

Danube – European Geopolitical Axis

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Abstract: From a geopolitical perspective, Danube represents an extremely important axis since it connects the North Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, with access to the Black Sea. The Main-Danube Channel with a length of 171 km, connects since 1992 the Main river and Danube from Bamberg by Nurnberg to Kelheim. The channel is part of the maritime track between Rotterdam and Constanța, being the shortest navigable connection between the North Sea and the Black Sea, on the rivers Rin, Main, Main-Danube Channel, Danube and Danube - Black Sea Channel. The works on the channel between Bamberg and Nurnberg started in 1960 and were completed in 1972. In 1962 there were completed the works of arrangement of the channel on the Main river up to Bamberg. The last section between Kelheim and Nurnberg, between '70s and '80s, was politically controversial for such section of 34 km that pass by Altmühl Valley. On 25 September 1992 this last part of channel was commissioned as well.

Keywords: Danube; geopolicity; European axis; European geopolitical axis; EU strategy

1. EU Strategy for Danube Area

The EU Strategy for Danube Area (SUERD) is a communitarian mechanism of collaboration between the states from Danube basin, for economic and social development of Danube macro-region, by reinforcing the implementation in the area of EU politics and legislation. SUERD is the second EU macro-regional strategy, taking over the manner of collaboration developed by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea (adopted in 2009) adjusted to the specificity of Danube area².

SUERD represents a politic initiative of Romania and Austria, promoted by a joint letter on the level of the prime-minister (June 2008) and addressed to the Chairman of the European Committee.

The European Committee has elaborated a *Communication related to the EU Strategy for Danube area*, as well as a *Plan of Action*, presented on 8 December 2010 and adopted by the EU Council General Business (ministers of foreign affairs) on 13 April 2011. The European Council (heads of state and government) endorsed the Danube Strategy on 24 June 2011.

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² See <http://www.mae.ro/strategia-dunarii>.

The documents discussed and approved on communitarian level and which form the core of regional cooperation on Danube represents the focused effort of elaboration of riparian states. These, with the European Commission, analysed and evaluated the real needs of Danube area and proposed a document agreed both on political and technical level. The Danube Strategy is a project of the European Union to which are invited to participate as well the EU non-member states from Danube basin.

The entry in the stage of implementation of the Strategy has generated as well a new platform of communication by creating the main portal of information www.danube-region.eu.

On Danube Strategy participates fourteen states: nine EU member states (Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech, Croatia, Germany – as federal state and by the lands Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary) and five non-members states of EU (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Moldova Republic and Ukraine).

The Strategy is structured on four main objectives¹:

- interconnection of Danube area;
- environment protection in Danube area;
- increase of prosperity in Danube area;
- reinforcement of Danube area.

Every objective of the Strategy is assigned specific field of action, grouped on 11 priority areas, every priority area being coordinated by 2 states/lands in the region, respectively²:

A. Interconnection of Danube area:

- improving the mobility and multi-modality:
 - a. internal navigable means; (Austria and Romania)
 - b. road, rail and air connections; (Slovenia and Serbia)
- encouraging sustainable power; (Hungary and Czech)
- promoting the culture and tourism, the direct contacts between people; (Romania and Bulgaria)

B. Environment protection in Danube area

- restoration and maintenance of water quality; (Hungary and Slovakia)
- management of environment risks; (Hungary and Romania)

¹ See <http://www.mae.ro/strategia-dunarii>

² *Ibidem.*

- conservation of biodiversity, of landscapes and of the air and ground quality (Bavaria and Croatia)

C. Increase of prosperity in Danube area

- development of society based on knowledge by research, education and technologies of information; (Serbia and Slovakia)
- support of the competitiveness of enterprises, including development of clusters; (Croatia and Baden Württemberg)
- investment in people and capacities; (Austria and Moldova Republic)

D. Consolidation of Danube area

- improvement of institutional capacity and of cooperation; (Austria and Slovenia)
- collaboration for the promotion of security and for solving the problems related to organised criminality and serious crimes. (Bavaria and Bulgaria).

Initially created under the imperative of “**the three no**” – without new funds, without new institutions and without new ruling – the Danube Strategy faced the challenge to adjust in order to assure the manner of implementation of the projects by valuing the existent European funds. In this context, the consolidation of national structures of government of Strategy is insistently recommended by the Commission in order to promote and support, actively, coherently and coordinated, the political and sectoral interests in Danube macro-area.

Thus, the government of Danube Strategy is provided:

a) on European level, by:

- European Union Council and the Group of functioning on high level of EU Council which provides the general political orientation;
- The European Commission (Regional and Urban Political General Directorate - DG Region), which has role of coordination of policies, supervision, reporting and evaluation;
- National coordinators, who, on the one hand, provide national coordination and propose practical aspects of activity, and on the other hand they mutually consult and coordinate on macro-regional level in order to promote the coherence between the priorities and patterns of government of the participating states;
- The coordinators of priority domains and the Executive Groups, which provide the identification of project enforcing the Plan of Action of Strategy.

b) on national level - national structure of implementation, elaborated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as national coordinator, **is the National Forum** and includes, according to the matrix of implementation of Danube Strategy:

- board of Directors on ministerial level – is chaired by the minister of foreign affairs, who is also executive president of the National Forum, and includes the ministers who are coordinating the priority fields of Strategy (vice-presidents: minister of regional development and public administration and the minister of European funds);
- SUERD National Coordinator and Office of Danube Strategy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs – with role of horizontal coordination;
- inter-ministerial work group – chaired by the SUERD National Coordinator, including the representatives of the ministries on the level of general manager or administrator, meets periodically, follows the activity of implementation internally and that in the executive Groups per priorities externally;
- the Consultative Council including the representatives of the actors involved (central and local administration, business environment, academic and university environment, civil society);
- thematic work groups of the Consultative Council.

The major benefits brought by the Strategy to Romania are:

- development of life quality, by increasing competitiveness and attractiveness of the towns and villages from Danube;
- obtaining economic benefits by concluding business partnerships and by “crossed” cooperation between the public and private sector;
- organisation of annual economic forums;
- attracting investments in strategic fields such as the infrastructures of transport, environment and power.

2. Black Sea Area

Pursuant to the adhesion of Romania and Bulgaria to EU, in 2007, the Black Sea has become direct neighbour of EU. Leaving from the involvement prior to adhesion, Romania has gradually become the most active EU member in *promoting the strategic importance of Black Sea and the need of an increased role of EU* in this area, in the spirit of a strategic approach. The important support offered by other member states, mainly by Greece, Bulgaria, and Germany – holding on such moment the EU Presidency – has contributed to the success of this approach, in the form of Black Sea Synergy and processes initiated by it. The importance of the area was outlined by several EU politics and instruments for the eastern neighbourhood, among which and most recently the Eastern Partnership launched (2009).

The major objectives of Romania on the Black Sea, defined by the national strategy in the field (2006) target the consolidation, in the eastern proximity, of a stabile, democratise and prosper area, simultaneously with the opening of Black Sea space

to the European and euro-Atlantic values and processes. The “fatigue” of extension towards east will be supplied by a model of cooperation meant to perpetuate the EU force of attraction and transformation, without removing the perspective of extension. As lines of action for the period 2009-2013, the external policy in the field will focus, with high degree of coordination and pragmatism, on reasoning the balance between the resources and objectives and rigorous selection of the demarches and initiatives sustained, depending on their feasibility, continuity to the already initiated projects and actual benefits brought on the level of regional cooperation and increase of EU involvement in the area.

In order to revive the cooperation in the Black Sea area and the increase of EU involvement in the area, within flexible processes, open to all states in the area and to EU member states, Romania undertook to pass few actual projects of implementation of Black Sea Synergy. The appropriated approach is pragmatic, directed towards specialised fields meant to allow visible evolutions of cooperation. The main projects supported by Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with other line ministries, if any, under the aegis of Black Sea Synergy are: Forum of NGOs on the Black Sea and Environment Partnership.

2.1. Partnership on Environment

On 16 March 2010, COM (DG RELEX and DG Environment) organised, in Brussels, the event of launching the Partnership on Environment, the first sectoral partnership on sectoral partnership concepts). During such event, it was adopted a Common Declaration indicating the role of Romania in promoting and launching the initiative as well as the need to continue the efforts of implementation of Partnership by signing a Memorandum of Agreement.

Institutional aspects: According to the current plans, the Partnership on Environment will hold a Steering Group - the political forum including the member states and the partner states. One intends to constitute a fund open to the contributions of all actors, including of those from the area and international financial institutions, not only to EU resources. Pursuant to launching the Partnership on Environment, Romania undertakes sustained demarches by providing increased involvement of COM with a view to pass from the political to the implementation stage of Partnership, as instrument of reviving a regional cooperation focused on real results.

3. Black Sea Synergy

Started in 2007, during the German Presidency of EU Council, pursuant to the demarches of Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, supported by other member states and with the contribution of the European Committee, the Black Sea Synergy appeared

as a new initiative for an EU regional politics addressed mainly to the region. It was officially launched on 14 February 2008, in Kiev, by a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of EU member states and of the states from the area targeted by Synergy (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova Republic, Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine). The main arguments that determined the undertaking of such initiative on EU level targeted direct vicinity, strategic location, connection to Western Balkans, as well as to Central Asia, Middle East, potential in terms of power, transport, trade, environment, consolidation of democracy.

The Black Sea Synergy has as main objective the consolidation of collaboration in the Black Sea area with beneficial involvement of EU. It provides the guiding lines for proposing pragmatic projects of collaboration between the states in the area and EU, in the following fields: democracy, human rights, good government, management of borders, frozen conflicts, power, transportation, environment, maritime policy, fishing, trade, migration, development, education, research and development.

Romania is actively dedicated to the idea of implementation of Synergy by some sectoral partnerships, based on the suggestions from the Report of implementation of Synergy elaborated by the European Commission in 2008 and of other pragmatic projects, in the advantage of the region and of UE. Between 2009-2010, Romania prepared, in collaboration with the European Commission and with the support of other member states active in the area, the concept of a sectoral partnership on environment, officially launched on 16 March 2010 in Brussels, on the level of EU and regional ministers of environment. The operational process of the partnership is currently undertaken mainly by the European Commission (DGRELEX, DG Environment). The partnership will benefit in time by own financial resources, for the implementation of some regional projects of environment protection, generated by EU funds, voluntary contributions of member states, contributions of other international financial institutions.

Romania supports the need to pass to a stage of actual transposing the principles of differentiation and complementarity between the Black Sea Synergy and multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership, according to the political declarations undertaken on EU level. The two European initiatives, reached in the stage of implementation of projects and recommendations existent in the networks created under their aegis, both on regional and macro-regional level, may outline a regional identity acknowledged on EU level.

4. Romania and Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO)

Romania got involved actively in the support and consolidation of BSECO¹, as well as in the continuation of the process of reform of the Organization developing, in parallel, relations of collaboration with European Union, as well as the other regional initiatives. BSECO was incorporated in 1992, under the conditions existent during such period in the Black Sea Area.

BSECO, by its wide spectrum of activities, as well as by its structure, remains a useful frame for dialogue and stimulation of mutual trust between the member states, preparing thus the field for a possible viable involvement in more ambitious projects.

Romania has constantly supported the need of consolidation of the relations of collaboration between BSECO and European Union. The approach was determined both by the priorities of Romania in the Black Sea area, and by the favourable current created by the “European Neighbourhood Policy”.

The Romanian side has initiated the process of reform and reorganisation of BSECO by “*Declaration from Bucharest – Towards the 15th anniversary of BSECO*”, with a view to increase the efficiency and visibility of the Organization on regional and international plan.

Romania held for the fourth time the Presidency-in-Exercise (PiE) of BSECO between January - June 2011, and the priorities of such mandate focused on: 1) continuation of the firm commitment of Romania opposite to regional economic cooperation and opposite to BSECO; 2) stimulation of economic mission of BSECO, focusing on the policies of environment, power, increase of the exchanges of economic, commercial order and of the frame of intra-regional investments; 3) consolidation of cooperation in the field of internal affairs mainly combating organised crime and corruption; 4) consolidation of BSECO-UE interaction by stimulating the interest of cooperation between BSECO and the European institutions and the BSECO member states; 5) achieving progresses in the implementation of the Partnership for Environment and launching the other two partnerships from Black Sea Synergy, based on consulting and collaborating to all the other member states of BSECO; 6) consolidation of the unique role of BSECO in the area and of its specific activities in order to value the existent potential of BSECO as platform of dialogue and cooperation; 7) consolidation of the dialogue between BSECO and the international community and amplification of BSECO contribution to the consolidation of stability in the area, in the frame traced by BSECO Charta; 8) reviving the internal process of reflection concerning the perspectives of organization and its objectives, with a view to consolidate the

¹ See <http://www.bsec-organization.org/Pages/homepage.aspx>.

organization as factor of regional cooperation; 9) increase of BSECO interaction with all partners, observers and related bodies, in order to determine an increased relevance of BSECO, with beneficial results for all its members.

During the presidency, under the motto *Building Sustainability, Enhancing Commitments*, Romania followed with priority the consolidation of an economic mission of BSECO. The meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (8 June, Bucharest) marked the balance of Romania mandate and official launching of the preparation of 20-year anniversary Summit of the organization that took place in June 2012. On PiE RO initiative, the heads of the delegations of BSECO member states adopted the ministerial decision concerning the review of the basic document of economic cooperation within the organisation – *Economic Agenda for the Future*.

The Black Sea area, as a whole, has constituted and will constitute a topic of priority interest on long term for our external policy. The strategic objectives of Romania consist in: consolidation of democratic stability, access to prosperity by projects of regional collaboration and with the partners from European Union, an approach including for all partners of dialogue and cooperation from the eastern space, connection to EU regional projects.

The construction of the Ring Road of the Black Sea and the development of maritime highways in the Black Sea area represents for Romania priority projects, of major interest in the field of infrastructure.

Romania sustains the continuation of the reform process of BSECO and the increase of efficiency of the organisation activity. Romania initiated a range of consultations with Bulgaria and Greece, the other two EU member states from BSECO, with a view to continue the reform and obtain real results in the process of implementation of BSECO projects.

Romania holds one of the positions of deputy General Secretary of International Permanent Secretary (PERMIS) of BSECO, with the seat in Istanbul (Ambassador Traian Chebeleu). Also, Romania is the state coordinating the work groups for combating criminality (2013-2015) and environment protection (2014-2016).

The General Consul of Romania in Istanbul is also the Permanent Representative of Romania in BSECO.

During the first semester of 2014, PiE BSECO is owned by Bulgaria, and during the second semester by Greece. Romania will take over for the fifth time the presidency in the 2nd semester, 2015.

5. Conclusions

From a geopolitical perspective, Danube represents an extremely important axis since it connects the North Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, with access to the Black Sea.

The Main-Danube Channel with a length of 171 km, connects since 1992 the Main river and Danube from Bamberg by Nurnberg to Kelheim. The channel is part of the maritime track between Rotterdam and Constanța, being the shortest navigable connection between the North Sea and the Black Sea, on the rivers Rin, Main, Main-Danube Channel, Danube and Danube - Black Sea Channel.

This geopolitical axis represents a high interests form European Union perspective. European Union developed and special mechanism for this area. The EU Strategy for Danube Area is a communitarian mechanism of collaboration between the states from Danube basin, for economic and social development of Danube macro-region, by reinforcing the implementation in the area of EU politics and legislation

From the geopolitical point of view, the Danube River cannot be separated by the Black Sea. So, the Black Sea Synergy appeared as a new initiative for an EU regional politics addressed mainly to the region. It was officially launched on 14 February 2008, in Kiev, by a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of EU member states and of the states from the area targeted by Synergy.

Basically, the Danube axis represents a link among various regions beyond European Union: North Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Caspian Sea, Caucasus Region and Central Asia. It is and important link form the political, economical and military perspective. Unfortunately this geopolitical axis is insufficient valued by the European actors.

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