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**Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region:**

**The EU's Geostrategic Role and the Potential Involvement of the New EU Member States**

**Abstract**

The Black Sea Region (BSR) has become one of the epicentres of the European Union's (EU) recent security and stability interest focus. In the current international status-quo geography has again become important, hence, the European Union is in a stringent need of a geostrategic vision at its Eastern borders. Thus, the Black Sea Region is crucial to the European Union principally because of its geopolitical location at the juncture of Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, its military-strategic implications with the new security challenges it poses, the assertiveness of Russian hegemonic pretences in the region, and last but not the least its geo-economic potential as a transit route for oil and gas. As a result, one of the more stressing geostrategic issues that the EU has to face is how to address the aforementioned problems regionally. There is a clear necessity for a substantive and not only "synergetic" regional policy approach in the BSR, at the time when the regional core states such as Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria are becoming of central importance as EU member states and as possible contenders for regional leadership. While taking into consideration the above mentioned generalizing statements, the following questions need to be asked: What mechanisms should the EU employ so as to effectively advance the EU's interests and values in the Black Sea Region? What pragmatic mechanisms should the EU resort to in order to make a substantive contribution in the democratic transformation of the Black Sea Region? Moreover, while taking into account the direct implications of Romania as a coastal Black Sea country, what strategic positioning should Romania adopt vis-à-vis this region? Romania is faced with a clear choice in terms of its foreign and security policies in the Black Sea: should it continue with a foreign policy that emphasizes a strong Atlanticist commitment under the traditional North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the United States-oriented security umbrella, or should it realign its foreign policy options towards a yet faulting EU commitment in the region? The matter of fact spells the need for a concerted effort of strategies and opportunities in the region, which direly necessitate a coherent strategic vision of the EU and the NATO, i.e. a holistic but at the same time flexible approach to the Eastern neighbourhood.

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