

THE BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY
ORGANIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON BULGARIAN
INTERESTS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 14-06-2019		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2018 – JUN 2019	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Bulgarian Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its Impact on Bulgarian Interests in the Black Sea Region				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Daniel Georgiev Zahariev				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT NATO enlargement eastward to the Black Sea was made possible after the fall of the Iron Curtain by gradually increasing geopolitical interest of the countries in the region and was achieved despite Russian opposition. It considers that the alliance is dangerously close to its borders in the East resulting in political and military challenges. One of the biggest factors contributing to these challenges is the re-emergence of Russian aggressiveness, increasingly willing to challenge NATO in order to expand its dominance and return the states of the near abroad back to its sphere of influence. This aggressiveness has been proved two times: with the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Since the annexation of Crimea, the relations between NATO and Russia have seriously deteriorated as both sides continued to build up their military in the Black Sea region. As a consequence, the region is more militarized and unstable than at any point since the end of Cold War, perhaps since the late 1940s. This has led to unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment, presenting not only new security challenges, but also elevating the risk of the disruption of trade and energy routes in the region as well as affecting the economic cooperation and tourism in the area. This study examines what are Bulgarian interests and the threats to them in the Black Sea region. Moreover, the project emphasizes on the Bulgaria's cooperation with NATO in the region and the ramifications of it on Bulgarian interests in the area.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Black Sea Region, Bulgarian Foreign Policy, NATO, Russia, Frozen Conflicts, Defense and Security, Energy, Economy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 123	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON BULGARIAN INTERESTS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION, by CPT Daniel G. Zahariev, 123 pages.

NATO enlargement eastward to the Black Sea was made possible after the fall of the Iron Curtain by gradually increasing geopolitical interest of the countries in the region and was achieved despite Russian opposition. It considers that the alliance is dangerously close to its borders in the East resulting in political and military challenges. One of the biggest factors contributing to these challenges is the re-emergence of Russian aggressiveness, increasingly willing to challenge NATO in order to expand its dominance and return the states of the near abroad back to its sphere of influence. This aggressiveness has been proved two times: with the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Since the annexation of Crimea, the relations between NATO and Russia have seriously deteriorated as both sides continued to build up their military in the Black Sea region. As a consequence, the region is more militarized and unstable than at any point since the end of Cold War, perhaps since the late 1940s. This has led to unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment, presenting not only new security challenges, but also elevating the risk of the disruption of trade and energy routes in the region as well as affecting the economic cooperation and tourism in the area.

This study examines what are Bulgarian interests and the threats to them in the Black Sea region. Moreover, the project emphasizes on the Bulgaria's cooperation with NATO in the region and the ramifications of it on Bulgarian interests in the area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the moral support, patient and encouragement of my wonderful wife Svetoslava. Because the research required a significant amount of time and commitment of efforts, it consumed most of my free time, depriving my family from my presence. Nevertheless, although immersed in completely new environment, suffering significant language constraints at the beginning, and taking care for two little children at the same time, my spouse never complained and stopped supporting me throughout my research endeavor. Moreover, at the moments of transient weaknesses, when I was mentally depleted and on the brink of giving up, my spouse always encouraged me and did not allow me to abandon the project.

I am also deeply grateful to my thesis committee of Mr. Mark Wilcox, Mr. Gregory Cook, and Dr. David Anderson. Without their recommendations and professional guidance, I would not have been able to successfully complete this project. Their advice and constructive feedbacks guided me throughout the whole process. I highly appreciate their dedication of time, spent with me and reading the numerous drafts of my thesis.

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ACRONYMS

BSRF	Black Sea Rotational Force
EU	European Union
HQ MND-SE	Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFIU	NATO Force Integration Unit
PfP	Partnership for Peace
TFP	Tailored Forward Presence
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the background and the importance of the problem addressed in the research project and the purpose of the research. It will introduce the primary research question and the following subordinate questions. Moreover, the chapter will elucidate the limitations and the scope of the project as well as the definition of some terms used in the research.

Background of the Problem

Since the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea region has turned into a zone of confrontation between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, both of which have been trying to exert their influence in the region. Moreover, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Alliance in 2004 was perceived by Russia as an act of encroachment into its sphere of influence, contributing to more aggressive Russian regional policy in the region. The emergence of Russia as an aggressive actor in the Black Sea has been proved twice, with the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. The strategic and geopolitical consequences of these crisis deteriorated the relations between NATO and Russia significantly and will likely lead to fundamental changes in the future European security design. Moreover, the aspiration of most of the Black Sea countries to join NATO and European Union (EU) would take into account the fact that the region is a central point of many interests. This fragile balance in the relations, between the countries in the Black Sea region, emphasizes the importance of deepening trans-Atlantic relations. In this complex

environment, the need for unity and joint efforts are of significant importance to deal with this set of challenges in the security field. From energy to economics and from security to geopolitics, the region's relevance is much broader than most people realize. The future of Europe and Eurasia is being contested in the Black Sea.

The Importance of the Black Sea Region

The Black Sea region has always been an important crossroad and an intrinsic intersection between East-West and South-North corridors. Situated at the crossroad between Europe and Asia, the Black Sea region has been a zone of confrontation and contention for centuries.¹

For a long period, The Black Sea region was a point of increased interests between Ottoman and Russian Empires, which dominated and closed the region to the outside world. After the collapse of both Empires during and at the end of World War I, there were series of unsuccessful attempts to redraw the map of the region. Then, after the World War II and during the Cold War, the region found itself on the frontier between global struggles for dominance. NATO members, Turkey and Greece, which joined NATO in 1952, controlled the south and south-west of the region, while the Warsaw Pact members, Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet Union, dominated the rest. With the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical situation in the region changed significantly. It led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the birth of new four

¹ Commission on the Black Sea, *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region*, Commission on the Black Sea Report for Bertelsmann Stiftung (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, May 2010), 22, accessed 15 October 2018, http://aei.pitt.edu/74137/1/2020_Vision_for_the_Black_Sea.pdf.

sovereign states—Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. It also opened the region to outside influence and started the process of region-building.²

After the collapse of Communist era, the strategic importance of the region turned it into contested area between the East and West, both of which have been trying to expand their influence in the region. The dissolution of the Communist Bloc and disintegration of the Soviet Union led to the opportunity of each country in the region to choose the form of security and economic development it considers most effective. As a result, most of the countries withdrew from Russian sphere of influence, converging their security and economic interest to accession in NATO and EU. Furthermore, the U.S. support of pro-Western governments in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, seriously threatened the Russian dominance in the Black Sea region.³

Although Russia maintained the perception that the Black Sea region is in its sphere of influence, it lacked the political, economic, and military power to thoroughly exercise its influence. This resulted to the so called Rose revolution, which took place in Georgia (2003-2004), and Orange Revolution, which happened in Ukraine (2004-2005). During these revolutions, leaders in Georgia and Ukraine, who were susceptible to Russian influence, were replaced by pro-Western and pro-Euro-Atlantic leaders. Almost at the same time, in 2004, NATO membership expanded, including two Black Sea littoral states—Bulgaria and Romania. Consequently, Russia viewed these events as NATO

² Commission on the Black Sea, *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region*, 22.

³ David Matsaberidze, “Russia vs. EU/US through Georgia and Ukraine,” *Connections* 14, no. 2 (2015), 81, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26326399>.

encroachment into its sphere of influence and took measures to reestablish its dominance in the region by implementing more aggressive regional policy.⁴

Today, countries in the Black Sea region can be placed into three different categories. First, Romania and Bulgaria, which are members of NATO and the EU. Second, Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, which were part of the former Soviet Union and are still defined by the historical legacy of Soviet rule. Finally, Turkey, which is also part of NATO, is increasingly viewed as one of the main powers in the region.⁵ Although the geography of the region represents the diversity of nations and cultures, there are three main reasons to look at the Black Sea as a coherent region: security, energy, and European and Eurasian integration. Each of these themes is shared across the Black Sea region, turning it into a zone of increased interests.⁶

⁴ Boris Toucas, “The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 02 February 2017, accessed 15 October 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>.

⁵ Chris Miller, “Why the Black Sea,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 23 January 2017, accessed 15 October 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/01/why-the-black-sea/>.

⁶ Ibid.



Figure 1. The Black Sea Region

Source: Boris Toucas, “The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 02 February 2017, accessed 15 October 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>.

The emergence of the Black Sea as a region-between-regions and the conflicting interests of powerful local and external players turn the Black sea region in a contested neighborhood and a subject of intense debates. This reflects the changing dynamics of the region, its complex reality, and the regions relations with the rest of the world. Moreover, the strategic position of the region, as well as its oil, gas, transport and trade routes are all relevant reasons for the increasing importance of the region.⁷

The importance of the Black Sea region varies from economic and energy to security and geopolitical factors. The opportunity of projecting power to the European

⁷ Commission on the Black Sea, *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region*, 12.

continent, particularly in the Balkans and central Europe, as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean, the South Caucasus, and the northern Middle East turns the Black Sea into key region for expanding dominance.⁸ Moreover, the East-West Strategic Corridor in the Black Sea through South Caucasus links Central Asia and Europe and opens a significant passage for trade, transportation, energy, and a wide variety of economic opportunities for all participating countries and their neighbors.⁹

The Black Sea is situated in an extremely important area of geopolitical interest. The geopolitical, geo-strategic and geo-economic significance of the Black Sea region ensures its strategic importance. The region is a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. Moreover, the region is the shortest possible path to areas rich in minerals, gold, oil, and natural gas. Additionally, the significance of the region increases with the expansion of NATO to the East, creating a boundary between the West and Russia. Because of the geostrategic character of the region, the access to natural resources, and the establishment of common boundary between NATO and Russia, the Black Sea region is a source of constant security challenges.

⁸ Pavel Anastasov, "The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection," *NATO Review*, 25 May 2018, accessed 15 October 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/also-in-2018/the-black-sea-region-a-critical-intersection-nato-security/EN/index.htm>.

⁹ Iulian Chifu, "The East-West Strategic Corridor: Multiple Opportunities and Benefits" (policy brief, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, DC, 06 August 2012), 2-3, accessed 15 October 2018, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/east-west-strategic-corridor-multiple-opportunities-and-benefits>.

Security Situation in the Black Sea Region

Since the Black Sea region is the south-east flank of NATO, the challenges to security in the region are all related and intertwined in the context of Euro-Atlantic security.¹⁰ The Black Sea region is surrounded by so-called “Frozen Conflicts,” including Transdnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Each of these “Frozen Conflicts” have occurred and may reoccur. Trans-national crime has found conducive environment in most of these places, destabilizing legitimate governments and threatening Euro-Atlantic community by its capability to trafficking weapons, drugs and technologies to terrorist organizations. Therefore, all these “Frozen Conflicts” and the Black Sea region as a whole affect NATO’s values and interests, presenting real security challenges in the region.¹¹

¹⁰ Anastasov, “The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection.”

¹¹ Deniz Kutluk, “NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region,” 42.



Figure 2. The Frozen Conflicts in the Black Sea Region

Source: The Economist, “The Hazards of a Long, Hard Freeze,” 19 August 2004, accessed 22 December 2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2004/08/19/the-hazards-of-a-long-hard-freeze>.

Except the “Frozen Conflicts,” which represent a real tangible threat to peace and stability in the Black Sea, the strategic environment in the region has transformed significantly in the past decade, presenting security challenges as complex and dangerous as the time of the Cold War. Today, both Russia and Ukraine are building up their military power in the Black Sea. NATO has deployed additional forces to Romania and has planned adding to its naval presence. Over the past several years, Turkey, and Russia have rocked between tentative friendship and near-open conflict. Russia’s military conflict in Syria continues to expand, emphasizing the importance of the Black Sea naval supply routes. With these many activities, the Black Sea is more militarized and unstable than at any point since the end of Cold War; perhaps since the late 1940s.¹²

¹² Miller, “Why the Black Sea?”

The Russia-NATO relationship has always been marked with disagreements and political conflicts. In this case, the enlargement of NATO to the East, expanding its influence and deploying troops in proximity of Russian border, has caused real tangible military challenges. Although the main purpose of NATO, with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Alliance, was to enhance peace and security in the region¹³, the further expansion of the Alliance and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders have been perceived by Russia as a threat to its security and interests, seriously threatening the peace in the region.¹⁴ Russia shares the same assessments with the West that unresolved regional conflicts, ethnic tensions, and violence from extremist groups create a risk of destabilization in the Black Sea region. However, Russia perceives its own actions in the region as defensive and claims that foreign military build-up and intelligence services in the area seek to destroy its unity and territorial integrity.¹⁵

With NATO expansion to the East, the Russian activities in the Black Sea have the main purpose of returning all countries in the region, which were part of the former Soviet Bloc, back to Russian sphere of influence.¹⁶ NATO build-up around the Black Sea

¹³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Istanbul Summit Communiqué," 28 June 2004, accessed 23 February 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2004/p04-096e.htm>.

¹⁴ Olga Oliker, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy," Center for Strategic & International Studies, 07 January 2016, accessed 23 October 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-russias-new-national-security-strategy>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Boris Toucas, "Russia's Design in The Black Sea: Extending the Buffer Zone," Center for Strategic & International Studies, 28 June 2017, accessed 22 December 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-design-black-sea-extending-buffer-zone>.

region gradually challenged the notion that Russia could maintain regional dominance through nonmilitary assets. After the “Colored Revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO, Russia’s focus increasingly switched to hard power to preserve its influence in the region.¹⁷ Russia made clear to states in the region, the former Soviet republics, that political independence was not an option.¹⁸ However, Russia’s attempts to have control over the Black Sea not only undermine the independence and sovereignty of the countries which were part of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), but also has its ramifications on security of NATO allies in the region. Since three of the Black Sea littoral states are part of NATO, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, any potential aggression in the area will directly have an impact on the Alliance’s interests and involve its member states.¹⁹

The response of Russia to remain its dominance in the Black Sea and prevent further expansion of NATO to the East has been demonstrated twice through its military aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. Russia’s invasion of Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the Russian ongoing destabilization of eastern Ukraine have emphasized Russian’s hostile attempts in preventing NATO’s further enlargement to the east. With the annexation of Crimea, the tensions between Russia from the one side and NATO from the other side reached those during the Cold War period, threatening peace and security in Europe. The aggression against Ukraine not only had its

¹⁷ Toucas, “Russia’s Design in The Black Sea: Extending the Buffer Zone.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ NATO, “Collective Defense – Article 5,” 12 June 2018, accessed 23 December 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.

ramifications on Ukrainian territory and sovereignty, but also proved the Russian readiness and assertiveness to use force in order to expand its influence.²⁰

All of these conflicts are usually perceived as sequences of the dissolution of USSR. This is true, but it is not a coincidence that most of the post-Soviet conflicts happen around the Black Sea. The primary reason is that the Black Sea region is where Russia and the West failed to make a deal on post-Cold War. The question remains; are Ukraine and Georgia under Russia's influence, or are they on the way to join Western society? Currently, such disagreement exists, largely because after the collapse of Soviet Bloc; neither the West nor Russia really imagined that these countries would want or rather could be prepared to join Western institutions. At the same time, the rejection of Turkish aspirations to join the EU by Western European voters, who feared a wave of Turkish immigrants, added an additional level of confusion and geopolitical complication in the region. Due to the lack of a clear set of rules, the Black Sea region's existing conflicts continued to smolder.²¹

Energy Situation in the Black Sea Region

The question of security and stability in the Black Sea region cannot be viewed in isolation of the question of energy supplies. While energy has always been perceived as a strategic resource, now with the growth of economies and the proliferation of industry the

²⁰ Jonathan Masters, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)," Council on Foreign Relations, 05 July 2018, accessed 15 October 2018, https://www.cfr.org/background/north-atlantic-treaty-organization-nato?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIoPrggKix3wIVxLXACH16QQ_eEAAYASAAEgLnIvD_BwE.

²¹ Miller, "Why the Black Sea?"

demand for energy is even higher. With the increased demand for energy and limited areas of energy resources at the same time, the supply of oil and gas has turned into an influential foreign policy instrument.

The Black Sea is a link between Europe and Central Asia, with intrinsic maritime routes for oil and gas exports and key pipelines for Europe's energy diversity supply.²² The region lies at the main transport route of the Caspian energy to Europe. The energy reserves of the Caspian are very important to Europe and the stability of World oil prices. By 2020, imports of energy resources from Caspian region to Europe are expected to rise up to 70%. This increase will be delivered to Europe through and around the Black Sea, making the region of strategic importance.²³

Taking advantage of the current demand for energy resources, Russia has tried to expand its influence by increasing political and economic reliance on Russian energy on the countries in the Black Sea region. Such reliance negatively affects international relationships, common values, strategic objectives, and security policies. Some nations in the region already depend heavily on Russian energy supplies, exposing them to potential political pressures and disruptive economic vulnerabilities.²⁴ Such dependence and vulnerability are now seen in Bulgaria as increasingly dependent on dominant Russian

²² Olivia Paschal, "Challenges for Security and Stability in the Black Sea Region," Yale Macmillan Center, 15 March 2017, accessed 23 December 2017, <https://macmillan.yale.edu/news/challenges-security-and-stability-black-sea-region>.

²³ Deniz Kutluk, "NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region," *Naval Forces* 27, no. 2 (2006): 43, accessed 22 December 2018, <http://lumen.cgscarl.com/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=20952799&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²⁴ Paschal, "Challenges for Security and Stability in the Black Sea Region."

suppliers for energy resources. With the existing energy network in Bulgaria under the control of Russian firm Gazprom, which was built during communist times, and the lack of diversity of energy supplies, Bulgaria is heavily reliant on Russian energy.²⁵

The Black Sea region is perceived as a great importance in the supplies of natural energy resources. In implementing its National Security Strategy, some of the important interests to Bulgaria is achieving energy security by diversification of energy resources, energy suppliers, and transportation routes. Energy security is an element of national security and a factor for economic stability. States become increasingly interdependent on vital resources, such as energy and raw materials which significantly increase the likelihood of the emergence of crisis.²⁶

NATO's Approaches towards the Black Sea Region

There are at least two approaches to NATO's involvement in strengthening security and stability in the Black Sea region. First, the operational approach, involving NATO's military capabilities to support Black Sea countries to fight asymmetric threats. Second, the cooperative security approach, based on regional cooperation.²⁷ The Istanbul Summit in 2004 represented the importance of the Black Sea region for NATO and the readiness of the Alliance to contribute to further strengthening security and stability in

²⁵ New Eastern Europe, "Moscow is Looming over the Bulgarian Energy Sector," 18 June 2018, accessed on 23 December 2018, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/06/18/moscow-looming-bulgarian-energy-sector/>.

²⁶ Republic of Bulgaria, *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria* (NSSRB) (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria 16 April 2016), 4-7.

²⁷ Kutluk, "NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region," 41.

the area on the base of regional cooperation.²⁸ This regional cooperation presents at least three arguments, which are related with NATO's interest in the Black Sea region. First, supporting regional defense and security cooperation could reinforce NATO's efforts to assist individual partner nations to implement defense, strengthening the peace and security in the region. Second, trans-national security risks and threats are better dealt within the framework of regional cooperation. Third, regional cooperation may contribute to the resolution to the "Frozen Conflicts" by helping the countries to establish mutual respect and confidence among themselves.²⁹

For much of the post-Cold war period, before the perception of Russia as a significant threat to the Alliance, NATO's deterrence posture may have been described as "Existential Deterrence," which means, it has possessed significant military capabilities and readiness to defend its allies.³⁰ However, at the Wales Summit, after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the Alliance came to conclusion to enhanced its posture to what may have been called "Deterrence through Reassurance." At this summit, NATO agreed to create the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) to strengthen the NATO Response Forces as part of the Readiness Action Plan.³¹ Moreover, at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, in 2016, NATO leaders pledged to increase alliance presence in the

²⁸ NATO, "Istanbul Summit Communiqué."

²⁹ Kutluk, "NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region," 44.

³⁰ Franklin D. Kramer and Hans Binnendijk, *Meeting the Russian Conventional Challenge: Effective Deterrence by Prompt Reinforcement* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2018), 6, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep16782.5>.

³¹ Ibid.

region on land, at sea, and in the air by the creation of the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP). This will help improve integrated training of Allied units, contribute to the Alliance's strengthened deterrence and defense posture, and demonstrate NATO's intent to operate without constraint. The announcement was also designed to demonstrate transatlantic unity and send a clear message to any potential aggressor in the region.³²

Nevertheless, the NATO presence in the southeast is too limited in size and capabilities to meet the Russian threat. The Alliance established only a brigade-sized "tailored force presence" on the basis of Romanian troops, which is helping to coordinate Allied training and exercises in the region.³³ NATO cannot assume that Russian aggressiveness in Southeast Europe would be limited only to the annexation of Crimea. Generally, NATO has far more forces than does Russia, so the Alliance should be able to establish an effective defense in the Black Sea region. Therefore, a reinforcement plan for the Black Sea region needs to be developed, especially as neither the Romanian nor Bulgarian forces have sufficient capacity to meet an eventual Russian attack.³⁴

Bulgaria's Cooperation with NATO in the Black Sea Region

Since the accession of Bulgaria to NATO, the National Security Strategy is intrinsically intertwined with NATO efforts to expand a zone of stability by settlements of regional conflicts and active participation in the solution of global problems. The

³² North Atlantic Council (NAC), *Warsaw Summit Communiqué* (Warsaw, Poland: National Stadium, 08-09 July 2016,) accessed 23 December 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm..

³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

country's security strategy is no longer confined only to the national dimensions, but it is integrated into the overall security strategy of the Alliance. The country's contribution to the stability in the Black Sea region is of particular importance to the Bulgaria aligned with NATO interests.³⁵

In the Black Sea region, Bulgaria plays an active role in the promotion of regional peace and security, energy security, and implementation of economic and infrastructure programs with importance to the NATO activities in the region. Moreover, Bulgaria plays an important role in the establishment and maintenance of relations between NATO and Russian Federation in order to enhance and preserve the security in the region.³⁶

The accession of Bulgaria to NATO is perceived as fundamental to Bulgaria's international and regional relations. As the former Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev stated in 2009 in the *Harvard International Review*, "After years of social and political transformation, Bulgaria has uniquely positioned itself among the countries of the Balkans and the Black Sea region. Not only does it currently enjoy unprecedented economic growth and the full trust of foreign investors, but its accession to the EU and NATO membership have made it an even more critical strategic player in regional and international relations."³⁷

³⁵ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 11-12.

³⁶ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSB, 42-43. NSSRB?

³⁷ Maximilian C. Forte, "Force Multipliers: The Instrumentalities of Imperialism," *The New Imperialism* 5 (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Alert Press, 2015), 153.

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

The primary research question is:

How has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's national interests in the Black Sea region?

In support of the primary research question, the study will answer several secondary questions as followed:

1. What are Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region?
2. What are the threats to Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region?
3. What actions has NATO taken in the Black Sea region since Bulgaria joined the Alliance?
4. How does Bulgaria act with NATO to defuse the tensions in the Black Sea region?

Assumptions

General assumptions for this research appear to be valid as the following:

1. NATO will continue to increase its presence in the Black Sea in order to respond effectively towards any threats against NATO state members in the region and mitigate Russian influence. This assumption is drawn by the conclusions made by NATO at Wales and Warsaw summit to enhance its posture in the region in order to strengthen its defense and deterrence capabilities and send a clear message towards any potential aggressor in the region.
2. Russia will continue with its assertive foreign policy in the region of what it considers protection of its national interests. The reemergence of Russia as an assertive actor to expand its influence in the region has already been proved by Russian military

interventions into the crisis in Georgia and Ukraine. At this current moment, Russia continues to increase its military build-up in the region, demonstrating Russia's readiness to use force in developing its foreign policy agendas.

3. Bulgaria will remain a loyal and trustful NATO member state with firm commitments to allied obligations and responsibilities in the Black Sea region. It may be derived from all official documents, regarding Bulgaria's security, where Bulgaria's sovereignty and territorial integrity is completely aligned within the framework of collective defense of NATO members.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the research:

The Black Sea Region: The region encompasses the territories of the countries around the Black Sea. However, for the purpose of this research project the term will include the territories of the following countries—Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey.

The South Caucasus: It is a region, also known as Transcaucasus, comprising the territories of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan between Caucasus Mountains and the borders of Turkey and Iran.³⁸

Partnership for Peace (PfP): It is a program with the aim to create bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries. The purpose

³⁸ Thomas V. Gamkrelidze, "Transcaucasia' or 'South Caucasus,'" *Georgia & South Caucasus*, 08 January 2007, accessed 19 January 2019, <http://georgien.blogspot.com/2007/01/prof.html>.

of the program is to increase stability, reduce threats, and build strengthen security relationships between NATO and non-member countries in the Euro-Atlantic region.³⁹

Tailored Forward Presence: It refers to NATO activities, located in the South-eastern Europe. The main purpose of these activities is to enhance interoperability between NATO members and provide support to regional stability and security by a balanced and robust NATO deterrence and defense posture.⁴⁰

Frozen Conflicts: A frozen conflict is a situation in which an active armed conflict has been brought to an end, but no peace treaty or political agreement has been made to resolve the conflict. Subsequently, the conflict can start at any moment, creating an environment of insecurity and instability. The term has been used mainly for the post-Soviet conflicts, but it has also been applied to other territorial disputes.⁴¹ In this study, as frozen conflicts will be perceived the situations in Transnistria in Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which are in Georgia.⁴²

³⁹ NATO, "Partnership for Peace Programme," 07 June 2017, accessed 17 January 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm.

⁴⁰ NATO, "NATO Forward Presence," accessed 20 January 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/operations/enhanced-forward-presence>.

⁴¹ Marko Ivas, "Frozen Conflict, Status Quo, and Horror without End: Does Serbia Need the Society of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, And Abkhazia," *Telegraph*, 16 August 2018, accessed 19 January 2019, <https://www.telegraf.rs/english/2983723-frozen-conflict-status-quo-and-horror-without-end-does-serbia-need-the-society-of-nagorno-karabakh-south-ossetia-and-abkhazia>.

⁴² Thomas D. Grant, "Frozen Conflicts and International Law," *Cornell International Law Journal* 50, no. 3 (2017): 362, accessed 19 January 2019, <https://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/research/ILJ/upload/Grant-final.pdf>.

The Strategic East-West Corridor: This corridor links together the Central Asia, Caspian and Black Sea regions to form a viable trade and transit corridor between Europe and South-East Asia.⁴³

Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline: It is a proposed natural gas pipeline as its new version, Nabucco-West, involves 1,300 kilometers pipeline running from Turkish-Bulgarian border to Austria. It is a modification of the original Nabucco pipeline project which had been planned to run 3,900 kilometers from the eastern part of Turkey to Vienna. The main purpose of this pipeline project is to diversify the natural gas resources for Europe by transportation of gas from the Caspian basin, as well as to reduce European dependence on Russian energy.⁴⁴

South Stream: It is a proposed natural gas pipeline, which was to consist of the Russian onshore pipeline, the Black Sea, Bulgaria and pipelines in the south-east Europe. The project started in 2012 and it was seen as rival to the Nabucco pipeline project with the main purpose to bypass Ukraine and to consolidate Russia's grip over Southeastern and Central Europe as being the primary source of natural gas. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the project was canceled due to obstacles from Bulgaria and

⁴³ Caspian Policy Center, "The "Trans-Caspian East West Trade & Transit Corridor" Forum," 12 July 2017, accessed 19 January 2019, <http://www.caspianpolicy.org/past-events/the-trans-caspian-east-west-trade-transit-corridor-forum/>.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Socor, "Nabucco-West: Abridged Pipeline Project Officially Submitted to Shah Deniz Consortium," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 23 May 2012, accessed 20 January 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/nabucco-west-abridged-pipeline-project-officially-submitted-to-shah-deniz-consortium/>.

EU, and the imposition of European sanctions on Russia.⁴⁵ On 1 December 2014, president Putin announced that Russia stopped the project and started building a new pipeline, bringing gas to Europe through Turkey, known as Turkish Stream.⁴⁶

Limitations

During the research process, the author will be constrained by some limitations. First, because the Masters of Military Arts and Science program does not include finances for travel, the author will be constrained of conducting personal interviews or archival research. Second, the time available for conducting the research is limited as the completion of the research project is no later than June 2019. Third, the research will be conducted at the unclassified level, using only available open source materials. Finally, since the topic is closely related to contemporary environment, new data emerges on a daily basis and the thesis should be regularly updated during the research.

Scope of the Research

Based on qualitative analysis, this research will examine the complex situation in the Black Sea region in regard to Bulgarian interests. The already mentioned topic will be examined through the lens of Bulgarian foreign policy toward achieving security and stability in the Black Sea region. The analysis will be comprised of two levels. The first

⁴⁵ Judy Dempsey, "Europe's Energy Strategy and South Stream's Demise," Carnegie Europe, 04 December 2014, accessed 20 January 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/57386>.

⁴⁶ Stanley Reed and Sebnem Arsu, "Russia Presses Ahead with Plan for Gas Pipeline to Turkey," *The New York Times*, 21 January 2015, accessed 20 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/business/international/russia-presses-ahead-with-plan-for-gas-pipeline-to-turkey.html?mabReward=A3>.

level consists of Bulgarian interests and attitudes towards the region. The second level of the analysis focuses on NATO approaches and activities in the area. In regard to these levels, the analysis will be constructed in the following order: first, the author will addresses what are Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea region; second, the research will examine what are the challenges which exist in the Black Sea region that affect Bulgarian interests; third, the research will explore what have been NATO's policies and actions in the Black Sea region since the accession of Bulgaria to the Alliance; finally, the author will evaluate the Bulgarian cooperation with NATO and how this contributes to the peace and security in the Black Sea region. Following these steps, the author will provide a summarized analysis of the question how Bulgarian membership in NATO has affected Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

The topic is significant to the military profession because it is directly related with Bulgarian sovereignty and security. Moreover, the research focuses on Bulgaria-NATO relations that have an impact on the stability and security in south-east Europe as a whole.

The security environment in the Black Sea region is rapidly changing. It combines protracted conflicts with significant military capabilities that intensified after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the following crisis in eastern Ukraine. As a result, there is a blurring line between peace, crisis and conflicts in the region. This has led to unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment in which military forces with developed weapons are increasingly active in close proximity to each other. In this context, Bulgaria recognizes actual and potential direct and indirect threats to its security, as Bulgarian membership in NATO is closely related to these threats. As the head of the

Economics and International Relations Institute in Sofia, Lyubomir Kyuchukov, says:

“Unlike the direct neighbors of Russia, Bulgaria and most South-East European countries see the risks for their security not that much in a direct Russian invasion, but more like in the totally worsened security environment due to the Russia—NATO confrontation.”⁴⁷

Moreover, the security dynamics and challenges facing the Black Sea region affect not only the security of the countries in the region, but also their economic and energy interests.

The purpose of this research is to enlighten the cooperation between Bulgaria and NATO in the Black Sea region in the context of Bulgarian interests. The author will try to analyze and describe what are Bulgarian responsibilities to NATO and how this affects Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea region. The objective is to analyze the current situation in the Black Sea as well as reveal whether or not membership of Bulgaria in NATO contribute to Bulgaria’s interests in the area.

The following chapter will provide a background of the sources written by the scholars on the topic.

⁴⁷ Vesela Vladkova, “Black Sea Region – Focus of Bulgaria’s EU Presidency,” *Radio Bulgaria*, 04 April 2017, accessed 19 January 2019, <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100816039/black-sea-region-focus-of-bulgarias-eu-presidency>.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general overview on literature used to write the thesis. During the research, the author has found a wide range of references that are related to the research project, but describe only specific parts and give an incomplete answer to the research question: How has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's national interests in the Black Sea region? Nevertheless, the literature combined with analytical thought provides a logical basis for addressing the proposed research question.

Literature used in this paper presents numerous sources from books, journal articles, reports, and research papers interrelated with the situation in the Black Sea region. According to the domains, the literature encompasses, the author aligned the sources into six categories: the first two categories describe the interests of the main participants and Bulgaria in the Black Sea region; the third category addresses Bulgarian interests to join NATO; the fourth and fifth categories explain the contemporary challenges in the Black Sea region; finally, the last category provides an overview of NATO's response to the challenges in the area.

Major Interests in the Black Sea Region

Understanding the major interests in the Black Sea would help the author visualize the overall picture in the region. This will serve as a foundation in the further research as understanding how the policies of the main actors in the Black Sea are aligned to Bulgarian interests in the region. Furthermore, understanding the overarching

situation in the Black Sea will help the author discover what are eventual threats and challenges in the area and how they affect Bulgarian interests.

The author Ognyan Minchev in his framework analytical review “Major interests and strategies for the Black Sea region” starts with a short historical overview of the Black Sea region. He describes that due to the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea connecting Europe with Caucasus and Central Asia, the region has been converging the interests of major powers for a long period. Today, according to the author, in the Black Sea region, there are three different groups of interests. First, the interests of the West, which pursue strategies for the change and transformation in the region. Second, the interests of post-Soviet Russia and Turkey which appear to be formed as major powers in the region. Third, the interests of the small countries in the region, like Bulgaria, which are challenged by different policy agendas.⁴⁸

Minchev continues that since the accession of Bulgaria and Romania into NATO, the territorial *status quo* of Soviet times in the Black Sea region cannot be maintained anymore. The presence of the alliance in the region has become a matter of fact, seriously challenging Russian dominance in the area. Moreover, in order to exit the vicious cycle of imperial dependencies of the past in their future, all of the countries in the Black Sea region, which were under the Russian dominance during the Soviet Bloc, try to involve the West in their security and development policies. The worst scenario, according to the author, is the creation of a new *status quo* and strategic balance among

⁴⁸ Ognyan Minchev, “Major Interests and Strategies for the Black Sea Region,” (framework analytical review, Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, Bulgaria, September 2006), 3, accessed 10 December 2018, <http://www.harvard-bssp.org/static/files/122/BlackSeaFrameworkAnalyticalReview.pdf>.

major international factors such as US, Europe, Turkey and Russia, splitting the region into rival pieces and fractions. On the other hand, the best course of action for the Black Sea would be the homogeneous geopolitical integration of the region to the West.⁴⁹

In his book, *NATO's Eastern Agenda in a New Strategic Era*, the author F. Stephen Larrabee elaborates on the change of dominance in the Black Sea region. He explains that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, significant changes have followed, changing the geopolitical map of Eurasia. The loss of Ukraine in the Black Sea region, led to the loss of a large, potentially rich industrial and agricultural economy for Russia. Moreover, the independence of Ukraine deprived Russia of its dominant position in the Black Sea region, which was perceived as a getaway to trade with the Mediterranean and outside world, as well as ports of the Black Sea Fleet itself.⁵⁰

On the other hand, in a chapter of his book, *A difficult neighborhood*, the author John Besemeres describes that much of Western Europe consider that the NATO and EU have already reached the limits of their expansion. The War in Georgia and the crisis in Ukraine, according to the author, were perceived by many Western Europeans as warning signs against further expansion of NATO and EU to the East. After the conflict in Georgia, the author continues, some of the Western European countries believed that NATO cooperation with Kiev and Tbilisi would seriously deteriorate the relationships with Russia and exacerbate the tensions in the region. Furthermore, the US at that time,

⁴⁹ Minchev, "Major Interests and Strategies for the Black Sea Region," 9-22.

⁵⁰ F. Stephen Larrabee, "Whither Russia?," in *NATO's Eastern Agenda in a New Strategic Era* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2003), 116, accessed 04 December 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mr1744af.12>.

did not want to oppose Russia in order to secure Russian support on issues of prior concern to the Obama administration like Iran, Afghanistan and nuclear disarmament. This West's growing skepticism towards Eastern enlargement of NATO, according to the author, contributed to the entrenchment of Russian positions in the Black Sea, compelling other dispute areas in the region like South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria to embrace Russian leadership.⁵¹

The importance of the Black Sea varies from economics to military. Being a bridge between two continents, a getaway between Europe and Asia, and providing a crucial access to the Mediterranean and the oceans beyond, the Black Sea has always been a nexus of big power confrontations. However, after the dissolution of USSR, the interests in the Black Sea are more complicated than ever, intertwining the policies of NATO, EU, Russia and former Soviet republics in the region. In this complicated situation and struggle for influence, Bulgarian cannot remain isolated.

Bulgarian Interests in the Black Sea Region

Understanding the Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea region is of primary importance to the research project. This will depict the importance of the region to Bulgaria and how it contributes to Bulgarian stability and prosperity. Moreover, understanding Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea will help the author comprehend Bulgarian interactions with main actors in the region.

⁵¹ John Besemeres, "Ukraine: A Sharp Turn Eastwards," in *A Difficult Neighborhood: Essays on Russia and East-Central Europe since World War II* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 146-61, accessed 02 December 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1rqc96p.16>.

Deborah Sanders, in her article, “The Bulgarian Navy after The Cold War: Challenges of Building and Modernizing an Effective Navy,” explains the importance of the Black Sea to Bulgaria. She describes that with Bulgarian location in the southeastern part of the Balkan peninsula on the Black Sea, Bulgaria has important economic and security interests in the maritime domain. The article addresses that Bulgaria’s Black Sea ports of Varna and Bourgas are the gateways of 60 % of the nation’s foreign trade and are vital to its economy. Moreover, the Black Sea also provides Bulgaria with the opportunity to diversify its energy resources, which is recognized as of vital security importance. From security perspective, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, the author continues, have created more challenging security environment in the Black Sea than in recent years, converging Bulgaria’s interests to increased NATO presence in the region.⁵² According to Ognyan Minchev, all official documents and positions of Bulgarian government confirm the nation’s interests and responsibility to the Black Sea region from the perspectives of its belonging to the institutions of the West.⁵³

Marusya Lyubcheva, in her report, *The Black Sea Region in EU Policies*, provides additional information about Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea region. She describes that because the Black Sea region is between the East and West, Bulgaria has accepted the role of a geopolitical and geostrategic crossroads. Because of the historical

⁵² Deborah Sanders, “The Bulgarian Navy after The Cold War: Challenges of Building and Modernizing an Effective Navy,” *Naval War College Review* 68, no.2 (Spring 2015): 69-70, accessed 24 December 2018, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26397836?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents.

⁵³ Minchev, “Major Interests and Strategies for the Black Sea Region,” 19.

background of Bulgaria, the author continues, the country practically implements a “bridging role” in the Black Sea between the West and East. Bulgaria forms a natural bridge between EU, Caucasus, Russia and Ukraine and is interested in having stability, integration and good neighborly relations. In this case the strategic goals for Bulgaria in the region are focused on safeguarding of its national security through achieving permanent stability in the region and the creation of favorable conditions for the development of Bulgarian economy through increasing the co-operation in the Black Sea Region on a bilateral and regional basis.⁵⁴

The interests of Bulgaria in the Black Sea varies from economics and energy to security and stability. At the crossroad between trade routes and energy supplies, the Black Sea is of primary importance to Bulgarian economy. Additionally, being a frontier of EU and NATO to the Black Sea, Bulgarian interests are closely related with strengthening the ties between the West and Russia and preserving good neighborly relations in the region.

Bulgarian Interests to Join NATO

While some of the interests of Bulgaria in the Black Sea are related with strengthening of its national security in the region, understanding Bulgarian interests to join NATO is fundamental. This will help the author evaluate how Bulgaria’s attitudes towards nation’s sovereignty and territorial security are aligned with the Alliance. Moreover, comprehending Bulgaria’s affiliations with NATO will provide the author a

⁵⁴ Marusya Lyubcheva, *The Black Sea Region in EU Policies* (Burgas, Bulgaria: Black Sea Institute, July 2010), 26-31, accessed 10 December 2018, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sofia/07769.pdf>.

broad framework of Bulgarian efforts to tackle with the newly emerging threats to international security.

The chapter “Postcommunist Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria” in the book *The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in East-Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union* describes that the disintegration of the former Soviet Bloc left the countries in the region in security vacuum, contributing to tangible regional instability. At that period, Bulgaria remained in relatively good relationships with the neighboring countries with strategic foreign policy of noninterference in the domestic affairs of other nations. However, in 1997, after the crisis in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria shifted its foreign policy interests towards achieving membership in NATO.⁵⁵ The accession of Bulgaria to the Alliance, according to the authors, would provide Bulgaria an opportunity to decrease the size of its Army, which is related with less expenditures for its sustainment. The main purpose of Bulgarian membership in NATO, the authors explain, was the creation of small mobile military force, interoperable with NATO forces and capable of providing initial security in a small or medium size conflict within Bulgaria or on its borders.⁵⁶

Bulgaria for NATO 2002 is another interesting source, describing Bulgarian interests to join NATO. The book describes that Bulgarian interests to cooperate with the Alliance date since 1990, after the fall of Communist Rule in Bulgaria. After the fall of Communism in Bulgaria, according to the authors, Bulgaria viewed NATO as

⁵⁵ Natalie L. Mychajlyszyn and Haral von Riekhoff, eds., “Postcommunist Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria,” in *The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in East-Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 142-44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 145-46.

“guarantor” of democratic changes and reliable counterpart. Subsequently, in the first half of the 1990’s the focus of Bulgarian foreign policy was on developing a close dialogue and cooperation with the Alliance and on active and devoted participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In 1994, the authors explain, Bulgaria was one of the first countries to join the PfP, initiative launched by the Alliance. Since that period, the authors continue, Bulgaria had been constantly cooperating with NATO and trying to achieve an Alliance’s membership. For Bulgarian government, according to the authors, membership in the Alliance was viewed as a step forward in strengthening its own security and stability. Moreover, the expectation of NATO enlargement to the Black Sea was perceived by Bulgaria as a process providing equal security and stability in the region thus avoiding the risks of creating new dividing lines or gray zones.⁵⁷

After the demise of Communism in Bulgaria, the sources articulate Bulgarian assertiveness and interests to cooperate closely with the Alliance in order to enhance its level of security and stability. However, since 2004, the accession of Bulgaria to NATO, the size of Bulgarian Army has been drastically decreased.⁵⁸ Therefore, Bulgarian interests in protecting its sovereignty and territory are contingent upon NATO support. In this context, in the volatile situation in the Black Sea, Bulgaria is heavily dependent on NATO actions in the region.

⁵⁷ Ognyan Minchev, Valeri Ratchev , and Marin Lessenski, “Bulgaria: A Loyal Partner and Prospective Member of NATO,” in *Bulgaria for NATO 2002* (Sofia, Bulgaria: Open Society Foundation), 326-30, accessed 27 December 2018, <http://www.iris-bg.org/fls/chapter5.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Mychajlyszyn and von Riekhoff, “Postcommunist Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria,” 146.

Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region

Since Bulgarian interests in the Black Sea are closely related with achieving of permanent stability and security in the region, the question of security environment in the Black Sea is directly linked with Bulgarian interests. Understanding the security challenges in the Black Sea will help the author comprehend on the sources of instability in the region and what are their correlation to Bulgarian interests.

In the report *A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region*, Steven Horrell describes that the Black Sea region has always been an intrinsic crossroads between the West and Middle East and like each important points of intersection it is also a point of tension. This tension is even more influenced by the current geopolitical environment of growing confrontation between the West and Russia.⁵⁹ Sertif Demir, in his article, “Is End of a Dream? Reassessing the NATO Enlargement Policy toward the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions,” elaborates that this growing confrontation is closely related with NATO expansion to the East. He writes that after the disintegration of the USSR newly formed countries, being independent from communist rule, found the Western ideology as more prosperous, converging their interests to accession in NATO. However, according to the author, Russia saw the enlargement of NATO as a threat to her interests and decided to emerge again as an aggressive actor defending its influence in the Black Sea region.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Steven Horrell, *A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2016), 2, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03475>.

⁶⁰ Sertif Demir, “Is End of a Dream? Reassessing the NATO Enlargement Policy toward the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions,” *Karadeniz Arastirmalari* no. 46 (Summer

According to Valentin Naumescu, in his article, “The Clash of Discourses Regarding Relations with Russia: New Fault Lines in the EU,” the first serious alert of Russian aggressiveness came with the Russia-Georgian war in 2008. The author argues that the EU response to that event was timid resulting in bolstering Russia’s confidence to expand its influence. Subsequently, the author continues, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, confirmed Russia’s claims to regain its regional sphere of dominance. This succession of events led to the exacerbation of the tension between the East and West, presenting tangible security challenges in the region.⁶¹

Horrell adds that with the reemergence of Russian aggressiveness in the Black Sea, it seriously challenges the West and presents a tangible threat to NATO members in the region. The Black Sea, the author explains, is a key area where NATO meets the former Soviet republics, which are considered by Russia within its sphere of influence. In addition to the complex geopolitical environment in the Black Sea, Horrell continues, Russia has seriously increased its military capabilities, additionally challenging the security and stability environment in the area.⁶² Since the accession of three Black Sea littoral states to NATO, Bulgaria, Rumania and Turkey, the author concludes, the rise of any tension in the region would involve NATO states and its interests.⁶³

2015): 2, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1691985703?accountid=28992>.

⁶¹ Valentin Naumescu, “The Clash of Discourses Regarding Relations with Russia: New Fault Lines in the European Union,” *Rumanian Journal of European Affairs* 17, no. 2 (December 2017): 75.

⁶² Horrell, *A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region*, 3-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

In his report, *Black Sea Security: The NATO Imperative*, Alexandros Petersen provides additional information about the security challenges to NATO after its expansion to the Black Sea. He writes that after the Alliance reached the Black Sea, it met the former Soviet states with varying degrees of instability and security problems. Armenia, with Russian support, and Azerbaijan, with Turkish support, have frictions over the dispute zone of Nagorno-Karabakh. Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Trans-Dniester Republic in Moldova proclaimed independence with Russian support. All these conflicts, the author continues, present a challenging environment on NATO and its members. Moreover, the author continues, any NATO expansion to the East may be perceived as an act of intrusion by Russia into its sphere of influence.⁶⁴

The book, *The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security: Implications for the United States and U.S. Army*, provides additional information on Russia's foreign policy towards the West. It depicts that after the inauguration of Putin as a president of Russia, Russian foreign policy is completely focused on restoring its influence in Eastern Europe, perceived as Russia's rightful sphere of influence. The main efforts of this Russian foreign policy are concentrated on preventing of the expansion of Western values and institutions—not only NATO but the EU as a whole. The authors call this period of Russia's attempt to regain its influence in the East as a period of a "Cool War." According to the authors, the new "Cool War," in contrast to the Cold War of the period between 1950s through 1980s, is more limited as it is regionally rather than globally

⁶⁴ Alexandros Petersen, *Black Sea Security: The NATO Imperative* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center Home, 07 July 2011), accessed 10 December 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/black-sea-security-the-nato-imperative>.

oriented, but at the same time it could also lead to a broad deterioration of political, economic, and military relations between Russia and the Atlantic Alliance and spill over into other important areas, such as arms control.⁶⁵

The annexation of Crimea, the authors continue, has significantly increased Russian influence in the Black Sea, shifting the military balance in the region in Russia's favor. Moreover, according to the authors, this provides an opportunity to Russia to expand its Black Sea Fleet, allowing Russia to project power not only in the region, but also in the eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, and Middle East. The authors conclude that within the Black Sea littorals, the navies of Bulgaria, Rumania, and Georgia altogether, are not sufficient to oppose an eventual threat from Russian Black Sea Fleet. The only force capable to oppose the Russian fleet in the region is Turkey. However, in the past decade, the relationships between Turkey and Russia have improved significantly, especially in the economic realm, turning Russia into Turkey's largest trading partner and supplier of natural gas.⁶⁶

Kimberly Marten, in her article, "European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis," also underlines the question of Russian military build-up in the Black Sea and the inherent challenges to it. She points out that the seizure of Crimea provided Russia an opportunity to strengthen its Black Sea fleet and enhance its air defense capabilities in the region.

⁶⁵ F. Stephen Larrabee, Peter A. Wilson, and John Gordon, "Implications for the United States," in *The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security: Implications for the United States and U.S. Army* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2015), 17, accessed 02 December 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15sk8s2.9>.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 37-9.

Marten also shares his concerns that Russia may use these capabilities in campaign against NATO members, threatening sea trade routes in the Black Sea and Mediterranean region. A similar campaign, according to the author, would be launch with the main purpose to challenge NATO and prevent the Alliance of intervention along the Black Sea.⁶⁷

“NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next” is another source which addresses the challenges related with the increase of Russia’s military capabilities in the Black Sea region. In 2008, the author Zviad Adzinbaia explains that Russian intervention in Georgia led to the deployment of substantial Russian military troops there. Moreover, an agreement signed in 2011, between the de-facto regimes of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, granted Russia a permission to operate in military bases located in these areas. As a consequence, Russia was able to deploy a significant amount offensive and denial capabilities in Tskhinvali and Abkhazia. In 2014, with the annexation of Crimea, the author continues, Russia relocated its advanced, long-range surface-to-air missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles to Sevastopol. Moreover, in Crimea, Russia has installed a series of Anti Access/Area Denial systems. By such actions, according to the author, Russia is perusing to enhance its military capabilities in the region, denying NATO access to the Black Sea and undermine the security of the littoral states around the Black Sea. This

⁶⁷ Kimberly Marten, *Reducing Tensions between Russia and NATO* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), 23, accessed 14 November 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.lumen.cgsccarl.com/stable/resrep05770.12>.

would seriously threaten the Alliance members' interests not only in the Black Sea but also in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East.⁶⁸

Incidents in the Black Sea after the Annexation of Crimea

Tomas Frear, in his article, "Lessons Learned," describes that after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia-West confrontation have become a commonplace. With several NATO member states and partners in the Black Sea and Russian assertiveness to remain its influence in the region, the area presents conducive environment for such confrontations. Encounters between Russia and the Alliance have taken on land, at sea, in the air, and in cyberspace. While most of these encounters, the author explains, are perceived as routines without presenting significant threat, some of them show dangerous characteristics, corresponding increase of tension. Such an example is the case in January 2018 between US reconnaissance aircraft and a Russian fighter over the Black Sea, when the both aircrafts approached to each other at a distance within five feet. Any reckless behavior or a minor mistake, in this case according to the author, could lead to disastrous consequences, resulted in serious crisis in the region.⁶⁹

The Nature of the Problem is a report that also highlights the growing intensity of incidents between NATO and Russia after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Only one year after the annexation of Crimea, the report explains, more than 60 incidents

⁶⁸ Zviad Adzinbaia, "NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next" (research paper, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, 2017), 5-8, accessed 02 November 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.lumen.cgsccarl.com/stable/resrep17617>.

⁶⁹ Tomas Frear, *Lessons Learned: Success and Failure in Managing Russia-West Incidents 2014-2018* (London: European Leadership Network, 2018), 1-5, accessed 25 October 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17423>.

between NATO and Russian forces had been reported around Europe, including the Black Sea region. The report highlights on several incidents which happened in the Black Sea: first, the report of Bulgarian authorities for violation of Bulgarian airspace by Russian military and civilian aircrafts in July 2016; second, the unsafe close range intercept of Russian fighter over a US anti-submarine aircraft in September 2016. The incidents, according to the authors of the report, vividly depict the real danger in the region and the lack of established mechanisms for managing in situation where NATO and Russian forces are close to each other. Other similar incidents, the authors point out, would have political and military ramifications, exacerbating the tension in the region. This in combination with the heightened pace of military deployments and military exercises in the region is particularly dangerous.⁷⁰

This complexity of interrelations between the West and Russia and the significant increase of military capabilities from Russian side in the Black Sea do not promise that the tension in the region is likely to decrease in the following years. Moreover, the intensity of current incidents in the Black Sea aggravate the tension, presenting a tangible threat to the peace and stability in the region. Therefore, Bulgaria, as a part of the Black Sea region and a member of NATO and EU is directly interested in resolving the problems in the Black Sea and defusing the tension in the region.

⁷⁰ Lukasz Kulesa, Thomas Frear, and Denitsa Raynova, *Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area: A New Plan of Action*, European Leadership Network, 2016, 7-10, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17414.5>.

Energy Challenges in the Black Sea Region

In addition to the military challenges, as Steven Horrell explains, the energy is also a key factor having influence on the stability in the region. The Black Sea is an intrinsic route for energy resources, as the region is a key transit corridor linking Europe with Caucasus, Asia, and the Middle East. Therefore, the security environment in the region cannot be examined in isolation of the supplies of natural resources. In order to ensure peace and security in the region, the transatlantic community should establish effective collective defense, stability and security in non-NATO regional partner nations and energy security to the countries in the region.⁷¹

Ariel Cohen, in his report, *Alternatives to Russian Gas—Coal, Nuclear, and Renewables*, also elaborates on the correlation between energy and security in the Black Sea. He describes that NATO needs to recognize that the energy security in the Black Sea region directly affects the ability of the countries in the region to withstand the Russian pressure, applied to them through the disruption of energy supplies. In this case, the author explains, Russia uses the energy supplies not only as a way of revenues, but also as an instrument of increasing political interdependence in the region. If a conflict in the region fires up, the author continues, “Russia could hold the countries in the Black Sea area as energy supply hostages.”⁷² According to Cohen, energy policy in the Black Sea region depends on broader economic and security policy between all littoral Black Sea states.

⁷¹ Horrell, *A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region*, 5-6.

⁷² Ariel Cohen, *Developing a Western Energy Strategy for the Black Sea Region and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2015), 2, accessed 08 December 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03636.5>.

Cooperation, training and interoperability, the author concludes, between NATO members and its partners in the Black Sea region should be a main priority in order to preserve energy security and stability in the region.⁷³

The article, “Bulgarian-Russian Relations in the Context of Global Powers’ Geopolitical strategies in the Balkans” by Penka Peeva, is another source describing the use of energy supplies by Russia as an influential instrument in developing its foreign policy interests. The author describes that after the disintegration of Soviet Bloc, Russia lost its supremacy over the countries in the Black Sea. Losing its supremacy, the supply of energy turned into a primary instrument for Russia to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, in this strategy, according to the author, proved to be one of the main targets.⁷⁴

“Between Amity, Enmity and Europeanisation: EU Energy Security Policy and the Example of Bulgaria’s Russian Energy Dependence” is another article by Tomas Maltby, proving the Bulgarian dependency on Russian oil and gas. The author describes that Bulgaria has been importing natural gas and oil from Russia since 1974, as in 2011 “Bulgaria imported 89% of petrol, 86% of natural gas and 100% of its nuclear fuel from

⁷³ Cohen, *Developing a Western Energy Strategy for the Black Sea Region and Beyond*, 14.

⁷⁴ Penka Peeva, “Bulgarian-Russian Relations in the Context of Global Powers’ Geopolitical strategies in the Balkans,” *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 8, no. 4 (2015): 539-42, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1764368041?accountid=28992>.

Russia.” The only supplier of nuclear fuel, the author elaborates, is Russia predicting energy import dependence from 70% in 2010 to reach 77% by 2030.⁷⁵

The failure of diversifying energy supplies, the author continues, as Russia’s Gazprom still remains the sole exporter of gas to Bulgaria, increases the dependence of Bulgaria on Russian gas and affect the decision-making process in the Bulgarian government. Because of this reliance, Russia is perceived to represent a threat to Bulgaria’s energy and national security and it would be catastrophic for Bulgaria if Russia decided to stop its delivery of energy supplies, in case of Bulgarian confrontation against Russia.⁷⁶

Due to the strategic location of the Black Sea on the way of important energy routes between Europe and Asia, the energy has gained increasing significance for the Black Sea states. Ever since the demise of the Soviet Union, the new Russia has been very aware that energy would be one of its most important tools for projecting power and ensuring its dominance in the Black Sea region. Therefore, controlling energy export routes to European states has become a crucial objective in Russia’s foreign policy and the Black Sea region has been one important focus in this project. In this context, the dependence of Bulgaria on Russia energy supplies is obvious and any further step leading to the separation from Russia should be carefully thought. Looking for different sources of energy supplies is necessary for Bulgarian security and stability. However, with the

⁷⁵ Tomas Maltby, “Between Amity, Enmity and Europeanisation: EU Energy Security Policy and the Example of Bulgaria’s Russian Energy Dependence,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 5 (July 2015): 813–14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 814.

ongoing situation, a country with such strong dependence on Russian energy must be deeply concerned on deteriorating the relations with its most important energy supplier.

NATO's Response to the Challenges in the Black Sea Region

Comprehending on NATO responses to the challenges in the Black Sea will help the author discover what are the consequences of these actions to the region. Since Bulgaria is a part of NATO and Black Sea littoral state, it is closely related to its interests.

According to Zviad Adzinbaia, all of NATO efforts in the region are intended to support the regional efforts of its Allies and the Black Sea littoral states which are directed at ensuring security and stability.⁷⁷ However, the Allies' stances, according to the author, with regard to the threats in the Black Sea region differed. On the one hand Romania advocated for the presence of more NATO forces in the Black Sea region; on the other hand, Bulgaria feared that the deployment of more NATO forces in the Black Sea would aggravate the tension in the region. At the same time, Turkey did not articulate clear statement about their perception of the deployment of more allied troops in the region.⁷⁸

In Warsaw 2016, Zviad continues, although some of the disagreements, the Allies agreed to increase NATO's presence in the Black Sea, including air and naval surveillance elements. Moreover, the Alliance has also designed multinational exercises in the Black Sea region to enhance the credibility of NATO operations such as the US-

⁷⁷ Adzinbaia, "NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next," 8.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Ukraine co-hosted annual exercise Sea Breeze and Saber Guardian, exercise rotated between Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine as parts of US European Command Joint Exercise Program. According to the author, the main purpose of these exercises is to increase the interoperability between Allied and partner nations and emphasize the Alliance abilities to mobilize forces anywhere in Europe at any time. However, beside of the multinational military exercise in the Black Sea, the author emphasizes, the Alliance also needs international legal status in order to establish sufficient naval presence in the region. According to the author, based on 1936 Montreux Convention, warships over 15,000 tons are restricted from passaging through the Bosphorus Straits. Moreover, other warships less than 15,000 tons are prohibited from staying in the Black Sea longer than 21 days. These limitations, the author concludes, seriously impact NATO's aspirations to establish a permanent naval presence in the Black Sea and imply that NATO naval capabilities in the region would be much smaller than those of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.⁷⁹

“Bulgaria and the Black Sea Security” is another paper by Siemon Wezeman and Alexandra Kuimova that provides additional information about NATO's military exercise in the Black Sea region. The authors underline that the size and frequency of such exercises have increased in the recent years. They point out that the July 2017 US-led multinational exercise SABER GARDIAN, which was co-hosted by Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, was the biggest ever in the region with more than 25 000 troops from 22 NATO member states. Moreover, the authors continue, the August 2018 exercise,

⁷⁹ Adzinbaia, “NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next,” 8-9.

PLATINIUM LION, was a counterinsurgency peacekeeping exercise in the region, involving personnel not only from NATO members but also from members of the PfP program—Georgia, Moldova and Serbia. In conclusion, the authors highlight, in 2016 the Alliance agreed on the Forward Presence initiative with the main purpose to strengthen its eastern flank by stationing multinational forces in its eastern members. Part of this initiative is the component TFP which is focused on the Black Sea region, particularly Bulgaria and Romania.⁸⁰

Although NATO actions in the region are intended to enhance the peace and security in the Black Sea, they are perceived different by different NATO members in the region. This additionally increases the ambiguity in the Black Sea and questions how NATO actions contribute to the peace and security in the region.

All of the sources provide a comprehensive view of the situation in the Black Sea region. They encompass the geostrategic importance of the region, the interests of main actors in the area, the growing confrontation between the West and Russia, security, and energy challenges in the region. Some of the sources provide an overview of Bulgarian interests in the region and how its interests are aligned with NATO. At the end, some sources present a short summary of NATO response to the challenges in the Black Sea region. Although all of the sources describe the situation in the Black Sea and current challenges in the region, they lack vision on how NATO actions contribute to the peace

⁸⁰ Siemon T. Wezeman and Alexandra Kuimova, “Bulgaria and the Black Sea Security” (background paper, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm, Sweden, December 2018), 8-9, accessed 06 January 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2018/sipri-background-papers/bulgaria-and-black-sea-security>.

and security in the area. Moreover, it is not explained how NATO actions in the Black Sea affect Bulgarian interests and security in the Black Sea region.

In the following chapter the author will provide a description of the research methodology, developed to answer the research question: how has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 of this paper provides a framework of the depth and breadth of this study. It offers a wide spectrum of academic literature which provided a foundation for developing the analysis of this research project. Chapter 3, on the other hand explains the methodology applied in this study as it will present the method and instruments, used by the author, to answer the primary research question: how has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's national interests in the Black Sea region? Moreover, the chapter will provide a map of this study, which will direct the research process and prevent diversions.

There are numerous research methods and even many more areas of research, but each research method does not relate to each thesis. Given the complexity of the thesis, the research methodology was carefully chosen to provide precise answers to the research question. The author endeavored to apply qualitative analysis for research methodology selection. In essence, qualitative research focuses on generating meaning and understanding with capturing the richness and describing the unique complexities of data. This research method is comprised of reading numerous sources to establish key issues, allowing a more thorough and accurate analysis to take place.⁸¹ As Creswell states, when

⁸¹ David Wilkinson and Peter Birmingham, *Using Research Instruments: A Guide for Researchers* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2013), 76.

the problem needs to be explored and when a complex, detailed understanding is needed, a qualitative research should be conducted.⁸²

In this research method, the author will use inductive reasoning, which uses data to generate ideas,⁸³ where the truth of the conclusion is believed to be true, but depends on the given argument.⁸⁴ Inductive reasoning provides a basic and general understanding, but a certain amount of guessing is necessary.⁸⁵ This kind of reasoning is used in real life reasoning, where conclusions cannot be clear facts.⁸⁶ In contrast, the conclusion of deductive argument is certain, based on facts and evidence.⁸⁷ With these criteria and taking into account the complexity of the research project, inductive reasoning seems to be the only option. The author intends to collect the information required for the research through numerous public sources and records including Bulgaria's official documents, regarding Bulgaria's foreign policy and national security, speeches and statements of Bulgarian and international officials with regard to the Black Sea region, NATO's

⁸² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2013), 65.

⁸³ Sally Thorne, "Data Analysis in Qualitative Research," *Evidence-Based Nursing* 3 (July 2000): 68, accessed 05 January 2019, <https://ebn.bmj.com/content/ebnurs/3/3/68.full.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Deductive and Inductive Arguments," accessed 26 February 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ded-ind/>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

official documents, NATO's official website, newspapers, articles and government websites. The research project does not include interviewing people.

In his research project, in support to the primary research question, the author developed four secondary questions that will allow him to receive a better understanding of the facts and evidence related to the problem:

1. What are Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region?
2. What are the threats to Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region?
3. What actions has NATO taken in the Black Sea region since Bulgaria joined the Alliance?
4. How does Bulgaria act with NATO to defuse the tensions in the Black Sea region?

The plan for development of the research project is as follows: gathering sources related to the secondary questions; critical and unbiased evaluation and analysis of the sources, answering the secondary questions in a sequential order; answering the primary research question and drawing conclusions; finally, formulating proposals for further research on the topic.

The starting point for the entire research will be determining the objectives of Bulgaria's policy towards the Black Sea region. The author will focus on economic interests, energy resources, and regional security in the Black Sea region that have relevance to Bulgarian stability and prosperity. The research will examine the cooperation of Bulgaria in the Black Sea region on bilateral and regional basis and how this contribute to Bulgaria's economy development. Subsequently, the author will examine how the Black Sea region contributes to Bulgarian foreign trade and its role in

Bulgarian economy. Moreover, since the region is a major source of revenues to Bulgarian tourism industry, the research will continue with focusing on the issues that have an impact on Bulgarian tourism in the Black Sea. The question of national security and economic stability cannot be seen in isolation of the question of energy security. Therefore, the research will continue exploring Bulgaria's interests in the supplies of energy resources through the Black Sea and how this affects Bulgarian policy in the region. Since the economic and energy interests in the Black Sea region are vital to Bulgaria's prosperity and stability, the question of security in the area is inevitable, protecting as Bulgaria's interests in the region as well as guaranteeing Bulgaria's sovereignty. In this context, the author will first, examine what are Bulgarian attitudes towards the peace and security in the region; second, he will focus on Bulgaria's neighborly relations in the region. Examining Bulgaria's policy towards the Black Sea region, it will help the author visualize potential threats to Bulgarian interests in the area.

After identifying Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea, the next step in the research is to determine the threats to Bulgarian interests in the region. The author will discuss whether the conflicts and crisis in the Black Sea region affect Bulgaria's sovereignty and the way of life. The author will analyze whether security threats in the region affect Bulgaria's economic interests. The research will continue with examining the assertiveness of Russia to expand its influence in the region and how this affects Bulgarian interests. In this context, the author will explore Bulgarian dependence on Russian energy and how this impacts Bulgarian policy in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, the author will try to analyze whether Russia exerts influence over Bulgaria by increasing political and economic reliance on Russian energy resources. Finally, the

author will explore whether energy security may be achieved by diversification of energy resources and alienation of Bulgaria from Russian energy supplies. Understanding the threats to Bulgaria's interests in the region will help the author analyze, in the follow on research, whether NATO's action in the area contribute to the mitigation of these threats or create additional challenges to Bulgaria.

Next, after identifying Bulgarian interests and the threats to them in the Black Sea, the research will continue with examining NATO actions in the region since Bulgaria's accession to the Alliance. At the beginning, the author will discuss what are the attitudes of the Alliance towards the region. Then the author will continue with analyzing NATO's initiatives and programs in the region since 2004. Subsequently, the analysis will examine the presence of NATO forces in the region as well as NATO activities in the area. Finally, the research will focus on the exercises which have been conducted in the region with the participation of NATO forces. Since the primary research question is related with the NATO's effects on Bulgaria's interest in the Black Sea region, examining of NATO's actions in the area is inevitable. This will help the author understand what are NATO's actions in the region and their relation to Bulgaria's interests.

Finally, the author will examine Bulgarian cooperation with NATO in the region. At the beginning, the author will explore what are the Bulgaria's attitudes towards NATO actions in the region. Subsequently, the research will continue with determining Bulgaria's responsibilities as a NATO member in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, the author will examine what is the role of Bulgaria in the promotion of regional peace and security in accordance to NATO activities in the region. At the end, the author will

discuss the international military exercise, conducted in the Black Sea region, in which Bulgaria has taken part as well as Bulgarian cooperation in hosting NATO forces. Examining the cooperation of Bulgaria to NATO in the region will help the author understand what are Bulgaria's commitments and obligations to the Alliance and what is their relation to Bulgaria's interests in the area.

Answering the subordinate research questions will provide the author foundation for answering the primary research question. In answering the primary research question, the author will explore how NATO activities in the region and Bulgarian cooperation with NATO in the area affect Bulgaria's interests. The completion of this step will lead to the conclusion of the project, in which the author will provide his answer to the research question and supporting arguments.

The following chapter will provide detailed analysis of collected evidence relevant to the secondary research questions.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this paper is to reveal how Bulgaria's membership in NATO has affected Bulgaria's interests in the Black Sea region. Within a dramatically changed security environment in the Black Sea region in the recent years and NATO's enhanced presence in the area, Bulgaria's role and prospects are shaped by powerful yet hard to organize and realize in practice interests. The intent of this chapter is to analyze, first, the Bulgaria's interests in the region; second, the existing threats to Bulgarian interests in the region; third, what are NATO's activities in the area, since Bulgaria's accession to the Alliance; finally, the chapter will analyze Bulgaria's participation with NATO in the region and how this contribute to defusing the tension in the area. The information derived in this chapter will serve as a foundation to answer the primary research question of this project.

Bulgarian Interests in the Black Sea Region

The importance of the Black Sea region to Bulgaria could be explained by the geostrategic importance of the region as intrinsic crossroads of oil, gas, transport, and trade routes. The region is also an important part of tourist sector in Bulgaria, contributing significantly to government's revenues. In this context, the instability and insecurity problems in the region directly affect Bulgarian interests, turning the region into a main priority for Bulgaria and its efforts to strengthen the peace and security in the area. The Black Sea region is viewed by Bulgaria in a broad European and Euro-Atlantic

context in order to promote cooperation between countries in economy, trade, and security.⁸⁸

Economic Interests

The Black Sea region is rich of marine and submarine resources and is located on a strategic trade crossroad. According to Georgi Georgiev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Republic of Bulgaria in 2017, “The Black Sea Region is a distinguished geographical region, rich of natural resources and located strategically between Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. It is a continuously growing market with a big potential and an important transport hub.”⁸⁹ In this case, the need for better cooperation in broader management, transport and economic development is of primarily importance to Bulgaria in the Black Sea region.

Being a EU and NATO member, Bulgaria has a geostrategic position and has opened relations with countries in the Black Sea region that leads to the establishment of strategy that includes the development of active relations with the countries of the broader Black Sea region and strengthening relations in the regional free trade.⁹⁰ According to an annual report of Black Sea Trade And Development Bank in 2008, trade

⁸⁸ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 7.

⁸⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Deputy Foreign Minister Georg Georgiev takes part in the opening of the international conference ‘The Black Sea Regional Dimension of the One Belt, One Road Initiative’,” 18 September 2017, accessed 20 January 2019, <https://www.mfa.bg/en/news/15474>.

⁹⁰ Bulgarian National Television, “Bulgaria Takes over Presidency of Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization,” 02 January 2019, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.bnt.bg/en/a/bulgaria-takes-over-presidency-of-black-sea-economic-cooperation-organisation>.

within the Black Sea region has risen from an estimated 13.6% of total trade in 1999 to 17.9% of total trade in 2007.⁹¹ Although a decline in the regional trade was noticed in 2009, which can be explained as a consequence of the Global economic crisis in 2008, in the following years, the trade between the countries in the region increased quickly, reaching almost the previous levels.⁹² In this case, in terms of economic activities, the Black Sea region enjoyed one of its best years in 2017.⁹³ These figures indicate a gradually rising trend over time, and suggest that the pace of trade among Black Sea countries has been gradually picking up.

In a broad perspective, the region is a home to approximately 330 million consumers,⁹⁴ with important demographic and economic potential. In this context, as President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated, in a press conference during 25th

⁹¹ Black Sea Trade And Development Bank (BSTDB), *Annual Report 2008*, Black Sea Trade And Development Bank Annual Report for the Board of Governors of the Black Sea Trade And Development Bank (Thessaloniki, Greece: Headquarter of The Black Sea Trade And Development Bank, 14 July 2009), 19, accessed 19 February 2019, https://www.bstdb.org/publications/annualBSTDB_2008.pdf.

⁹² BSTDB, *Black Sea Region: Sources of Sustainable Growth*, Black Sea Trade And Development Bank Annual Report for the Board of Governors of the Black Sea Trade And Development Bank (Thessaloniki, Greece: Headquarter of The Black Sea Trade And Development Bank, 04 July 2013), 19-20, accessed 02 April 2019, https://www.bstdb.org/publications/BSTDB_Annual_Report_2012.pdf.

⁹³ BSTDB, *Meeting Regional Expectations*, Black Sea Trade And Development Bank Annual Report for the Board of Governors of the Black Sea Trade And Development Bank (Thessaloniki, Greece: Headquarter of The Black Sea Trade And Development Bank, 09 July 2018), 13, accessed 03 April 2019, https://www.bstdb.org/publications//BSTDB_Annual_Report_2017.pdf.

⁹⁴ Panagiota Manoli, “Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea: Building an Inclusive, Innovative, and Integrated Region” (commissioned paper, University of the Aegean, Mytilene, Greece, May 2014), 4, accessed 02 April 2019, https://www.bstdb.org/publications/Regional_Cooperation_in_the_Black_Sea.pdf.

Anniversary Summit of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in Istanbul, “The total gross domestic products of the countries in broader Black Sea region has reached \$2.7 trillion in 2017, while it was \$658 billion in 1992.”⁹⁵ Additionally, the economies in all of the countries in the broad Black Sea region posted positive real GDP growth in 2017.⁹⁶ These facts clearly indicate that the region is getting stronger and its economy is increasingly growing. As a result of this growth, the region is so important from Bulgaria’s economic perspective. Moreover, the region is host of two G20 countries, Russia and Turkey, being among the largest economies in the world, providing a good environment for economic activities.⁹⁷ In this case, Russia is among the five largest trading partners of Bulgaria with mutual trade reached almost \$ 3.5 billion for 2017.⁹⁸ According to Stratfor analysis:

Net inflow of foreign investment in Bulgaria between January and October 2014 was around 805 million euros (\$974 million). Of that, some 177 million euros, or about 22 percent, came from Russia. The major Russian firms with assets in Bulgaria are LUKoil, Gazprom and Promet Steel. LUKoil’s operations, including

⁹⁵ Muhammed Ali Gurtas, Dilara Zengin, and Ecenur Colak, “Erdogan Urges more Cooperation among Black Sea States,” *Anadolu Agency*, 22 May 2017, accessed 02 April 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/erdogan-urges-more-cooperation-among-black-sea-states/823585#>.

⁹⁶ BSTD, *Meeting Regional Expectations*, 16.

⁹⁷ Manoli, “Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea: Building an Inclusive, Innovative, and Integrated Region,” 6.

⁹⁸ The State Duma, “Ivan Melnikov Discussed with the Bulgarian Delegation Economic Cooperation between the Two Countries,” 06 February 2019, accessed 17 February 2019, <http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/29697/>.

its oil refinery in Burgas, have reportedly contributed about 25 percent of Bulgaria's tax revenues.⁹⁹

In broader perspective, with an economic growth of 6,5% for 2017, the highest rates globally, Asia has been considered the main engine of global economic growth.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the East-West strategic corridor is another important factor that shapes the attitudes of Bulgaria towards the region. According to this, China led One Belt-One Route initiative has presented new opportunities for the Black Sea countries, since all major paths that are related with the project pass through the region.¹⁰¹ As a part of this initiative, the establishment and development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, in order to increase the freight flows between Europe and Asia through the Black Sea region, is closely related with Bulgaria's economic interests. Because of its strategic geographic location, Bulgaria could become a bridge for Chinese cargoes and open "New Silk Road" to Central and Western Europe.¹⁰² The region is also a getaway out to Ocean for Bulgaria, which definitely broaden Bulgaria's opportunities for foreign trade.

⁹⁹ Stratfor, "Russia is losing ground in the Balkans," 04 January 2015, accessed 14 February 2019, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/russia-losing-ground-balkans>.

¹⁰⁰ BSTD, *Meeting Regional Expectations*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Özge Nur Ögütçü, "25th Anniversary Summit of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Commentary NO: 2017/44," Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi, 31 May 2017, accessed 02 April 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/25TH-ANNIVERSARY-SUMMIT-OF-THE-BLACK-SEA-ECONOMIC-COOPERATION>.

¹⁰² Sofia News Agency, "Bulgaria can Open the "New Silk Road" to Central and Western Europe," Novinite, 29 April 2018, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/189794/Bulgaria+can+Open+the+%22New+Silk+Road%22+to+Central+and+Western+Europe>.

Another important feature of the significance of the Black Sea to the Bulgarian economy is the tourist sector. One of the most valuable Bulgaria's resources is tourism, which have a great potential along the Black Sea coast line. International tourism in Bulgaria generates an estimated US\$2.4 billion, and the tourism sector employs 11.1 % of the national workforce.¹⁰³ The main tourism product is coastal summer tourism along the Black Sea coast, as about 95 % of all revenues from international tourism originate from seaside resorts.¹⁰⁴ The tourism product of Bulgaria is heavily dependent on beach summer tourism, especially international tourists, as most tourism is concentrated in the Black Sea coast.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Bulgaria has an interests of expanding cooperation in the field of tourism with Russia, particularly the establishment and development of cruise tourism in the Black Sea between the both countries.¹⁰⁶

The approaches to the cross-border activities in trade and tourism in the Black Sea region are of utmost importance for Bulgaria. The region is also emerging as a strategic path for transport of resources and particularly energy resources. In this case, the region lies on the route proposed for transporting the Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas to Europe.

¹⁰³ Republic of Bulgaria, *Advisory Services on a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan. Appendix 6: Assessment of the Tourist Sector* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 17 August 2018), 1, accessed 17 February 2019, file:///C:/Users/IMSD/Downloads/Appendix%206%20-%20Tourism%20Final%20(2018-08-17)%20-%20EN%20-%20for%20printing.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁶ The State Duma, "Ivan Melnikov Discussed with the Bulgarian Delegation Economic Cooperation between the Two Countries."

Energy Interests

Access to energy has always been an essential part of Bulgarian national strategy for independence and development.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, an important aspect of the heightened significance of the Black Sea region to Bulgaria is its rise as a prominent source of energy resources. The Black Sea is a strategic corridor mostly because of the energy routes going from East to West through the narrow land channels and water straits between the Caspian and the Mediterranean Seas.¹⁰⁸ In this case, roughly 90% of Bulgaria's gas¹⁰⁹ and 80% of oil¹¹⁰ come from Russia through the Black Sea region. Additionally, in 2012, Gazprom and Bulgargaz signed a new 10-year gas supply agreement, providing for the supply of 2.9 bcm/year of natural gas until 2022. Moreover, since 2013, Bulgaria benefits a 20% discount on gas prices and the country is seeking to renegotiate gas prices with Gazprom every year.¹¹¹

Bulgaria's strategic location at the Black Sea is another important aspect, which makes the country a point of transit for energy resources to the rest of Europe, and a

¹⁰⁷ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS), "Strategic Balance and Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region" (position paper, Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, Bulgaria), 8, accessed 06 February 2019, http://www.iris-bg.org/fls/Strategic_Balance_and_Security_Challenges_in_the_Black_Sea_Region.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, *Global Energy Market Research: Bulgaria* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, June 2017), 19, accessed 26 January 2019, <http://web.ebscohost.com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=3447837f-ecfb-4b6c-bda9-2f8f450bcbf0%40pdc-v-sessmgr03>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 20.

privileged customer. Although the cancellation of the major South Stream gas pipeline project, the country strives to become a gas hub for Europe.¹¹² In this context, Bulgaria plans to build a new gas link to transport Russian gas from the TurkStream pipeline to Europe.¹¹³ Additionally, according to Bulgarian Minister of Energy Temenushka Petkova, one of Bulgaria's main priorities in diversification of natural gas resources and routes is the implementation of the Southern Gas Corridor project, which is Azerbaijan's main driving force for providing gas from the Caspian region and other distant destinations. Both countries, Petkova continues, are a natural bridge between the Black Sea and Caspian as this will significantly contribute to the diversification of gas supply sources and routes for the whole region.¹¹⁴

Bulgaria's security is fundamentally contingent on energy stability as an ongoing process of delivery of social services that are vital for the functioning of the society as a whole. It is of Bulgarian interest to support the installation of required infrastructure that will diversify energy supplies. Therefore, interconnection with the neighbor countries' systems is of particular importance in guaranteeing Bulgaria's energy security.¹¹⁵ As a

¹¹² Republic of Bulgaria, *Global Energy Market Research: Bulgaria*, 34.

¹¹³ Reuters, "Bulgaria Prepares to Transport Russian Gas to Central Europe," accessed 30 January 2019, <https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKCN1NZ1XY>.

¹¹⁴ Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Energy, "Minister Petkova: Southern Gas Corridor has Key Importance for Energy Supplies to Europe," Accessed 26 January 2019, <https://www.me.government.bg/en/interviews-detail-393-29.html>.

¹¹⁵ Republic of Bulgaria, *Energy Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria till 2020: For Reliable, Efficient and Clear Energy* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, June 2011), 12, accessed 26 January 2019, http://www.mi.government.bg/files/useruploads/files/epsp/23_energy_strategy2020%D0%95ng_.pdf.

member state of the EU, Bulgaria supports initiatives of the European Commission for interconnection of energy supply routes, based on the advantages of the regional cooperation, for the purpose of assisting the performance of energy infrastructure projects and improvement of market development in the Black Sea region.¹¹⁶

Security Interests

The geostrategic situation of the Black Sea region and the dynamic developments in the political, economic and energy spheres determine the importance and impact of the region to Bulgarian security and stability. The importance of the region emphasizes Bulgaria's active role in the maintenance of international peace and its responsibilities to protect NATO external borders.¹¹⁷ As a whole, the Republic of Bulgaria enjoys a relatively favorable geostrategic and regional environment, which allows the country to lead and realize steady defense policies, in the interest of national security and its commitments to NATO.¹¹⁸

Due to the growing importance of the Black Sea region, as a link between Europe, the Middle East and Asia, Bulgaria's defense strategy is based on multilateral co-operation centered on the Black Sea region and solid support for NATO forces.¹¹⁹ Bulgarian defense strategy suggests that national security is directly related to wider

¹¹⁶ Republic of Bulgaria, *Energy Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria till 2020: For Reliable, Efficient and Clear Energy*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, *National Defense Strategy* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 18 March 2010), 9.

regional conditions, such as potential conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea littoral, and the wider Middle East.¹²⁰

The security interests of Bulgaria in the Black Sea region are to keep threats away from state borders and to contribute to the international peace and security in the area.¹²¹ The interests in Bulgaria include active participation of the country in the creation of favorable environment for the realization of Bulgarian interests and contribution to the efforts of international community for strengthening of the peace and security in the region.¹²² However, the country's contribution to the achievement of regional stability and security in the Black Sea on the base of non-interference in the internal affairs of other littoral countries remains of particular importance.¹²³ Therefore, strengthening the peace and security in the region on the base of maintaining good neighborly relationships and regional cooperation remains a primarily objective to Bulgaria's interests.¹²⁴

Despite the absence of immediate security threats to Bulgaria's territorial integrity in the Black Sea region, the country will continue to maintain a defense potential, adequate to the aforementioned risks and threats and to the collective defense capabilities

¹²⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, *National Defense Strategy*, 9.

¹²¹ Republic of Bulgaria, *White Paper on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 28 October 2010), 19, accessed 02 February 2019, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/esl/download/17421/203610/BulgariaEnglish2010.pdf>.

¹²² Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 9.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Republic of Bulgaria, *Programme for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 30 September 2015), 6.

of NATO.¹²⁵ The specifics of the Black Sea security environment predefine that the threats to Bulgarian national security will be largely met beyond the state's borders, wherever they emerge, and above all with the participation of military forces in international operations and missions.¹²⁶

The Threats to Bulgarian Interests in the Black Sea Region

Since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea region has witnessed fundamental geopolitical changes and significant shifts in its regional context and dynamics, presenting a new set of challenges to the countries in the area. The challenges, which affect Bulgarian interests in the region may be divided into three different groups: security, economic and energy challenges.

Security Threats

Bulgaria is located in one of the areas with highest concentration of threats in the Euro-Atlantic community. The trends in the development of these threats are negative as in a medium as well in a long term, as one of the sources of considerable risks for Bulgaria's security remains the instability of the Black Sea region.¹²⁷ The cause of regional security risks in the region is the existence of frozen conflicts, the actions of terrorist groups, sharp ethnic and religious disputes, high levels of organized crime, the

¹²⁵ Republic of Bulgaria, *White Paper on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria*, 15.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Republic of Bulgaria, *Vision: Bulgaria in NATO and in European Defence 2020* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 02 September 2014), 3.

illegal trafficking of weapons, narcotics, and humans.¹²⁸ Moreover, Russia's invasion and occupation of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea has tangibly degraded the security situation in the Black Sea region,¹²⁹ as this negative development has a direct implication for Bulgaria's security.¹³⁰ Although there are not clear signs of direct conventional military threat for Bulgaria and NATO in the Black Sea region, there is a perception of long-lasting deterioration of security environment.¹³¹ International order and the principles of international understanding of commonplace borders, non-interference into internal affairs of other countries, and the rights of nations to freely identify themselves, are seriously undermined.¹³² In the Black Sea region, the negative tendency of existing and emergence of new conflicts and crisis continues, as this tangibly or intangibly impact on Bulgarian security.¹³³

Today, in the Black Sea region, several major fields of security challenges could be defined, depending on the emphases we would like to put on the present security dynamics in the area. The first field represents the inter-ethnic and inter-communal

¹²⁸ Republic of Bulgaria, *White Paper on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria*, 14.

¹²⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, *Integrated Country Strategy* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 13 August 2018), 9, accessed 16 February 2019, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/285025.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, *Vision: Bulgaria in NATO and in European Defence 2020*, 3.

¹³¹ Republic of Bulgaria, *Programme for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020*, 4.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

conflicts in the context of the post-Soviet nation building process, also known as “Frozen Conflicts.” These conflicts are potential source for the emergence of broader conflicts and crisis in the region, threatening Bulgarian security and stability.¹³⁴ The type of crisis, requiring Bulgarian participation, may be political, humanitarian or military-political, as the main reasons for their appearance are usually political contradictions, armed conflicts or natural disasters.¹³⁵

The security threats, generated in the “Frozen Conflicts,” perceived by Bulgaria could be classified in three groups, requiring different conceptualizing and operational treatment.¹³⁶ The first group includes the longer-term structural instabilities. They are inherent for transitional periods between old and new structures of the system of international relations, between old and new social, economic, and political structures within transforming countries.¹³⁷ The individual countries from the South Caucasus, after the collapse of totalitarian socialism, display different orientations to the evolving centers of global power and also have varying orientations to regional cooperation in neutralizing

¹³⁴ Republic of Bulgaria, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria 04 December 2017), 10.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁶ Plamen Pantev, *Security Threats and Risks in South Caucasus: Perceptions from the Western Black Sea*, Research Report 17 (Sofia, Bulgaria: Institute for Security and International Studies, June 2005), 4, accessed 11 February 2019, http://www.isis-bg.org/Publications/research_reports/RR17.pdf.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

conflicts in the region.¹³⁸ Moreover, the unwillingness of Russia to accept the fact of the existence of new sovereign states put additional challenges to region.¹³⁹

The second group includes social, institutional, and energy factors that constitute security risks.¹⁴⁰ First, continuous internal national economic, social, and political crises in the individual countries and missing regional cooperative structures other than those designed and utilized by the Russian dominating power, generate various security risks.¹⁴¹ Second, the Black Sea and the Southern Caucasus have turned into a ‘battlefield’ for the oil and natural gas pipelines. Three out of the four alternative routes for oil supply from the Caspian Sea cross the Black Sea. Therefore, the security threats posed by the various conflicts and terrorist activities endanger the stability of the oil and gas supplies through the Black Sea.¹⁴² Moreover, the conflicts of Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are the key instruments of preserving Russia’s strategic control in the Black Sea region.¹⁴³ The conflicts in the South Caucasus benefit Russia as they prevent the region from serving as an open energy route between the oil and gas sources of the Caspian and Central Asia and the European markets. Preventing the export of energy

¹³⁸ Pantev, *Security Threats and Risks in South Caucasus: Perceptions from the Western Black Sea*, 4.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 6.

¹⁴³ IRIS, “Strategic Balance and Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region,” 4.

resources from the Caspian basin is a key part of Russia's strategy to monopolize energy supplies from Eurasia to Europe.¹⁴⁴

The third group includes very intensive and actual security threats, having local and regional features.¹⁴⁵ Illegal migration, together with human, drugs and weapons smuggling, organized crime, and money laundering are inherent for the "Frozen Conflicts" and constitute grave risks for Bulgaria. Fragile or failed state institutions, internal government corruption, and low living standards facilitate the implementation of these criminal activities.¹⁴⁶ An important feature of this group of risks is that they are induced strongly by global networks. The unclear statuses of regions such as Nagorno Karabakh, Transdnistria, Abkhazia, and Southern Ossetia, provides a breeding ground for such activities.¹⁴⁷

The second field of security challenges in the Black Sea region stems from the conflict in Ukraine and the Russia's foreign policy to expand its dominance in the area. Changes in the modern security environment, along with the emergence of non-traditional risks and threats, pose new and unexpected challenges to Bulgaria's security. Its direct impact is on the unstable situation in the Black Sea region and the crisis in Ukraine.¹⁴⁸ Since the security and stability of Bulgaria has been planned, prepared, and

¹⁴⁴ IRIS, "Strategic Balance and Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region," 4.

¹⁴⁵ Pantev, *Security Threats and Risks in South Caucasus: Perceptions from the Western Black Sea*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁸ Neno Hristov, "Current Aspects of Development of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Role of the Defense Acquisitions in the Process of their

executed in the frame of NATO's collective defense, the long-lasting effect of Ukraine's crisis and deterioration of the relations between NATO and Russia, pose additional security challenges to Bulgaria.¹⁴⁹ With the growing confrontation between NATO and Russia, and Bulgarian location at the Black Sea, Bulgaria's role to the contribution of security environment in the region is likely to become more, not less prominent.

Three years after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the conclusion that Russia is a destabilizing factor for the regional as well as for Bulgarian security in the Black Sea region is discernible.¹⁵⁰ The shift in the geostrategic and military balance in the Black Sea caused by Russia by means of the annexation of Crimea and the intensive enhancement and modernization of the Russian military capabilities is an undeniable fact that is recognized in NATO and Bulgaria.¹⁵¹ Since Russian annexation of Crimea, Russia built up military power in the Black Sea to intimidate neighbors and threaten NATO's southeastern flank. Russia's missile deployments, thirty multipurpose naval aviation jets, and long-range bombers, capable of carrying nuclear-armed cruise missiles, represent a

Realization" (3rd International Conference on Advances in Education and Social Sciences Istanbul, Turkey, 9-11 October 2017), 655, accessed 04 February 2019, http://www.ocerint.org/adved17_e-publication/papers/107.pdf.

¹⁴⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, NSSRB, 10.

¹⁵⁰ Atlantic Council of Bulgaria, "Bulgaria in NATO and the European Defense: Memorandum No. 1 on the Security and Defense Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria," 22 September 2017, accessed 12 February 2019, <http://atlantic-council.bg/en/bulgaria-nato-european-defense/>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

clear danger to NATO members in the region. That arsenal is complemented by naval infantry, air assault, and Special Operations units.¹⁵²

Since the annexation of Crimea, Russia has been heavily militarizing the peninsula and the Black Sea as a whole. At that moment, there are about 28,000 Russian soldiers, who are stationed on the peninsula, as Russia has been systematically increasing its military presence in the Black Sea region. In the past 10 years, Russia has practically doubled its military budget, as Russia's new submarines and frigates, equipped with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles, pose a serious threat to Bulgaria.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ariel Cohen, "NATO should Stand Up Black Sea Command Before It's too Late," *Huffington Post*, 06 July 2016, accessed 16 February 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-ariel-cohen/nato-should-stand-up-black_b_10831440.html.

¹⁵³ Volker Wagener, "Russia-Ukraine skirmishes: Storm warning on the Black Sea," *Deutsche Welle*, 29 November 2018, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-ukraine-skirmishes-storm-warning-on-the-black-sea/a-46512960>.



Figure 3. Russian Military Troops in the Black Sea Region

Source Volker Wagener, “Russia-Ukraine skirmishes: Storm warning on the Black Sea,” *Deutsche Welle*, 29 November 2018, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-ukraine-skirmishes-storm-warning-on-the-black-sea/a-46512960>.

In this context, while the obsolete navy of Bulgaria has undertaken some modernization efforts, its naval, missile, and air force systems ultimately remain unprepared to face Russian military buildup.¹⁵⁴ With the exception of a few frigates and a mine countermeasures vessel acquired from Belgium, the balance of Bulgarian warships are elderly Warsaw Pact-era vessels inadequate for operational requirements, particularly in light of Russia’s Black Sea fleet build-up.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the navy possesses only two

¹⁵⁴ Cohen, “NATO should Stand Up Black Sea Command Before It’s too Late.”

¹⁵⁵ Sanders, “The Bulgarian Navy after The Cold War: Challenges of Building and Modernizing an Effective Navy,” 75-76.

new AS 565MB Panther helicopters. A third was lost in a fatal accident in June 2017.¹⁵⁶

In this context, the requirement for a number of fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft remains outstanding.

Surprisingly, from Bulgarian perspective, the third field of security challenges in the Black Sea region comes from Turkey. According to poll conducted by WIN/Gallop International, Bulgaria sees Turkey, a NATO ally, as its biggest security threat in the region.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Bulgaria views Russia as a primary defense partner if an eventual threat emerges.¹⁵⁸ The observation that Bulgaria relies on Russia for its defense is suspicious and somewhat illogical to the Alliance. However, this is explained by the finding that Bulgaria considers Turkey as the biggest threat to its national security.

Economic Threats

The detonation of regional landscape in recent years undermines efforts to develop regional cooperation in the Black Sea region. Military build-up in the region as well as the multiple conflicts, which are not resolved, negatively impact the cooperation between countries in the area. In this context, the current situation in Ukraine and still unclear relations between Russia and NATO will lead to changes in the economic

¹⁵⁶ Bulgarian Military, "One Dead, 2 Hurt in Bulgarian Naval Helicopter Crash," 10 June 2018, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2017/06/10/one-dead-2-hurt-in-bulgarian-naval-helicopter-crash/>.

¹⁵⁷ Gallup International Association, "Defense Preferences, Economic Role of China, International Terrorism," October-December 2016, accessed 30 March 2019, http://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2016_Defence_Economics_Terrorism.pdf.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

relationships in the region and may well affect the small and weak Black Sea economies, like Bulgaria, which strongly depend on the regional trade exchange with Russia. Additionally, the growing confrontation between Russia and NATO could turn into a big obstacle for the Black Sea regional cooperation.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the area's unresolved conflicts retard economic development of the countries in the region and have the potential to flare up into wider conflagrations.¹⁶⁰

The Black Sea region has been an intersection of important trade routes between Europe and the Middle East, from the Eastern Balkans to the South Caucasus. The security of these routes is crucial for trade and prosperity in the region and beyond. In this context, it is obvious that the current instability clogs economic development and potential in the region, which sea trade and closer economic integration could uncap.¹⁶¹

The confrontation between NATO and Russia also has a significant footprint on the tourism in the region. An enhanced presence of NATO forces in the Black Sea will seriously affect Bulgaria's tourism. According to Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boyko

¹⁵⁹ Galya Vladova and Jörg Knieling, "Potential and Challenges for the Black Sea Regional Cooperation," *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 5, no. 1 (June 2014):48, accessed 23 January 2019, http://ejes.uaic.ro/articles/EJES2014_0501_VLA.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Commission on the Black Sea, *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region*, 12.

¹⁶¹ Anastasov, "The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection."

Borisov, “To deploy destroyers, aircraft carriers near Bourgas or Varna during the tourist season is unacceptable”¹⁶² and “exceeds the limit of what I can allow.”¹⁶³

Dependence on Russian Energy

Energy security is a major issue for Bulgaria and the question whether Bulgaria will allow itself to continue to be dependent on Russian energy is controversial. When Russia cut its gas supplies to Europe in the winter of 2009 in the wake of the Ukraine conflict, Bulgaria felt the pinch. The country found itself with fully cut supplies in the middle of the winter, leaving home cold and factories closed. The disruption was a wakeup call, proving Bulgarian dependence on Russian energy resources.¹⁶⁴

In this case, although western EU member-states had enough gas reserves to help its new partner in the East, they could not, as there were no pipeline connections between them and Bulgaria. It became conspicuous that in the field of energy, the Iron Curtain was still alive and well and led Eastern European countries, like Bulgaria, to reconsider their energy security options and policies. In this context, Bulgaria has been backed by EU in the efforts to diversify its energy resources and decrease its energy dependence on

¹⁶² Joshua Kucera, “Bulgaria Throws Wrench in Works of NATO Black Sea Plans,” Eurasianet, 17 June 2016, accessed 14 February 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/bulgaria-throws-wrench-works-nato-black-sea-plans>.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Eugen Iladi, “Bulgarian Gas Storage Would Improve Energy Security and Diversification,” New Eastern Europe, 16 October 2018, accessed 26 January 2019, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/10/16/bulgarian-gas-storage-improve-energy-security-diversification/>.

Russia, but breaking from the past path of energy reliance has proven difficult—politically, economically and socially.¹⁶⁵

Although Bulgaria shifted away from the three large Bulgarian-Russian energy projects, the construction of the Burgas-Alexandropolis oil pipeline,¹⁶⁶ the building of second Bulgarian nuclear power plant in Belene,¹⁶⁷ and the creation of the South Stream gas pipeline section on the territory of Bulgaria,¹⁶⁸ there is a lack of vision how Bulgaria will diversify its energy resources. Moreover, the vastly anticipated EU's efforts for diversification of energy resources towards Eastern and Central Europe, by constructing the natural gas pipeline Nabucco, also failed.¹⁶⁹

Bulgaria does not possess or own any proven sizable own energy resources, making the country dependent on energy imports, most of which come from Russia.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Ruslan Stefanov and Martin Tsanov, "Bulgarian Energy Policy," *Aspen Review*, February 2012, accessed 28 January 2019, <https://www.aspenreview.com/article/2017/bulgarian-energy-policy/>.

¹⁶⁶ Sofia News Agency, "Bulgaria Abandons Burgas-Alexandropolis Oil Pipeline," *Novinite*, 07 December 2011, accessed 28 January 2019, https://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=134623.

¹⁶⁷ Sofia News Agency, "Bulgarian Parliament Confirms Decision to Scrap Belene N-Plant," *Novinite*, 27 February 2013, accessed 28 January 2019, https://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=148250.

¹⁶⁸ Georgi Gotev, "EU-Gazprom Deal Clears Bulgaria of South Stream Cancellation Claims," *Euroactive*, 13 March 2017, accessed 28 January 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-gazprom-deal-clears-bulgaria-of-south-stream-cancellation-claims/>.

¹⁶⁹ Clara Weisis, "European Union's Nabucco Pipeline Project Aborted," *World Socialist Web Site*, 13 July 2013, accessed 30 January 2019, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/07/13/nabu-j13.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Stefanov and Tsanov, "Bulgarian Energy Policy."

First, oil production in Bulgaria is very limited as this forces the country to import oil, with nearly 80% of crude oil imports coming from Russia.¹⁷¹ Second, Russia is the sole gas supplier to Bulgaria. The imported gas to Bulgaria is purchased from Gazprom and Overgaz, as Bulgaria meets 90 % of its domestic needs with Russian gas.¹⁷² Moreover, the Russian gas exports to Bulgaria, through the Black Sea, have been growing each year since 2013, as this trend continues by now. In the period January 1-May 31 2017, the gas deliveries to Bulgaria have increased by 14.5 %, compared to first five months of the previous year.¹⁷³ Additional concerns on the dependence on Russian gas are also related with the examination of the development of a new gas transmission infrastructure on the territory of Bulgaria, requiring long-term arrangements for gas delivery to Bulgaria from Russia.¹⁷⁴ Finally, in 2012, Bulgaria abandoned the project to resume works on its nuclear plant in Belene, which aroused concerns over Bulgaria's energy dependence on Russia.¹⁷⁵

Heavy dependence on energy resources leads to economic and political vulnerabilities. Therefore, the projects to diversify energy resources and transportation

¹⁷¹ Republic of Bulgaria, *Global Energy Market Research: Bulgaria*, 19.

¹⁷² Ibid., 20-34.

¹⁷³ Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Energy, "Gazprom and the Bulgarian Ministry of Energy Agree on Examining the Gas Transmission Development in the Republic of Bulgaria," 03 June 2017, accessed 26 January 2019, <https://www.me.government.bg/en/news/gazprom-and-the-bulgarian-ministry-of-energy-agree-on-examining-the-gas-transmission-development-in-2424.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Republic of Bulgaria, *Global Energy Market Research: Bulgaria*, 31.

routes impact the geopolitical reality in the Black Sea region and project directly into Bulgaria's national security. In this context, the state of the current energy infrastructure negatively impacts the national security. Therefore, diversification of energy resources and intensify cooperation with EU is a key necessity for Bulgaria in order to mitigate negative economic consequences of the crisis in the east.¹⁷⁶

This geographical and supplier dependence on Russian energy has its implications for Bulgaria. The question is whether Bulgaria can afford to be aggressive, or even firm, in the fight against Russian expansion of dominance when the energy spigot is controlled by Moscow.¹⁷⁷

NATO's Actions in the Black Sea Region since Bulgaria's Accession to the Alliance

On 29 March 2004, Bulgaria, Romania, and five other states became NATO members.¹⁷⁸ With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO, the Alliance strengthened its security posture and extended its area of freedom in the Black Sea region.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Republic of Bulgaria, *Vision: Bulgaria in NATO and in European Defence 2020*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Ronald H. Linden, "The Burden of Belonging: Romanian and Bulgarian Foreign Policy in the New Era," *Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 2009): 281, accessed 22 January 2019, <https://www.polisci.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Linden2009.BurdenBelonging.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ NATO, "Seven New Members Join NATO," 29 March 2004, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2004/03-march/e0329a.htm>.

¹⁷⁹ The New York Times, "NATO's Newest Enlargement: Milestone from the Baltic to the Black Sea," 29 March 2004, accessed 24 February 2019,

At Istanbul Summit in 2004, NATO Heads of State and Government articulated that the main efforts of the Alliance in the Black Sea region were to contribute to further strengthening security and stability in the area and building upon existing forms of regional co-operation.¹⁸⁰ Although neither of the NATO's programs had specific regional dimension focused on the Black Sea region, at that time, NATO's activities in the area were mainly focused on supporting domestic defense reforms, enhancing of military interoperability among NATO's members and partners, and contribution to the fight against terrorism.¹⁸¹ In this context, the NATO-Russia partnership, under the structure of NATO-Russia Council, was a strategic element in fostering security and stability in the Black Sea region.¹⁸²

NATO-Russia Council was established at the NATO-Russia Summit in Rome on 28 May 2002. On the basis of this forum, for consultation and cooperation, all NATO member state and Russia worked as equal partners on a wide spectrum of security issues of common interests. Cooperation had been intensified in a variety of key areas, including the fight against terrorism, crisis management, non-proliferation, arms control and confidence-building measures, theatre missile defense, logistics, military-to-military

<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/29/opinion/IHT-natos-newest-enlargement-milestone-from-the-baltic-to-the-black.html>.

¹⁸⁰ NATO, "Istanbul Summit Communiqué."

¹⁸¹ Kutluk, "NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region," 43.

¹⁸² NATO, "Riga Summit Declaration," 29 November 2006, accessed 23 February 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm>.

cooperation, defense reform, and civil emergencies.¹⁸³ However, after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia and Russia's illegal intervention in Ukraine, NATO's foreign ministers decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia.¹⁸⁴ NATO's foreign ministers also agreed a package of measures aimed at deepening cooperation with other NATO partners in Eastern Europe, in consultation with them and within existing bilateral programs.¹⁸⁵

The illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 marked a crucial moment for European, transatlantic and international security.¹⁸⁶ Acting like a wake-up call, this event redefined strategic and security considerations for NATO in the Black Sea region.¹⁸⁷ After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, during the Wales Summit in 2014, NATO adopted the Readiness Action Plan.¹⁸⁸ The purpose of this plan is that the Alliance can respond swiftly and firmly to any security challenges in the east and south

¹⁸³ NATO-Russia Council (NRC), "About NRC," accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.nato.int/nrc-website/en/about/index.html>.

¹⁸⁴ NRC, "Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers," 01 April 2014, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.nato.int/nrc-website/en/articles/20140327-announcement/index.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration," 05 September 2014, accessed 24 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

¹⁸⁷ Tania Lațici, "European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee" (briefing, European Parliament, Brussel, Belgium, July 2018), 5, accessed 24 February 2019, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625117_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS_BRI(2018)625117_EN.pdf).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

of its borders, including the Black Sea region.¹⁸⁹ This is the most significant reinforcement of NATO's collective defense since the end of the Cold War.¹⁹⁰ Assurance measures are comprised of land, sea, and air activities in and around the eastern part of the alliance, which are reinforced by exercises focused on collective defense and crisis management. Adaptation measures include the establishment of VJTF, which is able to deploy for a short period of time and enhances Standing Naval Forces.¹⁹¹ Moreover, facilitating the process of readiness and rapid deployment of forces, the Alliance created eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), which are small headquarters, deployed in central and east Europe.¹⁹² Two of these units are deployed in Romania and Bulgaria, with the purpose to strengthen NATO's presence on the south-eastern flank. The concept of the NFIU is to serve the 'Receipt, Staging, and Onward Movement' phase of military operations and the deployment of NATO's high readiness forces by ensuring the capacity of host nations.¹⁹³ They also work with host nations to identify logistical networks, transportation routes, and supporting infrastructure to ensure that NATO's high-readiness

¹⁸⁹ NATO, "Readiness Action Plan," 21 September 2017, accessed 22 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Lațici, "European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee," 5.

forces can deploy to the region as quickly as possible and work together effectively to help keep nations.¹⁹⁴

Additionally, in regard to the Readiness Action Plan, a decision for TFP was taken by NATO's leaders during the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016.¹⁹⁵ The purpose of TFP is to strengthen defense and deterrence in the southeast of NATO borders as well as to enhance the interoperability between NATO members and increase Allies' situational awareness and responsiveness.¹⁹⁶ NATO's rapid reinforcement strategy also ensures that forward presence forces will be reinforced by broader NATO Response Force, NATO's VJTF, Allies' additional high readiness forces, and NATO's heavier follow-on forces, if necessary.¹⁹⁷ This presence is built on the basis of Romanian multinational brigade under the command of Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast (HQ MND-SE), which is also located in Romania.¹⁹⁸ The force is comprised of up to 4,000 Romanian soldiers, supported by troops from nine other NATO countries, and complementing a separate deployment of 900 U.S. troops who are already in place. The NATO force aims to develop its presence in the Black Sea region without escalating

¹⁹⁴ Lațici, "European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee," 5.

¹⁹⁵ NATO, "Boosting NATO's Presence in the East and Southeast," 21 January 2019, accessed 22 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

tensions as it seeks to counter Russia's own plans to create a "buffer zone."¹⁹⁹ Moreover, amongst its many key roles, HQ MND-SE oversees the NFIU in Bulgaria and Romania.²⁰⁰

In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea, on 03 June 2014, the European Reassurance Initiative, whose name was changed to European Deterrence Initiative by US National Defense Authorization Act in 2017,²⁰¹ was announced by US President Obama. The purpose of the initiative is to support increased joint training, military exercises and capability development among NATO's members, and partners in central and eastern Europe to build a strong deterrence posture. The initiative reassures NATO allies by funding a rotational military presence and improving allies' capabilities and readiness. All activities take place under the umbrella of Operation Active Resolve, whose primary objective is to enhance deterrence and increase interoperability between ally and partner militaries with multinational training events.²⁰² Since April 2014, as a part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, U.S. Army Europe has been bringing units to Europe

¹⁹⁹ Robin Emmott, "NATO Launches Black Sea Force as Latest Counter to Russia," *Reuters*, 09 October 2017, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1CE0MJ>.

²⁰⁰ NATO, "Romania's Multinational Brigade – Bolstering NATO's Tailored Forward Presence," 26 February 2018, accessed 23 February 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2018/romania-s-multinational-brigade-bolstering-natos-tailored-forward-presence->.

²⁰¹ U.S. Congress, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017. Public Law (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 23 December 2016), 491, accessed 25 February 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ328/PLAW-114publ328.pdf>.

²⁰² Lațici, "European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee," 2.

for nine months, as part of them are deployed in Romania and Bulgaria.²⁰³ In support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, over the past year, the guided-missile destroyers James E. Williams, Carney, Ross, and Porter sailed the Black Sea, making stops in Bulgaria and Romania.²⁰⁴ Additionally, US have been deploying 350 Marine Corps and U.S. Navy personnel in the Black Sea region under Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF) initiative. Since 2010, the Corps has been sending a small detachment of Marines and sailors to the Black Sea region as part of the BSRF. Those forces have been focused on security cooperation exercises and training and advising partner nation forces from Ukraine to Georgia. The BSRF enables the region to engage in security cooperation, training and, building military capacity through a rotational deployment of Marine Forces.²⁰⁵ In 2019, the BSRF initiative may come to an end, as the Corps expands its presence in the Arctic high north of Europe.²⁰⁶

Since the accession of Bulgaria to NATO, there have been a lot of exercises, with participation of NATO's members and partners, conducted in the Black Sea region. Sea

²⁰³ U.S. Army Europe, "America's Continued Commitment to European Security: Atlantic Resolve," accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.eur.army.mil/AtlanticResolve/>.

²⁰⁴ Kyle Rempher, "Here's the US Military Footprint in the Black Sea Region," Military Times, 27 November 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/11/27/heres-the-us-military-footprint-in-the-black-sea-region/>.

²⁰⁵ Lațici, "European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee," 5.

²⁰⁶ Shawn Snow, "No more Marine rotations to the Black Sea. The Corps is focusing here instead," Marine Corps Times, 29 November 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2018/11/29/no-more-marine-rotations-to-the-black-sea-the-corps-is-focusing-on-the-arctic-instead/>.

Breeze Series, which have been conducted since 1990, take place almost each year in Ukraine. Sea Breeze is a U.S. and Ukraine co-hosted multinational maritime exercise, which is designed to enhance interoperability of participating nations and strengthen regional maritime security. The nations focused on maritime interdiction operations, air defense, anti-submarine warfare, damage control drills, search and rescue, and amphibious warfare.²⁰⁷ Another annual multinational exercise conducted in the Black Sea region is Saber Guardian series. The exercise is intended to enhance joint interoperability among Bulgarian, Hungarian, U.S., NATO Allies and other PfP nations.²⁰⁸ Sea Shield is another exercise, comprised of 16 warships, 10 warplanes, one submarine, and 2,800 troops from various NATO allies and partners, which took place in 2017. The exercise was intended to project NATO efforts in countering Russian aggression.²⁰⁹ In 2018, the first-ever large-scale multinational air exercise, Clear Sky 2018, was held in Ukraine. US and eight other nations participated in the exercise with the main purpose to enhance interoperability between the air forces of NATO member states as well as to showcase strong bonds between NATO and Ukraine.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, “Exercise Sea Breeze 2018 Concludes in Ukraine,” 19 July 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1578990/exercise-sea-breeze-2018-concludes-in-ukraine/>.

²⁰⁸ Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS), “Saber Guardian,” accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/SaberGuardian>.

²⁰⁹ Alex Gorka, “Exercise Sea Shield-2017; NATO Provokes Russia in the Black Sea Before Defense Ministers’ Meeting,” *Aletho News*, 10 February 2017, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://alethonews.com/2017/02/10/exercise-sea-shield-2017-nato-provokes-russia-in-black-sea-before-defense-ministers-meeting/>.

²¹⁰ Kyle Rempher, “US Air Force’s Huge Exercise in Ukraine Fuels Growing Partnership and that Country’s NATO Ambitions,” *Air Force Times*, 13 November 2018,

In regard to the Alliance activities in the Black Sea region, NATO members routinely conduct air policing and reconnaissance flights in the area.²¹¹ Since Russia-Ukraine crisis, NATO's air policing missions has been intensified. NATO Air Policing is a peacetime mission, which aims to preserve the security of Alliance airspace. It is a collective task, involving the continuous presence of fighter aircraft and crews, which are ready to react quickly to airspace violations.²¹² The NATO Air Policing mission is carried out using the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defense System.²¹³

Additionally, except NATO exercises and the presence of NATO forces in the Black Sea region, in 2015, US established a ballistic missile defense system on the territory of Romania.²¹⁴ The establishment of this missile defense architecture was part of the second phase of the European Phased Adaptive Approach. The main purpose of this approach is to augment capabilities against the proliferation of ballistic missiles from the

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/11/13/nato-ambitions-ukraine-looks-west-with-air-exercises-and-high-level-discussions/>.

²¹¹ Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "EU, NATO React Coolly to Ukraine's Call for New Moves against Russia," 30 November 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/amp/eu-nato-react-cooly-ukraine-poroshenko-call-new-moves-against-russia/29629488.html>.

²¹² NATO, "Air Policing: Securing NATO Airspace," 16 May 2016, accessed 24 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132685.htm.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ U.S. Embassy in Romania, "United States Ballistic Missile Defense Site at Deveselu Air Base in Romania," accessed 24 February 2019, <https://ro.usembassy.gov/united-states-ballistic-missile-defense-site-at-deveselu-air-base-in-romania/>.

Middle East.²¹⁵ According to NATO officials, the missile defense system is capable of shooting down rockets from countries such as Iran that could one day reach major European cities. However, Russia perceives this as an act against its own nuclear arsenal.²¹⁶

In the past years, NATO strategy in the Black Sea region has evolved and become more focused. The increased aggression of Russia in the region has prompted a strong response from NATO and its Allies. While it may have disrupted action on the region's other issues, it has placed the Black Sea region on NATO's threat map, which allows for build-up of the Eastern flank.²¹⁷

A number of air and maritime activities in the region have led to a fundamental increase in NATO's presence and maritime activity in the area. The Alliance will continue to strengthen its deterrence and defense posture in the region in all domains. Additionally, NATO will continue to support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova within their internationally recognized

²¹⁵ U.S. Embassy in Romania, "United States Ballistic Missile Defense Site at Deveselu Air Base in Romania."

²¹⁶ Robin Emmott, "U.S. Activities Romanian Missile Defense Site, Agering Russia," *Reuters*, 12 May 2016, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-shield-idUSKCN0Y30JX>.

²¹⁷ Andrew Rogan, "Black Sea Security Brief," Atlantic Treaty Association, 28 November 2017, accessed 24 February 2019, <http://www.atahq.org/ata-policy-focus/black-sea-security-brief/>.

borders. Moreover, the Alliance will continue to develop cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia in order to strengthen their resilience against security threats.²¹⁸

Bulgaria's Cooperation with NATO in the Black Sea Region

The security context in the Black Sea region indicates that new conflicts and crisis situation may emerge in the future. Therefore, the risks and threats to Bulgaria's national security will have to be averted outside the country.²¹⁹ In this context, Bulgaria is not capable of dealing on its own with these risks and threats, so this makes it fundamental to find multilateral approaches to the solution of the problems within the allied efforts of NATO.²²⁰ The security and integrity of Bulgaria are contingent on collective security and defense system aligned with NATO activities in the region.²²¹

In regard to the Readiness Action Plan, Bulgaria's commitments include mainly maintaining capabilities. In this case, the implementation of the Air Policing mission within NATO's Integrated Anti-Air Defense System and Missile Defense, increasing the number of joint exercises on the territory of the country and in the Black Sea, building a

²¹⁸ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration," 11 July 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

²¹⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, *Programme for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020*, 4.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Republic of Bulgaria, *The Republic of Bulgaria's Armed Forces' Development Plan* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 2010), 12, accessed 02 February 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Bulgaria_-_2010_-_The_Republic_of_Bulgarias_Armed_Forces_Development_Plan.pdf.

NFIU on Bulgarian territory, and contributing to the construction of the VJTF.²²²

Moreover, in regard to enhance NATO's capabilities to quickly and effectively deploy forces in the Black Sea region, Bulgaria participates with providing locations for hosting NATO's forces on Bulgarian territory, as well as using the Bulgarian infrastructure, which is crucial to a strong Allied defense in the Black Sea region.²²³

The agreements of cross-border airspace operations within the framework of NATO's Integrated Anti-Air Defense and Anti-Missile Defense System between Bulgaria and other NATO-Balkan states have been implemented. First, in 2010, the Defense Ministers of Bulgaria and Greece have signed the first ever bilateral agreement under NATO's Air Policing program in the Balkans.²²⁴ Under this agreement, designated aircrafts of both countries have been able to enter the air space of one another in case of a threat as stipulated by the respective procedures.²²⁵ Second, in 2011, a significant step in the enhancement of bilateral cooperation in the Black Sea region was the signed between Bulgaria and Romania agreement on trans-border Air policing within the integrated

²²² Hristov, "Current Aspects of Development of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Role of the Defense Acquisitions in the Process of their Realization," 9-11.

²²³ David Vergun, "US Soldiers in Bulgaria, Romania deter aggression, assure allies," U.S. Army, 26 September 2017, accessed 15 February 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/194338/us_soldiers_in_bulgaria_romania_deter_aggression_assure_allies.

²²⁴ Sofia News Agency, "Bulgaria, Greece Strike 1st Balkan Air Policing Deal," Novinite, 01 November 2010, accessed 10 February 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/121740/Bulgaria%2C+Greece+Strike+1st+Balkan+Air+Policing+Deal>.

²²⁵ Ibid.

NATO Air Defense System.²²⁶ Third, in 2016, due to the changes in the security environment in the Black Sea region and after the necessary changes in the Bulgarian legislation, the joint mission for the security of Bulgarian airspace with forces and means of the USA was realized. The U.S. Air Force, in close cooperation with Bulgarian Air Force, begun NATO's enhanced Air Policing measures in Bulgarian airspace as a part of the Alliance's Assurance Measures for eastern Allies.²²⁷ Finally, in 2017, under NATO's Assurance Measures, Italian and Bulgarian fighters flew together in order to provide more flexible response and preserve integrity of Allied airspace in the eastern part of the Alliance.²²⁸

In response to the perceptions of an increasing Russian regional threat, the pace of multinational military exercises in Bulgaria and involving Bulgarian forces in the Black Sea region has increased significantly since 2014. These have encompassed NATO sponsored multinational land and air exercises in Bulgaria and combined naval exercises in the Black Sea. Some of the most prominent exercises in which Bulgaria has participated are: "Sea Breeze" series, which are U.S. and Ukraine co-hosted annual multinational maritime exercises, being held in the Black Sea, to enhance the

²²⁶ Republic of Bulgaria, *2011, Annual Report on the Status of the Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria, 2012), 30.

²²⁷ NATO, "NATO's enhanced Air Policing Measures Begin in Bulgaria," 09 September 2016, accessed 02 February 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/2016/natos-enhanced-air-policing-measures-begin-in-bulgaria>

²²⁸ NATO, "Italian Jets Arrive in Bulgaria for Enhanced Air Policing," 05 July 2017, accessed 10 February 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/news_145834.htm?selectedLocale=en.

interoperability of participating nations and strengthen maritime security in the region;²²⁹ “Saber Guardian” series, which rotate through the territories of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, having the main purpose to enhance the interoperability of participating nations and to demonstrate commitment and readiness for action in support of the security and stability in the Black Sea region.²³⁰ Moreover, the field training area “Novo Selo,” in the territory of Bulgaria, very close to the Black Sea port city of Burgas, accommodates joint US-Bulgarian and NATO training exercises²³¹ in conjunction with the Black Sea Rotation Forces.²³² Additionally, various other operations and joint exercises, with the participation of Bulgaria’s troops and allied forces, and the certification of different formations under NATO standards are conducted in the area.²³³ In this context, Bulgaria

²²⁹ U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet, “Sea Breeze,” accessed 10 February 2019, <http://www.c6f.navy.mil/forces-efforts/sea-breeze>.

²³⁰ Angela Kersher, “Exercise Saber Guardian to Take Place in July,” U.S. Army, 07 June 2017, accessed 10 February 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/188997/exercise_saber_guardian_2017_to_take_place_in_july.

²³¹ Richard Wilson, “Novo Selo Training Range,” CoBases – US Military Bases, accessed 15 February 2019, <https://www.cobases.com/overseas/bulgaria/novo-selo-range/>.

²³² Timothy Lutz, “U.S. Marines in Bulgaria Conclude Exercise Platinum Lion,” U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe and Africa, 20 December 2016, accessed 15 February 2019, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/218421/us-marines-bulgaria-conclude-exercise-platinum-lion>.

²³³ Sevdalina Dimitrova, Stoyko Stoykov, and Rumen Marinov, “Black Sea Region and European Security Policy,” *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization* 24, no. 1 (2018): 65, accessed 06 February 2019, <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/kbo.2018.24.issue-1/kbo-2018-0009/kbo-2018-0009.pdf>.

will continue to participate in a high level of joint exercises, which will contribute to the development of Bulgarian defense capabilities.²³⁴

In 2015, as a part of NATO's Readiness Action Plan, on Bulgarian territory NFIU was created.²³⁵ Bulgaria is one of the six first-wave NFIUs together with Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Romania.²³⁶ In this context, the Bulgarian NFIU is a vital piece of NATO collective defense as it is a part of NATO's adaptation in the face of security challenges from the Black Sea.²³⁷ The NFIU is a vital link between Bulgarian forces and Allied troops during joint exercises and training and also provides logistical and infrastructural support for the deployment of NATO high-readiness forces, if the security and the territorial integrity of NATO member countries on the eastern flank of the Alliance are endangered.²³⁸ Moreover, the headquarter will be in charge of planning the possible deployment of NATO forces on Bulgarian territory if necessary.²³⁹

As a part of Bulgarian commitment towards the creation of VJTF in the eastern part of the Alliance, Bulgaria is ready to deploy 400 soldiers in a new multinational

²³⁴ Republic of Bulgaria, *Programme for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020*, 12.

²³⁵ Allied Joint Force Command, "Bulgaria Inaugurates New NFIU," 03 September 2015, accessed 14 February 2019, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/page6814941/bulgaria-inaugurates-nfiu-activation>.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, "NATO Force Integration Unit Activated in Sofia," 03 September 2015, accessed 26 February 2019, <http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1155910>.

²³⁹ Ibid.

NATO brigade to be based in Romania.²⁴⁰ According to Nikolai Nenchev, Bulgarian Ministry of Defense in 2016, more tangible NATO presence in the Black Sea region, as creating a NATO multinational brigade in Romania, is intrinsic to the security and stability in the region.²⁴¹ The unit is intended to facilitate the flow of forces throughout the region that amounts to a new land presence in NATO's southeast.²⁴² Moreover, Bulgaria participates in South East Europe Brigade, as Bulgarian participation in this initiative affirms the authority of Bulgaria as a major factor contributing to stability in the south-east Europe.²⁴³

Another way, in which Bulgaria participates to strengthening the peace and security in the Black Sea region, is by hosting NATO forces and providing infrastructure that facilitates NATO's activities in the area. The existence of small NATO bases in the Black Sea region, like those in Bulgaria, are needed for the Alliance to rapidly deploy forces on the way to the conflict theatre in the Black Sea. Most of these facilities are operated jointly by U.S. forces and Bulgarian troops and are crucial to the U.S. strategy

²⁴⁰ Sofia News Agency, "Bulgaria Ready to Deploy 400 to Romania-Based NATO Brigade," Novinite, 15 June 2016, accessed 14 February 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/174912/Bulgaria+Ready+to+Deploy+400+to+Romania-Based+NATO+Brigade>.

²⁴¹ The Sofia Globe, "Defense Minister: Bulgaria Ready to Contribute Soldiers to NATO Brigade in Romania," 14 June 2016, accessed 15 February 2019, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2016/06/14/defence-minister-bulgaria-ready-to-contribute-soldiers-to-nato-brigade-in-romania/>.

²⁴² Peter Korzun, "NATO Pushing for Military Buildup in the Black Sea," *Astute News*, 01 November 2016, accessed 15 February 2019, <https://astutenews.com/2016/11/01/nato-pushing-for-military-buildup-in-the-black-sea/>.

²⁴³ Republic of Bulgaria, *Programme for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020*, 11.

of using small bases to shelter troops.²⁴⁴ In regard to this, an estimated 2,500 US troops are temporarily stationed in the country at any one time.²⁴⁵ It is important for rotational units to maintain a continual presence in Bulgaria in order to respond immediately to eventual aggression from the east.²⁴⁶ Moreover, because of the Montreux Convention of 1936, which prevents permanent presence of non-littoral state vessels in the Black Sea, some US Navy ships sail under the Bulgarian flag in the Black Sea.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, facilitating NATO's activities in the region, NATO's military equipment and personnel may be deployed in Bulgaria via different ways through land, air, and sea, as the most important installation is the Black Sea port of Varna.²⁴⁸ Additionally, since the Black Sea is on the way to some of the most torn by insurgency territories in the Middle East, setting joint military facilities on the western shore of the Black Sea has an important role in the war against terrorism.²⁴⁹

The flashback of the problematic areas of strategic security of the Black Sea region highlights the question of whether Bulgaria's defense capabilities meet the

²⁴⁴ Daniela Popa, "Black Sea: A Geopolitical and Economic Perspective of the Eastern Border of the Euro-Atlantic Structures," *Romanian Economic and Business Review* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 139, accessed 11 February 2019, <http://www.rebe.rau.ro/REBE%205%202.pdf>.

²⁴⁵ Wilson, "Novo Selo Training Range."

²⁴⁶ Vergun, "US Soldiers in Bulgaria, Romania deter aggression, assure allies."

²⁴⁷ Korzun, "NATO Pushing for Military Buildup in the Black Sea."

²⁴⁸ Vergun, "US Soldiers in Bulgaria, Romania deter aggression, assure allies."

²⁴⁹ Popa, "Black Sea: A Geopolitical and Economic Perspective of the Eastern Border of the Euro-Atlantic Structures," 139.

challenges of the security environment, the risks and threats to the region as well as the feasibility of the declared capabilities of the armed forces for collective defense in the region. The answer is in itself related to the actions of the armed forces of Bulgaria in the interest of collective defense, European and national security. All of the activities mentioned above, confirm the joint action on the preparation of Bulgarian armed forces for participation in collective defense and the formation of necessary defense capabilities to enhance the security and balanced reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank in the Black Sea region.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary focus of this research is the examination of NATO actions in the Black Sea region and their impact on Bulgarian interests in the area.

This chapter will provide the author's analysis and conclusions based on the evidence presented in the preceding chapter, which will answer the primary research question: How has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's national interests in the Black Sea region? Moreover, the final part of the chapter will also offer recommendations for further studies.

Conclusions

With the increasing NATO presence and expanding influence in the Black Sea region, Russia developed a strategy to regain its dominance in the area. The objective of this strategy is not merely to stop the expansion of the Alliance, but also to intimidate the NATO members in the area, in particular Bulgaria and Romania. As a part of this strategy, Russia tries to exert pressure not only on areas of dispute in the region, but also on NATO members there. First, Russia threatens to choke energy and trade flows in the region to the countries whose behavior is not in compliance with Russia's foreign policy. Moscow also undermines prospects for future natural gas deliveries from countries in the Caspian Basin, which are vital for the diversification of energy resources. Second, Russia developed its own missile arsenal and enhanced the Black Sea fleet in the region, thereby posing a tangible threat to the countries in the area. Third, Russia exploits the "Frozen

Conflicts” enhance the presence of its forces in the region, threatening to destabilize peace in the area.

The risks and threats mentioned above challenges Bulgaria’s security and stability. Bulgaria is not able to cope with these challenges by itself, and the only real way to effectively meet them is to use the opportunities that Bulgarian membership in NATO provides. Today, one cannot suppose that Bulgaria could defend its territory and sovereignty without depending on the Alliance’s collective capabilities. Bulgaria simply does not possess the necessary military resources to effectively guarantee its own security.

The Republic of Bulgaria builds its defense policy within the framework of NATO’s collective defense. Within this framework, the Armed Forces’ capability objectives are an essential tool for fulfilling the tasks of protecting national interests, implementing allied engagements and contributing to national security in peacetime.²⁵⁰

However, although an enhanced NATO presence in the Black Sea is of particular importance - as a means to augment situational awareness and improve coordination between NATO Allies for example - the increased presence of NATO forces exacerbates tensions in the region. The militarization of the region against the background of high tensions is a very negative trend. Even a small accident might spark a big conflict.

Although the potential for confrontation between NATO and Russia in the Black Sea region continues to grow, Bulgaria’s relationships with neighboring countries in the area, to include Russia, too, are expected to remain peaceful. The country considers the

²⁵⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria*, 6.

Black Sea region in the Euro-Atlantic context, one that promotes security, economic, and energy cooperation. While Bulgaria faces no direct military threats in the Black Sea region, NATO's enhanced military presence in the area is perceived by Sofia as a provocation to Russia, which increases the likelihood of confrontation in the region.

Although Bulgaria actively participates in most NATO activities in the Black Sea region, the discontent of Bulgarian officials with further enhancement of NATO's presence in the area is apparent. According to Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, while the threat of escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is real, Bulgaria has no interest in the militarization of the Black Sea, which would directly affect Bulgarian interests in the region.²⁵¹ Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov has expressed similar concerns and a fear that "the entry of ships, combined with the entry of such a mighty Russian navy on the other side, will inevitably lead to a major crisis."²⁵² These statements clearly articulate the reluctance of Bulgaria to support an enhanced NATO presence in the area.

Given the enhanced military presence in the region, a confrontation could be triggered by even a minor incident. An accident, whether between aircraft or naval vessels, could produce an escalation in tensions very quickly. There have already been several incidents involving Russian forces in the Black Sea that exacerbated tensions in

²⁵¹ Radio Bulgaria, "President Radev: We Have No Interests in Militarization of Black Sea," 30 November 2018, accessed 06 February 2019, <http://bnr.bg/en/post/101051988>.

²⁵² Reuters, "Bulgaria would Face "Major Crisis" if Black Sea Tensions Worsen," 07 December 2018, accessed 17 February 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-bulgaria/bulgaria-would-face-major-crisis-if-black-sea-tensions-worsen-idUSKBN1O61O1>.

the region. Moreover, a change in the balance of power in the region could push NATO and Russia to the brink of a conflict. While such a conflict may still be avoided, the tendency of increasing confrontation might result in large-scale combat operation. Such an operation would necessitate the participation of Bulgaria, thereby placing at risk Bulgarian sovereignty and territory. Should the territory and sovereignty of Bulgaria not have been intimidated in any way by Russia, Bulgaria would not have any interest, aside from its obligations as a NATO ally, to be drawn into such a conflict. While a war between NATO and Russia is not likely to happen, the growing confrontation between both sides seriously threatens economic cooperation in the region.

The enhanced presence of military forces could elevate the risk of maritime incidents between military and, potentially, commercial vessels, which could lead to disruption of maritime transport and seriously degrade economic cooperation between the countries in the region. The Black Sea region represents an important transit corridor for goods into Europe, which forms a key pillar in Bulgaria's economic growth plans. Russia's control over regional ports in the Black Sea, like those in Sevastopol and Abkhazia, and the sea lines that link them, could give Russia the ability to disrupt the transportation of goods, if the level of confrontation in the region increases. Since Bulgarian foreign trade is increasingly dependent on trade in the Black Sea, disruption of these transport routes in the region would seriously affect Bulgaria's economy. Moreover, taking into consideration the strong economic ties between Bulgaria and Russia, a weak economy like Bulgaria's could not afford to jeopardize such cooperation. Additionally, an enhanced military presence in the region could badly affect international tourism in Bulgaria. Since most of Bulgaria's resorts are located along the Black Sea

coastline, the presence of troops in the area could deter foreign tourists from visiting Bulgaria. While economic opportunities in the Black Sea region are of particular importance for Bulgaria's prosperity, the disruption of energy resources threatens Bulgaria's security and stability.

A possible confrontation between Bulgaria and Russia, as a result of NATO's actions in the Black Sea region, could lead to the disruption of the supply of Russian energy resources to Bulgaria. Given Bulgaria's heavy dependence on Russian energy supplies, the curtailment of the supply of energy resources from Russia to Bulgaria would seriously affect not only business in Bulgaria, but also affect the function of essential services and the way of life in the country. Moreover, the militarization of the Black Sea might disrupt plans for delivering energy resources through pipelines from the Caspian Basin, projects which Bulgaria has been trying to realize in order to diversify the supply of its energy resources. Energy and economic ties aside, Russia and Bulgaria also have much in common culturally, linguistically, and historically.

In a case of further NATO confrontation towards Russia, close historical ties between Russia and Bulgaria might provide fertile ground for the provocation of disturbances among the Bulgarian population. Although the majority of people support maintaining membership in NATO, as a means to gain more credible guarantees for prosperity and security, it is important to note that Bulgarians, especially the older generation, generally uphold their positive attitudes towards Russia.²⁵³ Moreover, the

²⁵³ European Council on Foreign Relations, "Public Opinion Poll: Bulgarian Foreign Policy, the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and National Security," 26 March 2015, accessed 30 March 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/public_opinion_poll311520.

assumption that Bulgaria perceives Turkey as a major threat to its security in the Black Sea region, and therefore leans toward relying more on Russia than the U.S. in case of an eventual threat, further complicates the situation for Bulgaria's international relations. Although Bulgaria is a part of the Alliance, public opinion might oppose NATO actions towards countering a possible Russian threat.

At the end of the day Bulgaria's role and prospects are shaped by powerful interests. On the one side lie the interests of serving as a reliable boundary state of NATO, one that is trying to meet its obligations towards the Alliance. On the other side, Bulgaria could also try to contribute to efforts to bridge the interests of NATO and Russia, mainly in stabilization of the regional situation, while finding the right formula for its own interests. Bulgaria would actually like to be on both sides, with western security guarantees, but also with some economic benefits from Russia.

How has membership in NATO affected Bulgaria's national interests in the Black Sea region? Taking in consideration the current environment in the region, Bulgaria's accession to the Alliance is indispensable for the country, mostly because deterring Russia from incursion into Bulgaria's territory. However, growing confrontation between NATO and Russia and increasing the presence of NATO's forces in the area may seriously affect Bulgaria's economy. A price that Bulgaria must be ready to pay for the sake of its sovereignty.

Recommendations

This research project has no ambition to serve as a digest paper of the Black Sea regional security problems. It does not also aim to please readers and experts from different backgrounds. The basic purpose of this text is to serve as a departure point for

further analysis, regarding the ramifications of NATO's actions in the Black Sea region on Bulgaria's interests. This research is provoked by the need for building a strong collective defense, based on a comprehensive long-term approach to enhance the security and balance the reinforcement of the NATO South-East flank.

This study proposes the implementation of bi-directional foreign policy for Bulgaria in the Black Sea region, one which must focus on loyalty and firm commitment to NATO in the framework of collective defense, while simultaneously avoiding alienation from Russia and mitigating the threat of economic and energy crises. Since Bulgaria does not possess sufficient defense capabilities to defend its territory and sovereignty from a possible Russian threat, the only real way for Bulgaria to respond to such aggression would be to rely on the deterrent capabilities that the Alliance provides. However, in regard to economic and especially energy security, it would be catastrophic for the country if Bulgaria should decide to oppose Russia. It is not true that Bulgaria and Russia have close relations just because of their culture and history. Bulgaria has vested economic and energy interests in maintaining friendly relations with Russia. Therefore, a bi-directional approach based on mediating a thawing of relations between NATO and Russia, or at least keeping them at their current temperature, is indispensable for Bulgaria.

The nature of the problem warrants additional research in several areas. As a start, in order to gain more clarity into the problem under consideration, it would be worthwhile to gather additional statistical and other empirical data that might allow for more analysis of the impact of Bulgaria's decision to enter NATO, for instance by comparing data on economic activities in the Black Sea region or tourist visits to Bulgaria

before and after accession. Another area for research would be a comparative case study of the experiences of Bulgaria and Romania, both of which entered the Alliance at the same time, yet each of which has a different relationship with Russia.

Looking beyond the current project, one area for further research could be focused on Russia's influence in Bulgaria. Does Russia exert its influence on Bulgaria in order to undermine Bulgaria's relations with the Euro-Atlantic community and draw Bulgaria to its sphere of influence? While Bulgaria is a member of NATO, the country is dependent on Russia economically and for energy, a condition ripe for Russia to exert pressure on Bulgaria.

Another area of research, which could provide additional clarity to the problem, would be to explore whether Bulgaria should primarily rely on the Alliance in order to thwart Russia's designs or should improve its defense capabilities (for which significant additional resources would likely be required) to deter or defeat an attempt at destabilization on its own, buying time for its allies to react.

Even if the risks, the dangers and the threats in the regional security environment exist, the Black Sea region shows a wide range of opportunities for the developing process of creating a space of peace, security and prosperity. Bulgaria's accession to NATO aimed not to exacerbate the dangers and threats, but to enhance the opportunities for the country and for the region. By increasing regional military cooperation, the wider Black Sea region could become a pillar of stability, security and sustainable development.

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