



THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE DANUBE IN THE CONTEXT OF A FUTURE ROMANIAN MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY FOR THE BLACK SEA

Colonel (N) Lucian GRIGORESCU

Chief of the Romanian Military Representation of Defence Staff
to Allied Command Transformation, Norfolk, Virginia, USA
10.55535/RMT.2023.2.5

The present article pleads for the development of a Romanian security strategy that should take into account the importance of the Danube and of the Black Sea for the security of the region. It is mainly a descriptive type of research, aiming to identify subject-related characteristics and categories, based on the study of real data and observation. Moreover, the article highlights the fact that the development of a Black Sea strategy to include the Danube River and the Delta has been a constant concern for Romanian decision-makers for a long time. In addition, it is shown that, in the current context, such a strategy could be integrated into any Black Sea strategy developed in NATO or the EU, guiding the future integrated modernization of the Romanian Naval Forces.

Keywords: Danube Commission; Black Sea; maritime strategy; Romanian Naval Forces; Russia-Ukraine conflict;



INTRODUCTION

Today, the Danube is one of the main rivers of Europe, not only because of its length but especially because of its transport capacities. It crosses the continent from west to east, through regions of a great diversity in terms of natural and economic conditions. Through its course, the Danube traces a “diagonal” of Europe, and through the connections it provides between the countries of the continent, it can be considered “an artery” of commercial traffic. Thus the “Old River” is of great economic importance for most of the countries in its watershed, a fact highlighted by the macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. Seeking to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives in the region, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region/EUSDR was jointly developed by the Commission, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges together. (EUSDR, 2011).

In this context, Romania’s considerable dependence on the Black Sea and the Danube requires securing the fluvial-maritime communications. If security on river-sea communication routes is ensured *sine die* in peacetime, even more, it becomes vital in crisis or conflict situations. The Danube and its branches have a strong geopolitical and geostrategic significance; therefore, the Danube region, in addition to its advantages, presents obvious risks and it must be properly defended.

The present article pleads for the development of a Romanian security strategy that should take into account the importance of the Danube and of the Black Sea for the security of the region. It is mainly a descriptive type of research, aiming to identify subject-related characteristics and categories, based on the study of real data and observation. Moreover, the article highlights the fact that the development of a Black Sea strategy, to include the Danube River and the Delta has been a constant concern for Romanian decision-makers

The Danube is one of the main rivers of Europe, not only because of its length but especially because of its transport capacities. It crosses the continent from west to east, through regions of a great diversity in terms of natural and economic conditions. Through its course, the Danube traces a “diagonal” of Europe, and through the connections it provides between the countries of the continent, it can be considered “an artery” of commercial traffic.



for a long time. In addition, it is shown that, in the current context, such a strategy could be integrated into any Black Sea strategy developed in NATO or the EU, guiding the future integrated modernization of the Romanian Naval Forces.

GEOGRAPHICAL RELEVANCE OF THE DANUBE

The Danube, the second largest river in Europe, has always been an economic and cultural catalyst, an axis of prosperity in time and space for the states that established and developed throughout history on its banks, Romania being one of them.

Forming the northern border of the Roman Empire for a long time and being used as a line of defence as well as for transportation, the Danube River crosses the territory of 10 countries, including seven EU and six NATO member states, being the most international river in the world. With its length of 2,857 km, of which 2,588 km are navigable (between Ulm and Sulina), and a multiannual average flow of 6,855 m³/s, the Danube is ranked 21st among the rivers of the planet.

The Danube River Basin has an area of 805,500 km² and consists of 120 (34 navigable) tributaries. The hydrographic area of the Danube basin represents 8.35% of the surface of the European continent, as the river crosses the territories of Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and four capitals – Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Conventionally, the Danube is formed by the union of two small mountain rivers – the Breg and the Brigach. The course of the river initially goes to the northeast, towards Ulm and Regensburg, after which it turns to the southeast, to enter Austria at Passau. It then continues its course to the southeast through Upper and Lower Austria, crossing Linz and Vienna. Between Bratislava and Szob, it forms the border between Slovakia and Hungary. At Szob, the Danube heads south and runs through the great Alföld plain in central Hungary, crossing Budapest. After forming almost two-thirds of the border between Croatia and Serbia, it enters Serbia, crosses Belgrade, turns to the southeast, then to the east, and enters the territory of Romania (Ib.)

A hydrographic basin as vast as that of the Danube requires its separation into three distinct sectors: an upper sector, with a pronounced alpine character; a middle sector, remarkable for the widest

plain of Central Europe; a lower sector, where the river collects the waters from the slopes of the Carpathians and the Balkans.

The Danube is very significant for Romania, since the country is located almost entirely within the river basin. The Romanian sector covers almost a third of the surface area of the basin, and over a third of the river's length flows through the country, representing its southern border. Crucially, the Romanian (and also Ukrainian) Danube is the end carrier of all wastewater discharges into the Black Sea (ICDPR, *Danube Facts and Figures*, online). The Romanian sector includes the course of the river from Moldova Veche to the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, the branches of the Danube from Balta Ialomiței and Balta Mare a Brăilei (approximately 300 km, depending on the water level), the branches of the Danube and the navigable canals in the delta (about 700 km, depending on the water level) and the Danube-Black Sea Canal with Poarta Albă-Midia branch (91 km).

The waters of the Danube are used for producing electricity, for irrigation systems, for supplying drinking and industrial water to the port cities. The waters provide a rich fishery and a remarkable economic potential, the transportation of goods being the dominant one. Considering the importance of the river for the riparian states, Romania included, the Council of the European Union adopted, in 2011, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, inviting the National Contact Points and the Priority Area Coordinators, in close cooperation with the Commission and with due involvement of participating third countries, to identify stakeholders to develop projects for the area development and preservation (Council of the EU, *EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, Brussels, 2011, pp. 2-3).

Moreover, taking into account the economic value of the Danube region, which includes 14 countries where more than 100 million people, namely one-fifth of the EU population, live, especially in terms of freight transport, the potential for the riparian countries interconnection has been the subject of different European strategies. Among them, we can mention those focused on the European transport corridors, the Rhine-Main-Danube representing a transcontinental axis (*figure 1*).



The Danube is very significant for Romania, since the country is located almost entirely within the river basin. The Romanian sector covers almost a third of the surface area of the basin, and over a third of the river's length flows through the country, representing its southern border. Crucially, the Romanian (and also Ukrainian) Danube is the end carrier of all wastewater discharges into the Black Sea.

Forming the northern border of the Roman Empire for a long time and being used as a line of defence as well as for transportation, the Danube River crosses the territory of 10 countries, including seven EU and six NATO member states, being the most international river in the world.

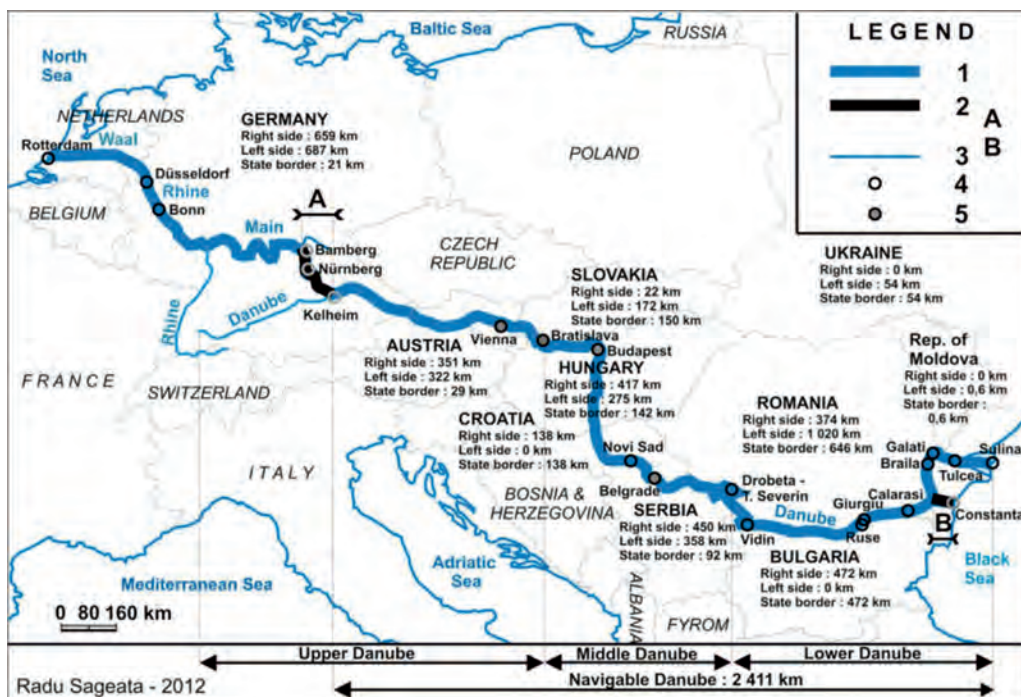


Figure 1: Rhine-Main-Danube transcontinental axis (Rechnitzer, 2009, p. 11, in Săgeată, 2012).

- Legend
1. Navigable rivers
 2. Navigable canals:
 - A. Danube-Main-Rhine Canal
 - B. Danube-Black Sea Canal
 3. Other rivers/shores
 4. Cities
 5. Capital Cities.

THE DANUBE AS A NATURAL ELEMENT OF HISTORICAL AND STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

The Danube is a vital stake for the states of Central and Eastern Europe, whose history has been closely linked to the political destiny of this river. Moreover, it has been the main area of contact between the great powers. Therefore, the Danube River Basin has a rich history with a strong cultural heritage, a fact proved even by the large number of ethnic groups and the languages still spoken, appreciated as at least 17 official languages (ICDPR, 2004, p. 27.).



Following the Danube Convention, concluded in Paris in 1921, it was decided that the European Commission of the Danube, formed by four states – Great Britain, France, Italy, and Romania, would retain the powers which it possessed before the war. In 1938, after the Sinaia Agreement, Romania's sovereignty over the Maritime Danube was recognized by Great Britain and France, but on 12 September 1940, following the Danube Conference in Vienna, Germany's total control over the Danube was recorded.

For the Romanians, the Danube has been a border, separating Balkan Europe from Central-Eastern Europe as well as a communication channel between riparian states. In this context, free navigation at the mouths of the Danube has been a great concern for the naval powers in the region and beyond, making Romania particularly attractive in this respect, especially considering the proximity to Russia and its relations with Turkey throughout history.

The Great Powers interests in controlling the mouths of the Danube are unequivocally demonstrated by the establishment of the European Commission of the Danube/ECD, an aspect discussed during the Paris Conference of 1856, in order to mediate the possible conflicts of interests between the powers of the time. Subsequently, non-riparian states, such as France and Great Britain, called themselves guarantors of Europe's interests in the Danube. To emphasise the importance of the commission, Grigore Gafencu¹ states that: "one of the reasons to be of the European Commission (of the Danube, A.N.) has always been to serve as a stop to prevent Russian ambitions from having an open path on the Danube right to the centre of Europe" (Tuluş, 2007). Although it was meant to be a provisional institution aimed at removing the obstacles that hindered navigation along the Maritime Danube, it managed to survive and gradually extended its reach, being thus a successful experiment in international administration, having a self-governing bureaucracy and complete financial independence (Krehbiel, 1918).

Following the Danube Convention, concluded in Paris in 1921, it was decided that the European Commission of the Danube, formed by four states – Great Britain, France, Italy, and Romania, would retain the powers which it possessed before the war (Convention, 1921, Article 5). In 1938, after the Sinaia Agreement², Romania's sovereignty over the Maritime Danube was recognized by Great Britain and France, but on 12 September 1940, following the Danube Conference in Vienna, Germany's total control over the Danube was recorded.

After the Second World War, during the Belgrade Conference of 1948, dominated by the Soviet Union, it managed to impose decisions

¹ Romanian diplomat, Foreign Minister of Romania between 1939-1940.
² The Sinaia Agreement was concluded on 18 August 1938 between Romania, France and the United Kingdom. It entered into force on 13 May 1939, ending the Commission's authority over the Lower Danube. It continued to exist, having only an advisory role.



The end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new geopolitical expansion of Russia, as well as the political-military developments in the Black Sea area has put the importance of the Danube back on the agenda. In this context, it should be highlighted once more the strategic importance of the Danube and its mouths in connection to the Black Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits, and thus to the free access to the high seas of the planet and the world trade.

leading to the cancellation of the 1921 convention, the exclusion of Western countries from the Danube Commission, and the abolition of “free zones”. (*Convention regarding the Regime of Navigation on the Danube*, Belgrade, 1948). The 1948 Danube Convention was drafted in Moscow and accepted without change by the communist governments of the Danube signatory states – Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Thus, after almost a century of “Western order”, using the idea of establishing the sovereignty of the riverside, the Soviet Union implemented its expansionist tendencies. The three Western Powers – the USA, the UK and France had no influence on Conference decisions. Because of the evolution of the negotiations in Belgrade, the Western powers did not sign the new convention (Campbell, 1949, pp. 315-320).

The end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new geopolitical expansion of Russia, as well as the political-military developments in the Black Sea area has put the importance of the Danube back on the agenda. In this context, it should be highlighted once more the strategic importance of the Danube and its mouths in connection to the Black Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits, and thus to the free access to the high seas of the planet and the world trade. It is a problem that has long been considered by historians, diplomats, politicians and strategists.

Today, the Danube Commission/DC is based in Budapest. It ensures, on the basis of appropriate forms of partnership and cooperation, freedom of navigation on the entire river, without discrimination between riparian countries and other states. (danubecommission.org).

THE ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE DANUBE TODAY

The most important economic dimension of the Danube remains, without a doubt, the shipping sector. From an economic point of view, the Danube represents a huge cheap and fast transport infrastructure related to the quantities carried by the transport units, connected to the railway and road network that intersects with the river. The economic analysis of river traffic on the Danube shows a total capacity of 80 million tons per year. Under the conditions of the RO-RO



type naval traffic and the internodal switching to road and rail traffic, the transport capacity on this river can increase by another 10 million tons per year. Thus, the Danube can be considered the “backbone” of the communication system in South-Eastern Europe.

The construction of the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal, put into use in 1992, allowed the union of the two major European inland communication routes, the Rhine and the Danube. Thus, the Pan-European Corridor VII (*figure 2*), the only water transport corridor



Figure 2: Map of the ten Pan-European transport corridors (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-European_corridors, retrieved on 17 March 2023)



The Rhine-Main-Danube Canal allows countries from Central Europe to have direct access to the Black Sea and from there to the Suez Canal. Thus, a new trade route has emerged, linking the Suez Canal and Central Europe via Constanța, which, compared to the old one (crossing the entire Mediterranean Sea and bypassing the Iberian Peninsula), has the advantage of shortening the journey by eight days, including the related costs.

out of the 10 existing in Europe, links the North Sea with the Black Sea and has the Danube as its main connecting element. Under these conditions, it has been possible to connect the two major European ports (Rotterdam, on the North Sea, and Constanța, on the Black Sea), ensuring a safe and cheap communication route that crosses all of Europe over a length of 3,540 km. Due to the multitude of ports located on the Rhine river, on the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal, as well as on the Danube (there are 47 river ports located along the Danube river, four river-sea ports, and five ports on the Danube-Black Sea Canal), a particular fluency of goods traffic can be ensured for any area of Europe, all the more so as through the system of Western European canals the transport of goods to the countries of Western and Northern Europe can be ensured.

Romania is the country on whose territory the largest part of the Danube flows (approximately 38% of the vast basin). Moreover, it hosts both the mouths of the river and the canal that connects the river to the port of Constanța. Therefore, it has had a special interest in using this main way of communication, as a means of carrying out the transport of goods both for domestic traffic and for international export or transit traffic. This fact determines an obvious advantage as well as a major responsibility that must be honoured through a correct geopolitical and geostrategic evaluation of this element.

The Rhine-Main-Danube Canal allows countries from Central Europe to have direct access to the Black Sea and from there to the Suez Canal. Thus, a new trade route has emerged, linking the Suez Canal and Central Europe via Constanța, which, compared to the old one (crossing the entire Mediterranean Sea and bypassing the Iberian Peninsula), has the advantage of shortening the journey by eight days, including the related costs. Another advantage is the fact that the ports of the Black Sea and those of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea have the most favourable position to the Suez Canal for the routes of the Indian Ocean and the Far East. With the establishment of the river axis Rotterdam-Constanța, new geopolitical values are propelled to the fore and give Romania a new image for Europe.

The importance of this route is overwhelming both from an economic point of view (it has been proved that it is extremely efficient and produces advantages for all the countries that use it) and especially

from a geostrategic point of view, where a series of vulnerabilities, if they are not evaluated and managed correctly, can have particularly serious consequences. The main vulnerabilities are related to ensuring the full viability of the route and terrorist threats.

In the context of ensuring the full viability of the route, and especially of the Danube section, it is worth mentioning that it depends on the actions of the riparian countries. The positioning of one or more states in a state of conflict can generate quite serious consequences. An example in this regard, in the recent history, is the situation in former Yugoslavia, when the bombing of the three bridges in Novi Sad blocked for a while not only the transport on the corridor VII but also the one on the Pan-European corridor X. Therefore, to prevent such events, it would be important for all the countries bordering the Danube to be part of a common alliance, both economic and political (Hâldan, 2014, p. 2).

As for terrorist threats, they can affect both the traffic on the Danube and the safety of the population settled on the banks of the river. At any time, especially in its lower course, the Danube can be the object of terrorist actions, to stop navigation on this important European artery or produce floods with catastrophic effects. The Danube-the Black Sea Canal, the Iron Gates energy systems (the largest on the Danube), the Kozloduy and Cernavodă nuclear power plants, and especially the permanent crossings, roads and railway bridges may be attacked by terrorists. In this regard, it is important to note that not all the countries bordering the Danube have naval forces specialized in the fight against possible terrorist actions, and even cyber attacks, most of them being limited to police or border police vessels with limited capabilities, especially in combating cross-border crime and pollution (Hanganu, 2006).

In terms of specialized forces, we can mention that there are no such units in Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia or Moldova. Hungary has 5 fast sweeping boats and 3 US SOC-R/Special Operations Craft Riverine, Serbia has a small Flotilla/HQ ship, sweeping and fast patrol boats. Romania is the only country that has a fluvial Naval Force, consisting of 3 monitors, 5 armoured gunboats, and 12 minesweeper boats (navy.ro), practically being the strongest fluvial naval force on the Danube that is supplemented by the boats of the border police,



Romania is the only country that has a fluvial Naval Force, consisting of 3 monitors, 5 armoured gunboats, and 12 minesweeper boats, practically being the strongest fluvial naval force on the Danube that is supplemented by the boats of the border police, thus achieving very effective surveillance of the Danube on the Romanian sector.



thus achieving very effective surveillance of the Danube on the Romanian sector.

From a geostrategic point of view, Romania is located at the crossroads of the world's major geographical areas, as well as of major European and even Asian interests. The area of responsibility in Romania, considering its geographic position, is directly influenced, both operationally and strategically, by the Danube River and the Black Sea, a fact that requires particular and even vital attention.

It can be observed that Romania and the area where it is located are gradually moving from the status of "periphery" to that of "centre", depending on the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. Romania, as a country of contact between the Euro-Atlantic and the Asian space, benefits from the intersection of some important geopolitical and geostrategic axes, as follows: the **NW-SE axis**, represented by the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal, an important axis of Europe; the **N-S axis**, which can ensure access from the Scandinavian and the Baltic Sea areas to the Black Sea, by road or river; the **E-W axis**, which allows the countries of the Caucasus to have air and maritime access to Europe, through the Black Sea, thus Constanța becoming a gateway to Central and Western Europe, or, through trans-shipment, to the other ports on the seas and oceans of the world (a segment of the famous old "silk road"); the **SE-NW axis**, which is of interest to Türkiye, as well as to the other countries in the area (Syria, Iran, Iraq), considering the access facilities through the "Romanian gate" to the European space, using the road, rail, maritime, fluvial formula or the combined RO-RO transport type; the **Far East-Eastern Europe axis**, which turns the "Romanian gate" into Japan's fourth gateway to Europe (after Rotterdam, Hamburg and Trieste); the **NE-SW axis**, which mainly ensures Russia's and Ukraine's access to the port of Constanța, the most important in the Black Sea; the **Caspian Sea-Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea axis**, which can have the potential of a multiplier of dialogue and cooperation on multiple levels (Marinescu, 2009).

All the mentioned axes, even if some are less marked at the moment, intersect the Danube and the Romanian coast, namely the mouths of the Danube and the Black Sea. Therefore, keeping the status of master of the Danube mouths is fundamental for the development of Romania as well as for the preservation of its national security.

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN GRAIN SHIPMENTS ON THE DANUBE BY THE ROMANIAN NAVAL FORCES

Following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, with all its consequences, the Secretariat of the Danube Commission, based in Budapest, actively contributes to the initiative of the European Union regarding the establishment of the Solidarity Lanes to ensure the continuity of trade, and, importantly, the export of agricultural products from Ukraine. To this end, the Danube Commission Secretariat has established and operated an information and coordination desk, supporting the set-up of new logistics chains via the Danube ports of the region (danubecommission.org).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Russian naval blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports have significantly disrupted Ukrainian grain shipments to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Ukraine is the fourth largest grain exporter in the world having more than 25 million tons stored for export. Before the war, the Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea – Odessa, Pivdennyi, Mykolayiv, and Chornomorsk – served as terminals for about 5 million tons per month, which was 80% of the total grain exported monthly. The remaining 20% were exported by rail or road (Păvălașc, 2022).

The destruction of the port infrastructures, the danger of mines in the Black Sea and the hostile actions of the Russian military ships have led the Ukrainian government to find other solutions for the export of grain. If road transport is limited by transport capacities and extremely high costs, and railway transport involves changing the gauge railway, which is different in the European Union compared to the Ukrainian one (Romania changed the gauge from the border with the Republic of Moldova to the port of Galați, an old line over a distance of about 5 km), the only way of transport with lower costs is the transport on the Danube to Constanța and from there by sea to Europe and Africa, or Austria and Germany. It would allow the export of approximately 2 million tons per month. In this regard, Romania has made available the port of Constanța and the ports of Galați and Brăila for the transport of Ukrainian grain. But like any infrastructure, ports cannot suddenly go from a normal level of activity to a much higher one, requiring additional staff or storage facilities, aspects that need time and investments. Moreover, no operator would be interested in investing in infrastructure that can become redundant with the end of the war.



The Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Russian naval blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports have significantly disrupted Ukrainian grain shipments to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Ukraine is the fourth largest grain exporter in the world having more than 25 million tons stored for export.

From a geostrategic point of view, Romania is located at the crossroads of the world's major geographical areas, as well as of major European and even Asian interests. The area of responsibility in Romania, considering its geographic position, is directly influenced, both operationally and strategically, by the Danube River and the Black Sea, a fact that requires particular and even vital attention.



It is obvious that the Russia-Ukraine war has entered a phase of attrition, and the conclusion of an armistice or even a fragile peace is still far away. This aspect, coupled with the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, will further amplify the grain crisis, especially for African and Asian countries. Ukraine has lagged behind in exporting the grain harvested, which cannot be stored for a long period of time.

In addition, transport on the Danube can ensure the movement of grain to Austria and Germany, and from there to Africa and the Middle East. It entails a significant bypass and implicitly additional costs for the relatively small quantities of grain that can be transported upstream. It does not mean, however, that the option of transport on the Danube should be avoided, but it needs the review by the EU of the strategy for the Danube region, with a special emphasis on dredging works, to allow the navigation of commercial ships even in dry periods. Even if the Danube is a less advantageous option than it seems at first glance, the most sustainable way to bring enough grain to the countries that urgently need it is to resume transport via the Black Sea, thus river transport playing an extremely important role, which can be capitalized on in the future.

It is obvious that the Russia-Ukraine war has entered a phase of attrition, and the conclusion of an armistice or even a fragile peace is still far away. This aspect, coupled with the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, will further amplify the grain crisis, especially for African and Asian countries. Ukraine has lagged behind in exporting the grain harvested, which cannot be stored for a long period of time.

The Romanian Naval Forces can support the transport on the river with the personnel and means at its disposal. Thus, by qualifying personnel in the Danube navigation, following a minimum training course, the number of pilots in the Romanian sector of the Danube can be supplemented. Military river tugs can carry in their current configuration one barge loaded with grain, and by modifying and adapting the bow of the ships, as well as by increasing the propulsion power, they can carry up to four barges of grain. Another support that the Romanian Naval Forces can provide on the entire Romanian sector of the Danube is the logistics support as river ships can operate both on the river-sea sector and upstream.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE DANUBE AND ITS INCREASED IMPORTANCE IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The current regional geopolitical context is strongly marked by the Russia-Ukraine conflict that began on 24 February 2022, through the aggression of the Russian Federation, and expanded from the two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk)



The “special military operation for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine” as Vladimir Putin called the invasion of Ukraine, has led to the blockade of the northern part of the Black Sea and the transformation of the Azov Sea into a “Russian lake”. Moreover, the navigation lines between the south and the north of the Black Sea have been redrawn, because of both the conflict and the danger of mines, as well as because of the embargo imposed on Russia. Under such conditions, the Black Sea port of Constanța has become much more important in terms of naval traffic.

to the entire Ukrainian territory. In this context, the Russian forces hit military and civilian targets located in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk, just 124 km north of the Romanian-Ukrainian border, as well as in the port city of Odessa, 207 km away from Tulcea. Moreover, the Snake/Serpents Island, located only 45 km from the Romanian shore of the Black Sea and the mouths of the Danube, was occupied for about three months by the Russian forces, which means that Moscow had and still has as objective to control the access to the Black Sea and implicitly to oversee NATO’s Eastern Flank.

The “special military operation for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine” as Vladimir Putin called the invasion of Ukraine, has led to the blockade of the northern part of the Black Sea and the transformation of the Azov Sea into a “Russian lake”. Moreover, the navigation lines between the south and the north of the Black Sea have been redrawn, because of both the conflict and the danger of mines, as well as because of the embargo imposed on Russia. Under such conditions, the Black Sea port of Constanța has become much more important in terms of naval traffic. Considering the limited port infrastructure, it has to adapt to the situation, which requires investment as well as increased workload.

The tense situation in the north of the Black Sea has had inevitable consequences for the Danube River too. In this regard, we can mention that, in the first weeks of the Russian invasion, the Isaccea-Orlovka Romanian-Ukrainian border crossing point was stormed by Ukrainian residents fleeing in terror from the war. In addition to the Ukrainian river ferry, which doubled its number of transit passengers, the number of private boats that made routes between the Ukrainian and Romanian shores also increased (Atanasiu, 2022).

The commercial traffic has increased considerably and far exceeded the commercial possibilities of the river ports in both Ukrainian and Romanian sectors. The severe drought in 2022-2023 (which led to the lowest levels of the Danube in the last 30 years) and the lack of specialized river navigation personnel resulted in blockades of the Sulina branch by a lot of river vessels. Moreover, if upstream of Galați the Danube offers a pillar of stability, considering the riparian countries in its upper and middle basin membership of Euro-Atlantic organizations (Serbia being the only country that is part of neither NATO nor the EU), downstream of Galați, up to Ceatal Ismail and the entire Chilia branch,



One of the scenarios of the Russia-Ukraine conflict aims at the Russian Federation conquering the entire southern part of Ukraine bordering the Black Sea and, in this way, making the junction between the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, Crimea and Transnistria, a pro-Russian separatist territory located de jure in the composition of the Republic of Moldova.

the Danube sector tends to become an axis of instability against the background of the Kremlin's tendencies to change the borders by the force of arms and to regain control over the mouths of the river.

In this context, one of the scenarios of the Russia-Ukraine conflict aims at the Russian Federation conquering the entire southern part of Ukraine bordering the Black Sea and, in this way, making the junction between the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, Crimea and Transnistria, a pro-Russian separatist territory located *de jure* in the composition of the Republic of Moldova.

Unfortunately, the river cannot ensure the movement of maritime vessels, except as far as Brăila (river-maritime sector of the Danube). Ukraine's main shipping company, for example, operates cargo ships that require a minimum water level of 360 centimetres, but the Danube has stretches that can only be crossed by ships that require a water level of 150 centimetres (Costea, 2022). Many of the Ukrainian transport ships are too large to navigate the Danube.

The conflict situation in Romania's proximity between Ukraine and the Russian Federation has once again brought to attention the role of a credible Romanian naval force on NATO's eastern flank. In the wake of recent events, it is clear that the Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood has ended, but Russia's interest in the Danube mouths has increased.

CONCLUSIONS – CONSIDERATIONS ON A FUTURE ROMANIAN MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY FOR THE BLACK SEA

Considering all the above-presented elements, it is evident that Romania needs to offer to the North Atlantic Alliance as well as to the European Union a capable and credible fluvial force, able to counter the risks and threats manifested or possible in the fluvial space. Taking into account the good relations between Romania and the Central European landlocked states, it can offer a "Romanian gateway" to Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Moldova, as well as to other states, through the mouths of the Danube, the Danube-the Black Sea Canal and the Black Sea ports.

To successfully monitor crises and prevent conflicts, Romania must have the ability to ensure the protection of its legal and legitimate interests in the peaceful use of the Danube River. Considering the position held on the main fluvial transport artery of Europe,

Romania needs fluvial forces that meet the requirements of flexibility, mobility, responsiveness, speed of reaction, and adaptability in a joint environment. They have to be capable of carrying out missions on the Danube, in the Delta, in the maritime area adjacent to the Danube Mouths, as well as in other areas of operations outside the national territory, on watercourses and inland lakes with depths greater than two meters.

The important role of fluvial forces in the national defence system is emphasized equally by historical, geographical, economical, and political-military motivations. Such military structures should have modern combat technical assets, namely multi-role river ships (carriers of artillery and dredging weapons), landing ships, patrol ships and logistic support units, to be able to carry out security missions independently or in cooperation with other types of forces or with the other elements of the country's national defence system.

The Danube plays a fundamental role in the current configuration of Europe. Thus, Romania, a state at the mouths of the great river, will have to assert its geopolitical position given by the new realities. Whatever the course of events, Romania has to face a difficult period and assert its rights under the conditions of the interference of old and new interests in the Danube basin. All these aspects prove once again the utility of the fluvial forces and especially the necessity of modernization for the adaptation to both military and economic crises.

Taking into account the already presented aspects related to the connection between the Danube and the Black Sea and, thus, to the high seas of the world, the idea of a Black Sea strategy has been debated throughout history, in dependence on different contexts. However, geography has not significantly changed. Therefore, the arguments presented almost a century ago can be still valid. In this context, considering the experience of Romania in the Second World War as well as in the previous period, in an article in *România Militară/Military Romania* (Mocanu, 1943, pp. 39-41), an analysis of the projects related to a Black Sea strategy was conducted, including the arguments in its support at that time. Thus, it was shown that, although the development of such a unique strategy could be seen as too bold, taking into account the proportions of the Black Sea compared to the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Indian Oceans as well as to the Mediterranean



The Danube plays a fundamental role in the current configuration of Europe. Thus, Romania, a state at the mouths of the great river, will have to assert its geopolitical position given by the new realities. Whatever the course of events, Romania has to face a difficult period and assert its rights under the conditions of the interference of old and new interests in the Danube basin. All these aspects prove once again the utility of the fluvial forces and especially the necessity of modernization for the adaptation to both military and economic crises.



Sea, it should consider other factors than the “inorganic” ones pertaining to geography, namely the peoples’ interests and passions, which had been well understood by the European powers throughout history, proofs in that regard being the armed as well as political and diplomatic struggles, got materialized in treaties, conventions, commissions, which also included the Danube. Moreover, it was expressed the idea that the Black Sea strategy could be integrated into the greater strategy of the high seas in the world. (Ib.).

The mentioned aspects are reinforced by the fact that, for the past decades, the importance of the Black Sea has been acknowledged in many political, military and think tank documents. In this context, and taking into account the recent developments in the area, a potential Black Sea strategy for a new regional reality has become increasingly debated and necessary. In one recent study of the kind, among the reasons why the Black Sea region has come to the fore again, especially in the current context, the following are mentioned: the region is home to reliable allies and partners, Romania included; there are unfinished business for the Euro-Atlantic integration of some states in the region; considering it is a regional transit and shipping hub, in an era of great power competition, China and Iran also play a role in the Black Sea region that should be considered by policymakers (Coffey, Kasapoglu, 2023, p. 5). In this context, Romania is appreciated as having the geostrategic edge to become a central A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) hub for NATO in the region (Ib., p. 3). Therefore, the mentioned analysis, reiterates, over about a century, the idea that the future Black Sea strategy should be comprehensive, multidomain and integrated into a strategy of the high seas worldwide.

A special importance in this strategy needs to be given to the development and resilience of the critical infrastructure in the Romanian ports, which contribute significantly to both the development of capabilities for the Romanian Naval Forces and the improvement and efficiency of the storage and transport of goods. A solution in this regard can be the declaration of these port facilities as being in the national security interest and, implicitly, the provision of development funds through the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, as is the case in other countries.

In the above-presented context, the development of a Romanian Maritime Security Strategy for the Black Sea, having also the role to inform and support any Black Sea Strategy developed in NATO, the EU and even in the USA as Romania’s Strategic Partner, has to include the Danube River and the Delta. With the Romanian Naval Forces being the custodian, this Black Sea Strategy should be developed in close cooperation with all the national stakeholders in the maritime domain, based on the national security and military defence priorities and objectives. This strategy could also be the guide for the future integrated modernization of the Naval Forces to meet all the regional security challenges, the commitments and the national contributions to NATO, the EU, other organizations, and, why not, to become a regional centre of gravity in terms of maritime security.

Disclaimer: This is an informative article to increase the awareness of the importance of the Danube River and its Delta with some future perspectives in the current security context and it does not represent an official position of Romania. Colonel (N) Marian Rîșnoveanu, Chief of Staff, the Romanian Danube Flotilla, has contributed to the development of the present article.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Atanasiu, B., (25 February 2022). *Peste 700 de ucraineni au ajuns la Isaccea, cu bacul. Primar: “Au stat toată noaptea în frig, pe malul celălalt și bănuim că sunt înfrigurați”*. Ziare.com, <https://ziare.com/refugiati-ucraina/razboi-rusia-ucraina-refugiati-bac-isaccea-tulcea-romania-1727228>, retrieved on 10 March 2023.
2. Coffey, L., Kasapoglu, C. (February 2023). *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Policy Memo. Hudson Institute, <http://media.hudson.org.s3.amazonaws.com/A+New+Black+Sea+Strategy+for+a+New+Black+Sea+Reality.pdf>, retrieved on 27 March 2023.
3. Costea, C. (16 July 2022). *Dunărea reprezintă o soluție insuficientă pentru transportul cerealelor din Ucraina spre Africa și Orientul Mijlociu*. Defence Romania, https://www.defenseromania.ro/dunarea-reprezinta-o-solutie-insuficienta-pentru-transportul-cerealelor-din-ucraina-spre-africa-si-orientul-mijlociu_617276.html, retrieved on 4 February 2023.
4. Campbell, J.C. (1949). *Diplomacy on the Danube*. *Foreign Affairs*. 27 (2), pp. 315–327.



The development of a Romanian Maritime Security Strategy for the Black Sea, having also the role to inform and support any Black Sea Strategy developed in NATO, the EU and even in the USA as Romania’s Strategic Partner, has to include the Danube River and the Delta.

The importance of the Black Sea has been acknowledged in many political, military and think tank documents. In this context, and taking into account the recent developments in the area, a potential Black Sea strategy for a new regional reality has become increasingly debated and necessary.



5. Hanganu, M. (2006). *Security Environment and Risk Factors for Romania*. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I".
6. Hâldan, R. (September, 2014). *Coordonatele geostrategice ale Dunării și Mării Negre*. Clubul Amiralilor.
7. Krehbiel, E.B. (1918). *The European Commission of the Danube: An Experiment in International Administration*. Academy of Political Science, https://books.google.ro/books/about/The_European_Commission_of_the_Danube.html?id=PBoXAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y, retrieved on 17 March 2023.
8. Iordache, C. (2005). *Importanța Dunării pentru NATO și UE*. Culegere de studii. București: CTEA.
9. Marinescu, C. (2009). *Promovarea intereselor naționale ale României în spațiul maritim și fluvial din Zona Extinsă a Mării Negre*. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I".
10. Mocanu, Gh. (1943). *Strategia Mării Negre*. In *România Militară*. Year LXXX. No. 3-5. March-May, pp. 40-70.
11. Păvălașc, M. (24 June 2022). *Blocada cerealelor. Cât grâu a exportat Ucraina prin Portul Constanța*. Europa Liberă, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/cereale-portul-constanta/31912097.html>, retrieved on 19 March 2023.
12. Săgeată, R. (2012). *River and Sea Transports in Romania in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region Perspective*. Researchgate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278023765_RIVER_AND_SEA_TRANSPORTS_IN_ROMANIA_IN_THE_EUROPEAN_UNION_STRATEGY_FOR_THE_DANUBE_REGION_PERSPECTIVE, retrieved on 10 March 2023.
13. *Strategy for the Danube Region Perspective*. Researchgate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278023765_RIVER_AND_SEA_TRANSPORTS_IN_ROMANIA_IN_THE_EUROPEAN_UNION_STRATEGY_FOR_THE_DANUBE_REGION_PERSPECTIVE, retrieved on 10 March 2023.
14. Tuluș, A. (2007). *Romania and the Neutralization of the Danube (September 1939 – June 1940)*. The Annals of Dunărea De Jos University of Galati. Fascicle XIX, History, 6, pp. 137-146, <https://www.gup.ugal.ro/ugaljournals/index.php/history/article/view/875>, retrieved on 15 March 2023. <https://jamestown.org/program/romania-danube-flotilla-an-unparalleled-capability-on-natos-southeastern-flank-part-one>
15. *Britannica online*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Danube-River>, retrieved on 10 March 2023.
16. *Convention Instituting the Definitive Statute of the Danube*, signed at Paris, 23 July, 1921, <http://www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19210723-1.pdf>, retrieved on 5 March 2023.

17. *Convention regarding the Regime of Navigation on the Danube*, signed at Belgrade, on 18 August 1948, <http://www.danubecommission.org/uploads/doc/convention-en.pdf>, retrieved on 5 March 2023.
18. Council of the EU. *EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, EUSDR, 2011, <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/eu-strategy-for-the-danube-region>, retrieved on 15 March 2023.
19. *Danube Basin Analysis Report (2004)*. International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River/ICPDR, <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/eu-strategy-for-the-danube-region>, retrieved on 16 March 2023.
20. Danube Commission, <https://www.danubecommission.org/dc/en/>, retrieved on 10 March 2023.
21. Romanian Naval Forces, https://www.navy.ro/despre/organizare/organizare_en.php, retrieved on 15 March 2023.

