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## Securitization in the Black Sea Region

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## 1. Introduction

This paper offers a résumé of the findings related to a study on securitization in the Black Sea Region (BSR) and is part of a more extensive paper published at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg.<sup>1</sup>

I will apply an inductive approach, using cooperation in the BSR as a case study – an area that has been victim to oversecuritization due to its geopolitical importance. The region has received a lot of focus on a policy level in recent years, especially by NATO and the EU, due to the heating up of frozen conflicts and meddling in internal affairs of member states. This geographic area represents a good empirical case that is worth investigating and the lessons learned here can be transferred to other places that have similar underlying dynamics. The Baltic Sea Region can serve as a good illustration – it bears a stark resemblance to the BSR in that it is an enclosed sea whose ports give access to warm waters; the actors are identical – NATO, the EU, Russia, former Soviet Republics and former members of the Eastern Bloc; strong historical antagonism and a large number of Russian-speaking people living outside of the Federation’s borders. The biggest difference is that the Baltic Sea has turned almost entirely into a “Western lake” with all countries, apart from Russia, being members of both the EU and NATO – a process not yet finalized in the BSR. In that sense, these sister regions can be used to provide mutually enhancing predictions for the future developments we can expect. On the one hand, if the EU and NATO were to expand their frontier further eastward, perhaps we can see the same relative stability as in the Baltics. On the other hand, if the idea of credible collective defense fails and countries no longer trust their allies for their protection, scenarios similar to those in Georgia and Ukraine could potentially unfold in Estonia and Latvia – countries with large Russian Diasporas. There has already been some escalation due to cyber attacks (McGuinness, 2017), border incidents (Walker, 2015) and airspace violations (YLE, 2019). However, tensions have not escalated to an armed conflict, perhaps, to a large part, due to NATO’s presence in the region and the concerns over the possibility of nuclear war.

I begin with a short outline of the BSR in order to set up the needed context in which any action takes place. Then, I will provide an overview of the key actors in the region including their foreign-policy perspectives, instruments and objectives within the BSR. In the next section, I will shortly present my theoretical framework, which uses securitization as a bridge between realism and collective action, to offer different explanations of why cooperation should or should not take place according to the theories. The last chapters will be dedicated to the discussion on the benefits and weaknesses of the methodological approach, an outline of the gathered data and the actual analysis of the sources. I shall conclude with a summary of my theoretical and empirical findings about the Great Power dynamics in the BSR.

## 2. Historical overview

As a start, I argue that it is essential to understand the basic characteristics of the situation in the BSR. Context is crucial in order to adequately pick the proper theoretical

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<sup>1</sup>You can find the entire study via: [https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/61868/1/gupea\\_2077\\_61868\\_1.pdf](https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/61868/1/gupea_2077_61868_1.pdf)

framework to be able to unravel the dynamics within the region. Furthermore, understanding the motivations of all parties will help to better analyze collected data in the end.

Ancient Greeks referred to the body of water locked between Anatolia, the Ukrainian steppes, the Balkan Peninsula and the Caucasus mountains as the “Inhospitable Sea”. Its somber waters and the fierce peoples inhabiting the coastal lines sparked the imagination of poets and sailors alike, inspiring many stories and myths. Legends aside, the Black Sea, as it is now known, has seen the rise and fall of several empires and has become an integral part of their histories, cultures and traditions. The region surrounding it was often seen as a bridge between Europe and the Orient and, in that sense, has been an arena where different interests clashed. From the ancient and medieval times through the countless Russo-Turkish wars up until the present day, world and regional powers have continuously tried to reap the strategic benefits of having the region in their sphere of influence.

On top of the historical and religious conflicts, the Cold War added an ideological dimension of division to the disputes between the riparian countries. With the Eastern Bloc almost encircling the Black Sea, Turkey attempted to counterbalance the Soviet growth in power by joining NATO in 1952. This was the first expansion of the military alliance eastward and led to the formation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 as an answer. While this was considered an initial but major step towards the stabilization of the region, the conflicts continued to escalate, with tensions reaching their boiling point in 1962 when the US placed ballistic missiles in Turkey, subsequently leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s left NATO as the main military actor in the region, while Turkey and the European Union strived to fill the vacuum left by the USSR. With Bulgaria and Romania joining the ranks of the EU in 2007, it seemed as if the West had secured its position in the BSR. However, this enlargement was perceived as a threat by the Russian Federation, which clearly showed its intentions to respond radically should any further encroachments diminish its sphere of influence. The war in South Ossetia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 came at times when Georgia and Ukraine showed their intentions to develop closer ties with the US and its allies, proving the potential for destabilization in the region. As a consequence, the responses of the EU member states (to impose economic sanctions on Russia) and NATO (putting forward the question of a Black Sea NATO fleet) further deteriorated relations with Russia.

The nature of these geopolitical rivalries has oftentimes made collaboration between Bulgaria, Turkey, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Georgia and Romania difficult, if not impossible. The BSR has turned into a Gordian knot of entangled interests, where even issues in which countries do agree with one another cannot be decoupled from other problems. Any sort of cooperation seems to be deemed as a sign of weakness and a step away from what could be considered the “national interest”.

### **3. Key participants**

Several axes of contention can be drawn in the BSR. On the one hand, NATO and the EU act as platforms through which the US and its allies (or the Western World) can coordinate

their efforts for a shared vision of the future. On the other, there is the Russian Federation – no longer considered a Great Power after the collapse of the USSR but which seeks to regain its position in global affairs. Lastly, there is Turkey – a member of NATO but, at present, fueled by strong antagonism against the West. In similar arenas of entangled interests, smaller states must move with extreme caution in order not to tip the delicate balance of power in the region in anyone’s favor.

In this section, the main doctrines and principles of each major regional power shall be reviewed. I rely on texts that serve as playbooks on the way foreign policy is carried out in general, and what role the BSR plays in their strategies in particular. I will then proceed with tracing how they developed and manifested throughout several critical events that shook the region – namely the 2008 war in Georgia, the 2014 war in Ukraine, the 2015 migrant crisis and the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. My goal is to take on the perspective of every actor in order to understand their motivations and the means to achieve them, in order to defend themselves from what they perceive as a threat.

#### a. NATO

To understand the purpose of NATO requires looking at the context in which it was established and also at its founding document – the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty. Along with the Marshall plan it can be seen as a tool through which the US secured its position in Western Europe. With the shadow of the USSR and Communism already looming over the eastern part of the continent, NATO became a political organization as much as a military one (Shea, 2003). Its deterrence policy based on solidarity and shared responsibility allowed Western Europe to focus on its economic development and rebuilding itself. Throughout the years, however, the Alliance has demonstrated that it can change in order to adapt to external and internal shifts in the operating environment (Rice, 2016).

For NATO, the BSR plays a vital role in asserting the organization’s power in the Balkans, Central Europe, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and even Central Europe (Atanasov, 2018). With Bulgaria and Romania joining its ranks in 2004, the Alliance continued expanding eastwards, developing close ties with Georgia and Ukraine – both states are now considered partner countries and aspiring future members. Russia, however, saw this as an intrusion in its sphere of influence, eroding trust and increasing tensions. Currently, the main challenges that NATO faces in the region are directly linked to Moscow – the increasing military buildup, interference in domestic politics and protracted conflicts, energy security and the security of critical lines of communication (ibid). As an inter-state organization, the Alliance relies on member countries to use their diplomatic, military, information and economic potential to meet its security challenges (NATO, 2017).

NATO has several main objectives in the region – acknowledging and protecting the sovereignty of all littoral states, in accordance with the rules of the Paris Charter of 1990; stability in countries from the periphery that are not alliance members; and economic security so that other countries cannot use their resources as leverage for political concessions (Horrell, 2016).

Three questions might come to one's mind: "Since NATO was established as an instrument of the Cold War does it not carry a significant amount of 'baggage'?" "Why was it not disbanded after the Iron Curtain was lifted?" and "If the organization were to persist, why did the Russian Federation not join?" Both scenarios could have led to a very different security situation in the region.

Interestingly, there never was an all-out debate about whether NATO should be disbanded. NATO was an organization in which countries joined by their own free will and were not forced to do so as it was the case with the members of the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not mean the end of security concerns for NATO members. Instead of dissolving, the Alliance transformed itself from a defense organization to an actor that could shape the world around it (Shea, 2003). In other words, states saw it as a source of stability that was too useful to be done away with.

In today's security environment, it seems impossible to imagine that there was a time when it seemed feasible for Russia to join the ranks of NATO. In 1991, President Boris Yeltsin signaled that membership was a "*long-term political aim*" for the country (Friedman, 1991). Even more notably, this was the second attempt in which Moscow tried to join the organization - the first being in 1954, which was perhaps an effort to reach a position where the sabotage of the decision-making process in the USSR's favor was within reach (Debating Europe, 2019). Furthermore, if Russia were to become a member, it would mean that it has given up the idea of its own sphere of influence, inherent to Russian foreign policy. With the sincerity of Moscow's attempts to join put into question, the negotiations ultimately did not lead to membership. Both sides attempted to establish some sort of dialogue by setting up the Russia-NATO Council in 2002, but relations have deteriorated since then. A simple answer to the question of why Russia did not join the Alliance can be found in a quote by Dmitry Olegovich Rogozin – Russia's ambassador to NATO: "*Great Powers don't join coalitions, they create coalitions. Russia considers itself a Great Power*" (Pop, 2009).

In the past decade the way NATO deals with foreign policy challenges has evolved significantly. To begin with, the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia served as a precedent. It was the first instance after the end of the Cold War when a frozen conflict became active. At the Bucharest summit in April 2008, NATO members could not fully agree on how to proceed with the membership applications of Ukraine and Georgia (RFERL, 2008). Additionally, the Alliance promised the two countries that they would become part of the organization at some point in the future but declined to offer them a Membership Action Plan (NATO, 2008). This left Russia with an opportunity to intervene in order to limit the West's expansion in the region, without technically provoking a response from NATO. After hostilities broke out in August of the same year, the Alliance seemed to be caught off-guard with little coordinated efforts to respond to the aggression. A NATO-Georgia Commission was established at the end of the year and in the following decade attempts have been made to better prepare the country's resistance to future aggression (NATO, 2019a).

It could be said that this conflict served as a 'rehearsal' for what followed in 2014. After the war in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea, the West had a much better thought-out response: it coordinated its efforts with the EU to impose economic sanctions on Moscow

and suspended NATO-Russian cooperation. This crisis also became a central topic of the 2016 Warsaw Summit and concentrated the allies' attention to the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and other vulnerable neighboring regions (NATO, 2017).

It might seem obvious that Russia appears to be NATO's chief adversary in the region; however, relations between member states are not as harmonious as it would appear on the surface. Tensions between Turkey and the West have been rising since the 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan, which was followed by mass purges and even affected 150 high-ranking Turkish personnel that were working for NATO structures (FT, 2016). The trend continued after Germany and the US refused to extradite people that were accused of playing a role in the coup attempt (DW, 2017; AJ, 2018). For NATO, Ankara is a key partner with one of the largest armies within the organization and with a crucial position for the Alliance's influence in the Middle East. That being said, the slide towards authoritarianism has undermined the potential for cooperation with democratic member states (Weize, 2017). Another evidence of the shift that Erdoğan might be making is the fact that Turkey has agreed to purchase S-400 missile systems from Moscow – “*a major diplomatic coup for Moscow*” (ibid) in a country that is already deeply integrated into NATO's own missile system. The Alliance is now at a diverging point where it must decide whether to keep its core principles of democracy and solidarity or sacrifice them in order to preserve its strategic position with an actor that might not abide by them.

## b. The European Union

The EU works in close cooperation with NATO since both organizations share the same strategic interests and face similar challenges (NATO, 2019b). Moreover, they share 22 common members.

Recognizing the importance of the BSR, the EU has developed a two-pronged tactic for the region, focusing on initiatives that include member states and ones that center around partner countries that are outside the EU's borders. On a member level, the Union tries to facilitate environmental sustainability and energy independence in order to preserve the stability in the region and to create the necessary conditions for fruitful cooperation (EU, 2018). With the war in Ukraine, the EU has stopped all cooperation with entities in Crimea that have any connections with the Russian Federation in order to avoid any claims for legitimacy related to the annexation (ibid).

The region has been central in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy. It is the closest thing that the EU has to a manifesto on foreign policy; it presents a shift towards *Realpolitik* and asserts the EU's claim as a Great Power on the world stage. Here, the crucial role that the figure of the High Representative plays in concentrating the member states' efforts on the international scene must be mentioned. For example, while Catherine Ashton tried to find a consensus that all countries in the Union could agree on, her successor Federica Mogherini was much more active on the international scene, putting a larger emphasis on security and defense capabilities (Ondarza and Scheler, 2017). In that sense, there seems to be a momentum that must be kept after HR Mogherini's mandate ended in 2019 in order to further develop and realize the Union's ambitions.

On a partner level, the EU has relied on its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Its goal was to develop closer ties with countries in the Union's 'back yard' and to bring forth closer economic integration. As far as the BSR is concerned, the ENP evolved into the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 to better react to the challenges in the region. This provided a tailored approach to countries like Georgia and Ukraine, giving them access to the Union's market. The EaP was amended in 2015 after the war in Ukraine and the emphasis was put on security and defense, state resilience to foreign interventions into domestic politics, democracy and transparency (CEU, 2016). The EaP will remain in effect until 2020; however, it is evident that it is prone to changes when major geopolitical events call for it.

The role the EU played in the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia was mainly that of a peace broker. With the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, calling for a ceasefire, the EU tried to remain as distant as possible in order to appear as a credible mediator (Barysch, 2008). However, in reality, Europe looked feeble and disunited - some condemned Russian aggressions while others blamed Georgia for provoking the conflict (Valasek, 2008). In the end, the Union was unable to come up with a common policy against Russia.

Much like with NATO, the EU was better prepared for the conflict in Ukraine. Several rounds of sanctions were imposed against individuals, businesses and officials related to Russia. These measures, along with the falling oil prices, put a lot of pressure on the Russian economy, leading to a financial crisis in 2014 and 2015 (Overland, 2015). The EU demonstrated that an approach which combined economic instruments, together with close cooperation and solidarity with the affected state, is the most efficient way to stop Russian military advances. In addition, the Union showed willingness for dialogue and a joint solution to the crisis (EU Newsroom, 2014) in an attempt to not completely marginalize Moscow. However, it must be noted that the enforcement of the sanctions was not accepted without opposition. Slovakia (Szakacs, 2014), Hungary (Reuters, 2014), Bulgaria (Croft, 2014) and other states have called for a lift, showing the potential for disunity within the EU when a country's financial well-being is at stake.

The other big challenge that the EU faced in the region was related to Turkey - a previously aspiring future member of the Union. Facing the large migration waves from countries in the Middle East, the European Union and Turkey signed an accord in 2016 in order to better manage the legal arrival of refugees, while limiting their numbers on European territory. For this, Ankara was to receive 3 billion euro and a visa-free regime for Turkish citizens (EC, 2016). However, there were tensions from the start as refugee numbers were misrepresented and Turkey accused the EU of not paying the agreed amount as well as not implementing the visa-free regime (DW, 2018). Rhetoric escalated with president Erdoğan even threatening to send 3 million refugees to Europe (The Guardian, 2016). The 2016 coup attempt in Turkey did not improve relations, as Erdoğan saw a conspiracy of the West to overthrow his regime. For the EU, the subsequent purges were a sign that the country was becoming more and more authoritarian and no longer upheld the values of the Union. As a result, the accession talks were frozen (CEU, 2018). The EU-Turkey relationship was further strained when Germany and the Netherlands did not allow Erdoğan to campaign on their territory in order to garner support for the upcoming 2017 referendum where citizens had to decide whether Turkey should become a presidential republic. The Turkish president called

this “*Nazi Tactics*” (Oltermann, 2017) and said that “*no European, no Westerner will be able to take steps on the street safely and peacefully*” (Saeed, 2017).

Turkey has increasingly become dangerous for the principles of the EU. This is further supported by the fact that ten countries, all of whom, apart from Austria, are members of NATO, see Turkey as a major threat to their security (Dennison, et al. 2018).

### c. Turkey

The end of the Cold War brought new opportunities for Turkey. Anchored to the Western world, it sought to fill the vacuum left by the USSR by becoming a modern secular state in which democracy and Islam coexisted. As Erdoğan’s AK Party came to power (2002), domestic and foreign policy were harmonized to help achieve this goal. On the international scene, this vision was manifested by employing three mutually connected foreign policy strategies – Neo-Ottomanism (or Neo-Osmanism), the “zero-problems” approach and the “strategic depth concept”.

Neo-Ottomanism is based on the idea of the superiority of the culture and history of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, Turkey’s aim is to increase its influence in the territories of the former Empire, namely North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucuses. A more expansionist reading of this doctrine could also include the ideas of pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism as a justification to reach out to countries outside of the empire’s borders based on their similar culture, language or religion (Stefanov, 2010). This move seems to be a shift from the traditional pro-Western Turkish foreign policy based on Kemalism (Calis and Bagci, 2003).

The way this approach can become successful is through the so-called “strategic depth” approach, coined by former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book with the same title. According to him, “*Turkey is a European country, an Asian country, a Middle Eastern country, Balkan country, Caucasian country, neighbor to Africa, Black Sea country, Caspian Sea, all these.*” (as cited by Vuksanovic, 2016). Strategic depth is characterized by two dimensions: geographic depth – spreading to the above-mentioned regions (multi-directionality); and historic depth – relying on the interwoven histories of the empire and the peoples that were under its yoke. In this endeavor, the country should seek allies not only in the West, but around the world (ibid). This tactic could only be effective, if current relations are peaceful, in order not to get entangled in disputes and conflicts that would force Turkey to choose a side. This “zero-problems” policy would allow the country to act freely and choose the best possible outcome in each situation, capitalizing on the use of soft power (Palabiyik, 2010).

The war in Georgia was one of the first major displays of the AKP’s foreign policy shift. Disunited as the West was in its response, Turkey decided to stay neutral with Erdoğan commenting: “*It would not be right for Turkey to be pushed toward any side. Certain circles want to push Turkey into a corner either with the United States or Russia after the Georgian incident. One of the sides is our closest ally, the United States. The other side is Russia, with which we have an important trade volume. We would act in line with what Turkey’s national interests require*” (Bechev, 2018). Erdoğan condemned Russia for its aggression, yet refused

to allow large NATO ships into the Black Sea, arguing they did not follow the criteria set by the 1936 Montreaux treaty (Kaya and Cornell, 2008). For Ankara, stability and good relations with all sides in the region, including Russia, was the name of the game. Close ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan were crucial for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and the Trans-Anatolian gas and oil pipelines.

The notion that pragmatism and gains are the driving force behind Erdoğan's foreign policy was further proved by the developments after the war in Ukraine. Even though FM Davutoğlu declared Crimea to be an integral part of Ukraine, there was no official statement condemning Moscow (Baştürk, 2014). Turkey found itself in a tough position where it had to choose between two of the aspects of its foreign policy. On the one hand, Crimea is home to a number of Turkic Tatars, which Erdoğan has attempted to bring closer to Ankara (Kates, 2014). On the other, opposing Russia would go against the "zero-problems" policy. In this position, Turkey chose to stay neutral, appealing to international law but not placing sanctions on Russia. It has also expressed its readiness to be a mediator in any future peace talks (AFP, 2018).

So far, the relations between Ankara and Moscow have followed the path of mutual convenience. They are by no means allies; however, they are also far from enemies. Turkey is largely reliant on Putin's goodwill to not interfere in the oil and gas transportation through the Caucasus, while Russia sees Turkey as a key to the Middle East and can also benefit from the latter's control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. Even during moments when tensions between the two were high, as with the downing of the Russian fighter jet by the Turkish air forces in 2015, Putin and Erdoğan have managed to put aside their differences for the benefit of both sides. Examples of the closer relations between the two sides are the aforementioned Turkish switch to a Russian missile defense system and the recently finished TurkStream gas pipeline, which served to cement Ankara's role as an energy hub on Europe's periphery.

Concurrently, relations between Turkey and Western nations have taken a turn for the worse. With rising antagonism around the 2015 migration crisis and the failed coup attempt, Erdoğan has used strong rhetoric to ramp up domestic support and consolidate his power. At the same time, however, the West has not stood idle. The US have imposed sanctions on Ankara in accordance with the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act*, which is aimed at penalizing all countries that engage in business relations with Russia's defense sector (Ward, 2019). Up until 2019, Turkey could rely on a strong and stable economic growth – a factor that has undoubtedly played a role in Erdoğan's popularity. Currently, however, the Turkish lira has hit an all-time low, which has coincided with the president losing support in the 2019 local elections (BBC, 2019).

#### d. The Russian Federation

It would be impossible to understand Russian's foreign policy without looking at the persona of the man that has been in charge of the state for the past 20 years. Despite regular elections, the country has strong authoritarian tendencies (V-Dem, 2018) with Vladimir Putin deeply involved in most important decisions on the international scene. Growing up in the

Soviet Union and receiving his training by the KGB, Putin has called the collapse of the USSR “*the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century*” (BBC, 2005). He also seems to share some of the goals of Eurasian ideologues like Nursultan Nazarbayev and Alexander Dugin, forming close ties with the latter (Barbashin and Thoburn, 2014). These influences have led Putin to follow a path of combining the messianism of Russian Orthodox Christianity and the superiority of Russian culture above all else with the doctrines of subversion and reflexive control, all while being strongly suspicious of the West (Thomas, 2004).

Neo-Eurasianism was the answer to Fukuyama’s “the end of history” – with Russia being left humiliated after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc (Johnson, 2011), it looked at Huntington’s idea of a “clash of civilizations” and took it to the extreme, arguing that there has been and always will be a conflict between Eurasianists and Atlanticists (Dugin, 2012). This ideology pushes forward the notion that the post-Soviet space is neither Western nor Eastern but something starkly different and unique, with Russia and Orthodox Christianity at its center. For Eurasianists, the world is multipolar with several civilizations that are inevitably bound to organize into massive political blocs - Africa, China, India, the Naval Atlanticists (the US, Britain and Australia) and Eurasia (Central Asia and mainland Europe) (Dugin, 2015). Consequently, the world is divided into spheres of influence and Great Powers should not interfere into the affairs of other Great Powers. Naturally, this should act as justification for the invasion of territories that “belong” to the Eurasian sphere of influence. Such an invasion would thus not be perceived as a conquest but as ensuring the “symphony of the peoples” (Kotkin, 2017). Western values, specifically liberty and personal freedom, are seen as unrealistic and corrosive and should therefore be rejected (Johnson, 2011). The alternative offered is the concept of an illiberal democracy, based on a strong state and the rule of law (Kotkin, 2017).

Using this prism allows us to understand both Russian foreign policy and Putin’s public statements. In the eyes of the government, the invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea serve a double purpose – they are presented as a liberation for Russian-speaking populations while also blocking Western meddling in Moscow’s “backyard”. It also sends a strong signal to other neighboring countries that have large Russian-speaking minorities like the Baltic States and Moldova. Putin is also willing to accept the consequences of the imposed sanctions since the country’s interests in the “near-abroad” are considered much more important. He has also not missed the opportunity to attack Western values in front of anyone willing to listen by criticizing how EU nations cannot integrate refugees from Africa and the Middle East (YouTube, 2018), accusing countries of hypocrisy and a conspiracy against Russia (YouTube, 2014) as well as interventionism (YouTube, 2017). That way the West has become a convenient enemy that can serve as a threat in order to mobilize domestic and foreign efforts.

#### **e. Platforms for cooperation and NGOs**

With all the antagonism in the region, attempts have been made to create organizations where all the riparian countries can meet up, settle their disputes peacefully and gradually begin to generate trust and cooperation through cross-national projects. The success of those endeavours, however, remains questionable.

On a state level, organizations like BLACKSEAFOR, the Black Sea Against Pollution (BSC) and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) provide the frameworks for cooperation in areas of shared interests in the region. BLACKSEAFOR focused on joint trainings of the littoral countries' naval forces but since its formation in 2001, it has remained mostly inactive after suspensions due to the wars in Georgia, Ukraine and the shooting down of the Russian fighter jet (Kucera, 2014). The BSC has also remained barely functional with large gaps of activity especially in recent years. The BSEC, on the contrary, has remained much more functional than its counterparts, yet has turned into an instrument that regional powers use to push their own agenda (Apakan, 2019) and where tensions have remained high since the wars in 2008 and 2014 (Ileri and Incekaya, 2017). Initiatives like the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue (BSF) have had a single summit despite its ambitions to become an annual forum on the highest level, while the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) provides funding for regional projects but does not focus specifically on cross-national cooperation.

The limited success of these platforms demonstrates that the time for inter-state dialogues has not yet arrived, so perhaps we should look at initiatives between non-governmental entities. It would be logical to assume that since all riparian countries share the waters of the Black Sea, they would have a vested interest in generating knowledge that would benefit all sides. While this was the case in the countries of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, when the planned economies of the countries provided research institutes with the needed funding, the transition to democracy in the early 1990s meant that multilateral cooperation in this area slowly began dissolving (Sumaila et al. 2010). In addition, while most BSTDB projects focus on developing infrastructure or boosting the countries' economies (BSTDB, 2019), no joint fund is dedicated to producing studies that would involve multiple BSR countries. The only organization that has attempted to facilitate this sort of cooperation is the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) but it has hardly managed to keep up with publishing annual studies (ICBSSa, 2019). The last project was completed in 2015 (ICBSSb, 2019).

To sum up, the most influential actors in the BSR, when it comes to cooperation, appear to be states; however, they have so far been unable to create a framework where all of them could effectively coordinate their efforts. A bottom-up approach might prove to be more promising – the geopolitical deadlock could be overcome through “islands of cooperation” (FES, 2018) that could gradually build up cooperation through NGO and citizen initiatives but this scenario seems unlikely without a minimal level of political will and funding on state level. In this context, I shall rely on the theoretical schools of realism, collective action and securitization and see how each of them interprets the current situation in the region.

#### 4. Theoretical framework

I focus on whether there is a common denominator between realism, collective action and securitization theories by demonstrating that theoretical pluralism must be employed in order to understand the complexity of securitization processes. A single theoretical

perspective cannot give a complete analytical picture. Rather, an integral multi-disciplinary approach is the only viable option for knowledge generation. The data shows that in order to truly understand how actors “do” securitization, we must take aspects from the theories related to the fields of political science, international relations, history, economy, and cultural studies, to name a few.

The cornerstone upon which realism is built is the presumption that the international system is inherently anarchic. In order to ensure their sovereignty, states tend to focus on maximizing their security (defensive realism) (Waltz,1979; 2001) or power (offensive realism) (Mearsheimer,2014). If a state becomes too strong for a single other actor to compete with, countries might group together, in order to balance out the rising hegemon (Gilpin 1983). The need for this balance of power pushes weaker states to cooperate so that they can deal with the threat of being dominated one by one by a much stronger actor. Nevertheless, realists do not view these joint efforts as long-lasting but rather as mere “*marriages of convenience*” (Mearsheimer, 2014). In order to disrupt the opportunities for cooperation, rising powers must try to convince weaker states that the outcome of the joint action will not be favorable due to the innate selfishness of all actors. Instead, less powerful countries should bandwagon with stronger ones – that way they avoid potentially devastating clashes between regional or global powers while also contributing to their own security by paying fewer costs (Wivel, 2008). In that sense, realists view power like gravity - the stronger an actor is, the more likely it is for others to join its side (Cristol, 2017).

In order to solve complex issues that affect multiple sides, stakeholders must often come together and attempt to coordinate their efforts. Problems such as the management of common pool resources, sustainable fishing or global governance fall into these categories and have become the subject of research on how participants interact with each other. In an attempt to develop a rational framework, scholars have sought to explore the different ways in which individuals and institutions manage their common affairs through coercion and compliance (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). These efforts fall under the category of Collective Action Studies. One of the core concepts in Collective Action is the idea of an overarching Leviathan who should make sure that participants follow the rules and enforce sanctions once one of the players defects (Hardin, 2003). If such an entity does not exist or does a poor job, collective action efforts may lead to a situation where rational actors who have in the past agreed to collaborate, find themselves in a system where they can get the advantages of collaboration without paying the costs for participating. This compromises the efforts of the group, leading to an undesirable outcome (Hardin, 2009). In that sense, trust, identity and the frequency of contacts all play a role in the success of collective actions.

The Copenhagen School of securitization sees the process of how an issue becomes perceived as a threat as a speech act that uses potential danger and urgency to justify the use of extraordinary measures. While this conceptualization is a good starting point, I would add a secondary definition which could also be related to cooperation – securitization can be seen as *the process of harmonization of the goals and expectations of the state and the citizenry*. This new framing encompasses the breadth of the securitization process and does not limit it to a single act of presenting something as a threat. Instead, securitization is the continuous construction of an image that might or might not reflect reality. This re-conceptualization

would also give an explanation to the question why sometimes securitization fails. If the process is not sufficiently lengthy or intensive, as in the case with Russo-Turkish relations in 2015, the initial status quo might be restored. Alternatively, a process that has started decades ago should logically require a long time to stop. An example of this would be the current ruling elite in Russia – they were brought up in a system which villainized the US and the West, a position that they have subsequently maintained even after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Both aspects lead me to assume that securitization might possess some kind of momentum – after all, we do not live in an Orwellian world in which the citizens’ perceptions of who the enemy is and who the friend is changes at the flip of a switch. However, further research in this area is needed.

Secondly, statistis traditionally view the drafting of a foreign policy agenda as the prerogative of governments and ruling elites. This top-down approach eliminates the possibility of citizens to have any agency in controlling what their country does on the world stage. My redefinition leaves room for the possibility that a bottom-up influence from the people to the state is also possible. There has been research on the effects of civil movements on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in Vietnam and I believe that if analyzed further, the effects of the EU policy to create “islands of cooperation” on a sub-state level can further contribute to this area.

Cooperation can only exist when areas seen as vital to the well-being of the country are not threatened. They may lie in the materialist world like the control of vital resources or maintaining a certain level of military might, or in the abstract world like identity, culture and national belonging. These red lines are defined by securitization and it is not uncommon for countries to define their interests by using both ends of the spectrum. Since these are two separate levels of analysis, neither realism nor collective action can fully explain under what conditions cooperation can occur. Securitization then turns into the linking force that connects them (see Fig. 1).

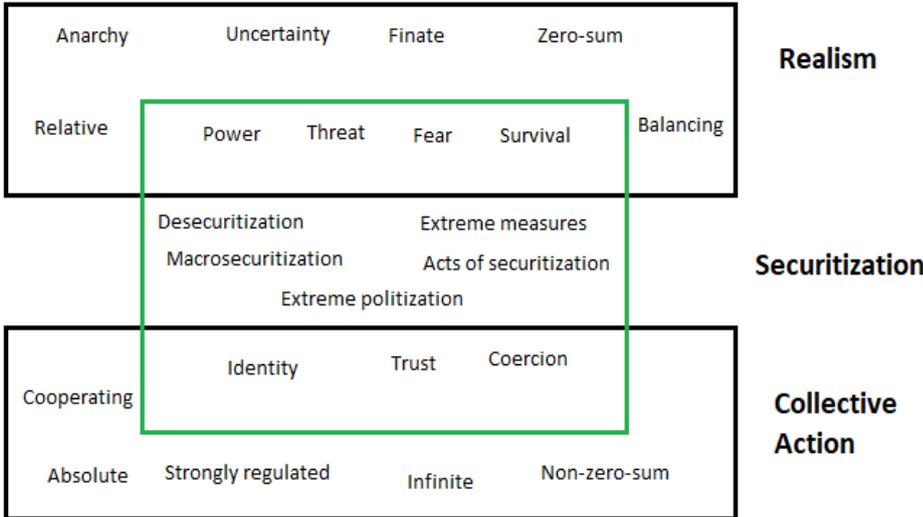


Fig 1.

This new position of securitization would also meet one of the major criticisms directed towards it, namely that it lacks explanatory power. I would argue that the strength of securitization lies elsewhere - it is a vessel of communication that allows for different theoretical schools and levels of analysis to interact with each other. Theoretical purists might argue that different theories are epistemologically and ontologically distinct. However, empirical evidence shows that policy-makers do not always follow the same logic of academics and combine aspects of different schools of thought. Furthermore, different theories have typically talked past each other and have not benefited from the lessons learned in their own area. Thus, by using a framework with an integrated and holistic approach, one could greatly benefit the generating of knowledge.

## **5. Methodology and data**

One crucial factor that must be mentioned from the start is that there is no standardized approach to conducting securitization analyses (Munster, 2012,). Guzzini (2011) suggests a process tracing method, while Balzacq (2011) adds three more approaches: discourse analysis, content analysis and ethnographic research that could be employed alone or in combination.

In this essay, I will mainly rely on discourse analysis (DA) in order to get a glimpse of the point of view of the main players in the BSR – NATO, the EU, Turkey and the Russian Federation. DA will also help to determine which issues the players are most adamant about and where they would be willing to make compromises. This method will help us understand the underlying causes of the process of securitization as well as its external manifestations. I would argue, however, that this approach is by no means all-encompassing or sufficient on its own and will advocate for methodological pluralism, as future researches on the topic are done.

### **a. Strengths and potential weaknesses of discourse analysis**

Balzacq (ibid) identifies three levels that could become the object of a study – the agents (both states and citizens), the acts and the context. Luckily, discourse analysis looks at both contextual and non-contextual elements and allows for the researcher to delve into all three dimensions in order to answer the “how”, “who”, “what”, “when” and “where” of how a threat image forms, evolves and is presented. Discourses can be seen both as a source and a medium (Hardy, 2004) and, as such, are inherently tied to the first two levels of analysis. At the same time, written and spoken texts cannot be disassociated from the context in which they were created and cannot be understood without linking them to the “when” and “where”. The ultimate goal is to understand the formation of “identities, decisions and norms” (Balzacq, 2011) and situate them within a system’s dynamic.

One major caveat of DA is the fact that research mainly focuses on spoken or written forms of discourse. With the Internet allowing files to be shared across vast geographic distances with near-instant speed, it is regretful that audio-visual pieces are often unaccounted for in securitization essays. This is in no small part due to the immense data that must be collected for even a single analysis. This echoes an underlying drawback of DA – a study is only as good as its sources. It is difficult to decide which documents to include and which to leave out – a careful balance must be struck between building a broad enough view of the

research topic and functionality. I will attempt to overcome this by picking the essential policy documents of only the major players in the region as the core of my study. That should by no means indicate that smaller states are insignificant. However, as stated in the “Realism” section, it is likely that they will try to align themselves with stronger actors or, at the very least, try to find a balancing position, avoiding conflict.

Furthermore, a common consequence of using DA is confirmation bias – researchers construct a theory and aim to prove it through applying, not testing it. I try to stay clear of this methodological weakness through a dialectic approach – asking questions and not coming in with a concrete presupposition. Nonetheless, the outcomes of this thesis must be triangulated with other studies as well in order to confirm the saliency of my analysis.

## b. Data

A full list of the data I have used is available in the appendix.

The timeframe I will mostly focus on will be 2008-2019. I see 2008 as an adequate starting point since by that time Romania and Bulgaria had already joined the EU and NATO and extended the borders of both alliances further east, changing the dynamics of the power balance in the BSR. One notable exception I make is with Russia – arguably their process of securitization towards “the West” began much earlier and I try to reflect that by additionally looking at materials from 2007. That way we can notice a pattern of issues that have troubled Moscow before, during and after the war with Georgia and lay at the root of what has been called “*Cold War 2.0*” (Wintour et al, 2016).

For my sources, I will use documents related to foreign policy that could be classified as foreign policy manifestos and doctrinal foundations, such as policy papers, official statements and declarations. While the process of selection is pretty straightforward for NATO – an organization that has called for transparency in its relations to other players on the world stage and which must coordinate the efforts of all 29 members – there are some specifics in the selection of materials for the rest of the actors in my analysis. NATO countries gather at official summits on a regular basis to discuss the issues of global importance which all member states face. There, threats are identified and a roadmap of how to deal with them is typically devised. In addition to the declarations of those summits, I also look at documents that outline specific measures of how to deal with challenges the Alliance is facing. Furthermore, I also look at interviews, press conferences and statements made by the Secretary General at various events during the chosen time frame. These sources provide answers to more specific questions that have not been addressed in the summit declarations, such as the rising tensions between NATO members.

The EU also uses a similar summit system where the members of the European Council meet and discuss topical issues. The focus of many of the 78 summits held between 2008 and 2019, however, is put on domestic, not foreign policy. That is the reason why I turned to the annual State of the European Union Speech, held by the President of the European Commission. It serves as a platform where the most crucial threats to the EU are addressed with special attention to Europe’s neighborhood and the world. It also serves as a demonstration of the evolution of the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

after the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, which introduced the role of a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Notably, the actual evolution of the FP agenda can easily be traced - from the initial steps through the much more comprehensive approach introduced by HR Federica Mogherini in the face of the newly formed Eastern Partnership (EaP), the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) and the initiatives by the European External Action Service (EEAS). In that sense, I see the documents related to the EaP, EUGS and the EEAS as indispensable sources for understanding the motivations and tools used by the EU. Furthermore, I also look at the tailored approach that the Union has developed towards the BSR in general and Turkey and Russia in particular. These strategies serve as roadmaps towards the necessary conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for cooperation attempts to succeed. The “interviews, press conferences and statements” section here might seem like it is lacking. However, I discovered that with all the provided documents, reports and analyses of the EU’s FP, the interviews and press conferences seem redundant and do not contribute a lot of new information.

The process of determining what constitutes Turkey’s FP manifestos was much more difficult. The National Security Policy document, also known as “The Red Book”, is classified and its contents remain largely hidden behind a veil of secrecy. That is the reason why I rely on analyses available in English of the fragments of information made available to the public as well as of actions and restructuring efforts implemented by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Policy and Armed Forces. I leave out the conclusions and the biases of the authors and only look at the facts by comparing the information of different articles in order to verify their validity. Luckily, here, the “interviews, press conferences and statements” section is extremely useful, as it looks at declarations made by the person that has been the head of Turkey for the past 16 years. Two events emerged as generating the most statements – the 2015 downing of the Russian fighter jet and the 2016 coup attempt which signified shifts of what the country considers a threat.

Lastly, I look at Russia. Their desire to become a stronger player on the world stage has relied on comprehensively communicating their ambitions both in front of a domestic and a foreign audience. Since there is the same issue of classifying what can be considered an official document, as it was the case with Turkey, I rely on the Annual Address to the Federal Assembly by the Russian president and the Addresses to the UN as data points. Both types of speeches are quite exhaustive and consistently and continuously set up and follow a line of action in regards to dealing with the threats Moscow faces and the goals Russian FP wants to achieve. Statements made on the eve of the war with Georgia, after the downing of the Russian jet and after the annexation of Crimea are quite useful for demonstrating the different aspects of securitization that Moscow uses.

In sum, discourse analysis helps create a storyline (Hajer, 1995, p. 56) – a link between various different texts into one coherent narrative with a flow and momentum. Consequently, securitization can then be isolated as a factor and its effects can be related to the possibilities for cooperation. A pattern could be traced from analyzing “doctrine” texts, the FP manifestos as well as the subsequent acts and the ultimate goals that actors strive for. Securitization as a process might still be ongoing – such a scenario could provide predictive power of what we can expect in the coming years, would the status quo remain the same. As a last note, the

outcomes should be compared with another set of studies, testing how the securitization process has affected citizen perceptions, their willingness to engage with their counterparts in neighboring states, the trust between them and their sense of identity. This can be accomplished by using an ethnographic approach in a series of semi-structured interviews. It would be interesting to see whether there is a sector where people are more willing to collaborate – for example in areas where they have a shared interest (i.e. fishing) or where they are less susceptible to being impulsively influenced by political rhetoric (i.e. academic research).

## 6. Analysis of the data

In this section, I will explore the gradual deterioration of relations between the main actors in the region by adopting each of their perspectives. I will use the war in Georgia as the initial status quo and look at how and what is being securitized. Finally, I will relate my findings to the theoretical schools and to cooperation.

### a. NATO

The BSR has continuously been described by NATO states as “*important for Euro-Atlantic security*” (Summit Declarations: Bucharest 2008, Strasbourg/Kehl 2009, 2009, Lisbon 2010, Chicago 2012, Wales 2014). As such, the relations of the region receive quite a bit of attention in official statements made by the Alliance and can roughly be divided into two periods: from 2008 to 2014, characterized by calls for cooperation and less antagonism; and from 2014 until now where the focus fell on Russia as an aggressor who threatened the stability of the region.

In the initial period, prior to the thawing of frozen conflicts, steps were being made towards the future membership of Georgia and Ukraine, offering them Membership Action Plans and establishing the NATO-Georgia Commission to further smooth out the accession process. Russia was seen as an important partner whose assistance was crucial in dealing with disarmament, nuclear proliferation, missile defense cooperation and, perhaps most importantly, cooperation when dealing with the crisis in Afghanistan. Even after the war in Georgia, there were mixed messages from NATO officials. On the one hand, Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions was condemned and the buildup of military forces near the border with Georgia was seen as “*of particular concern*”. On the other, the importance of dialogue and cooperation with Moscow and the history of developing shared values and principles were given a lot of attention at the Strasbourg/Kehl summit in 2009, dedicating a whole paragraph to areas where the goodwill of Russia is essential.

At the following summits in Lisbon and Chicago, the focus began to shift. Moscow was still described as an important partner and a key factor in building a lasting and inclusive peace in the BSR, but NATO began putting up red lines and identifying protracted regional conflicts as “*a matter of great concern for the alliance*”. The threats to the European population, territories and forces were identified as the main priorities that collective defense had to prepare for. In the spirit of transparency and reciprocity NATO countries addressed the security concerns made by Russian officials that were brought forward by the expansion of the Alliance eastwards. They tried to involve Moscow in dialogues through the NATO-Russia

Council so as to avoid a security dilemma situation that could lead to an arms race or open aggression. In several paragraphs of the documents on the 2012 Chicago Summit NATO tries to give guarantees that it is not a threat and that relations with Russia can still be salvaged.

The Wales Summit in 2014 marked a complete shift of how NATO approached the BSR. From the beginning, Russia is named as a threat to Europe – “*whole, free, and at peace*”. As a direct response to Moscow’s aggressive stance, the NATO Readiness Action Plan was adopted and a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was established. Additionally, this was the first time the term “*hybrid threat*” was used, an expression now commonly employed when talking about Russia. NATO’s stance after the Ukraine crisis was much more resolute and it accused Russia of destroying the confidence-building mechanisms set up in the BSR. As an additional measure, the close ties with the EU were stressed and a coordinated response was decided on by the two organizations in the form of sanctions and the limitation of the access to capital markets for Russian state-owned financial institutions. With the blatant disregard of international law and the deteriorating trust, the conditions for a cooperative and constructive relationship with Moscow were no longer present and “*all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia*” was suspended. Transparency and predictability were listed as arguments of why NATO is a credible partner and the lack of goodwill from the Kremlin was condemned. In the following years, a lot more emphasis was put on the capabilities of the Alliance both in traditional domains such as land, naval and air defense but also in developing the members’ cyber and space potential.

As NATO began to mobilize, the question of shared military commitments and defense expenditures began appearing in discussions. Since the Alliance is only as strong as its credible commitment to uphold Article 5 in case of a crisis, disunity was identified as one of the major threats that had to be faced and attempts to spread discord between the members had to be addressed. Interestingly, as Turkey adopted a more anti-Western stance, the antagonism so far did not reach Alliance level, at least from the point of view of NATO. So far, no single member has collectively been identified as a security threat. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg commended Ankara for its contribution in joint operations and defended each member’s decision to pick their own military equipment when asked about the possibility of Turkey switching to the Russian S-400 missile system.

We can draw several conclusions from the data. First off, NATO uses typically realist concepts such as knowledge, predictability, state sovereignty, territorial integrity and puts a lot of focus on traditional military armed forces. As such, these factors influence the Alliance’s stance to other actors that challenge them. As one of the blocs during the Cold War, it has inherent mechanisms for dealing with the realist “anarchical world” and it has so far managed to avoid escalations.

In addition, in recent years, we can notice a slight shift to traditionally non-realist aspects such as dealing with hybrid attacks aimed at exploiting historical and societal divisions, propaganda, subversion and the sense of identity. NATO and its opponents understand the importance of these factors in the functioning of modern-day societies as well as the destructive potential that outright conflicts between state actors pose in the era of weapons of mass destruction, so they have begun exploring new ways of managing conflicts.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East demonstrated how proxy forces can keep the conflict away from the state level. Lastly, according to NATO, there cannot be a return to the “business as usual” status until Russia “*demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities*” (Summits: Wales, 2014, Warsaw 2016, Brussels 2018).

## b. The European Union

The EU is an interesting case in that we can see a gradual consolidation of the foreign policy of the Union into a single unified approach. It spent the time from the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty up until the Ukraine crisis to set up its position on the world stage and define its ambitions. From the beginning, it took questions about human rights, state borders, the rule of law, good faith engagement and negotiations into account. The focus was placed on handling the consequences of the financial crisis and to generate political unity as this was the only way to become a credible actor in world affairs. The call for more “*Europe and more Union in our foreign policy*” (SOTEU 2015) became an underlying message for future calls to action.

The war in Ukraine was the first challenge that the EU countries answered in unison. The imposed sanctions on Russia demonstrated that even though the Union lacked a joint army, it could still uphold international law and appropriately react to aggression. The events of 2014 meant that the “*spirit of cooperation between the EU and Russia has given way to suspicion and distrust*” (ibid). Even though these sanctions took a toll on European economies through the collective efforts of all member states, Commission President Juncker called for a “*Europe that leads*” opposed to a “*Europe that stands on the sidelines of history*” (ibid). The red lines were set and no cooperation with the regime in Moscow could exist until the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Furthermore, according to the EU’s five guiding principles in dealing with Russia (2018), there were links between loans from Russian banks and far-right European parties which were used to “*express pro-Kremlin views, including calls for an end to sanctions*”. Multilateralism became one of the chief tools of European foreign policy by the strengthening of people-to-people contacts and building trust with Russian citizens while not dealing with the Kremlin directly. The Union’s security was threatened by the dependence on energy imports and the destabilizing effects of aggressive propaganda which led to “*mutual suspicion between ordinary EU citizens and Russians*”. Nevertheless, the EU has been actively trying to promote regional commitments in areas of shared interest through the Black Sea Synergy initiative in order to “*boost the stability, sustainability, resilience and prosperity*”(Black Sea Synergy: review of a regional cooperation initiative, 2015-2018)

Another event that defined this period was the migrant crisis which resulted from political upheaval in the Middle East. This meant that, as a transit country, Turkey became a crucial partner in avoiding a humanitarian crisis. Consequently, the accession process seemed to be accelerated and Brussels sought closer ties with Ankara. This, however, did not mean that the EU would “*water down [its] standards*” (SOTEU 2016). After the brief impetus in relations, the Union stressed that “*its values are its compass*” and that no country that did not uphold freedom, equality and the rule of law could become a member. The imprisonment of journalists and the hostile rhetoric from Ankara were criticized while differentiating between

the ruling political elite and the Turkish people. The EU demonstrated that it would not become a partner to countries that did not share its values despite their geographic location. Despite the suspended accession process, according to the EUGS, the EU still saw Turkey as a key partner in areas like “*migration, counterterrorism, energy, transport, economy and trade*” (The EU Global Strategy in Practice-Three years on, looking forward). The important role that the country played in dealing with the consequences of the Arab Spring in the MENA region meant that it was seen more as an ally than a threat on EU level.

In sum, the EU does not appear to be troubled by territorial infringements or traditional military threats in its borders. I attribute this to the fact that most countries are NATO members and choose the Alliance as the platform to deal with those questions. In addition, the EU does currently not possess the mechanisms or capacities to deal with armed conflicts so it would not make sense to manifest problems related to military forces on an EU level. The strength of the Union lies in the solving of other, non-conventional problems like meddling in internal affairs, subversion and propaganda. It tries to counter the negative effects of these challenges through education and promoting a shared sense of identity both across the continent and on a national level.

That being said, the EU currently puts a lot of focus on developing the European Defence Fund (EDF), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and military research and development projects. As noted by Commission President Juncker: “*Soft power is not enough in our increasingly dangerous neighborhood*” (SOTEU 2016). The ultimate goal would be to create a “*fully-fledged European Defence Union*” (SOTEU 2017) – a desire shared by EU member states and NATO.

Currently, the biggest challenge for the EU’s foreign policy is to act in a unitary manner. This means that the values that all member states share are the minimal point of contention when trying to make decisions in a qualified majority voting system and thus freedom, equality and the rule of law are the factors that define contacts and relations with other actors.

### c. Turkey

As a start, it is important to understand who determines what constitutes a security threat to Turkey. The national security policy document, known as the Red Book, is devised by the National Security Council (NSC) consisting of the head of the Turkish Armed forces, select members of the Council of Ministers, and the President of the Republic. It can only be revised in years ending with five or zero. The drafting of the Red book is “*institutionalized around a broad and ambiguous national security concept; and... concealed behind a veil of secrecy*” (“Security sector in Turkey: questions, problems, and solutions”). The result of this is a lack of knowledge in the public sphere, especially in English.

As a multiethnic country, radicalism and separatism were the cornerstones of Turkish threat perception. In addition, due to its geographic location between several major powers prone to violent conflict, Turkey played the role of a transit country even before the Arab Spring. As Ahmet Davutoğlu took the position of Foreign Affairs Minister in 2009, the country began adopting a more active role in managing its regional geopolitical ambitions. As

described in the section about neo-Osmanism, a lot more emphasis was put on soft power and developing friendly relations with all neighboring countries. As Ankara's influence in the Balkans, the Caucuses and the Middle East grew, NATO attempted to take advantage of this position and offered Turkey to host the radar component of an Alliance missile defense system – an initiative led by the US (“Turkey’s Security Challenges and NATO”). Here, it is important to note that this project received a lot of negative attention from Russia and Turkey insisted that it was presented as a part of the NATO defense plan and attempted to largely exclude the US from operating the system so as to not antagonize Moscow.

In 2010 the Red Book received an update in accordance with the new “zero problems” foreign policy plan. Greece, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia and Russia were removed from the list of “threatening countries”, signaling a silent revolution in the NSC. While previous versions saw Moscow as a competitor in the Caucasus region and in the fields of oil, gas and energy supply, the new document opened possibilities for cooperation and even joint solutions with the Kremlin. It must be noted that separatism and undermining the stability of the country still came high on the agenda, as Erdoğan condemned parallel state structures and identified the Gülenist movement as a major threat even before the coup attempt in 2016 (“The Red Book: The Bible of Turkish Foreign Policy”; “Turkey Analysis: What Does Ankara’s New “Red Book” of Threats Mean?”; “National Security Council under Erdoğan updates top secret national security ‘book’”). The possibility of a peaceful solution with Greece in key areas like the status of Cyprus meant that the EU could engage in dialogue with Ankara. The culmination of bilateral relations was the deal on migrant management and the promises to Turkey for visa liberalization and speeding up the accession process.

At the same time, relations with Russia seemed worsened due to the downing of the Russian jet in 2015 and the violations of human rights of Crimean Tatars during the annexation of Crimea (“Turkey will continue to defend the rights and interests of the Crimean Tatars”; “Erdoğan: Turkey to defend Crimean Tatars under any circumstances”). After an official apology from Ankara, however, the previous status quo was quickly restored (“Seeking to Improve Ties with Russia, Turkey Apologizes for Downing Warplane”).

The 2016 coup attempt seemingly marked a stark shift in Turkey’s foreign policy alignments. Erdoğan criticized the West and the US in particular for supporting the Kurdish and Gülenist movements; the Netherlands and Germany were described as “Nazis” for not allowing Turkish political rallies in their territory. Hundreds of NATO personnel were sacked or even imprisoned and Turkey decided to switch to the Russian S-400 missile system (“Erdoğan accuses Germany of 'Nazi practices' over blocked political rallies”; “Turkey's Erdoğan calls Dutch authorities 'Nazi remnants’”; “Defence and Security Policy of the Turkish Republic”; “Turkey’s Security Challenges and NATO”). In reality, however, these developments have led to very little changes in how Ankara conducts its foreign policy. Separatism was still the biggest threat that the country faced, and EU accession remained a top priority for the long-term. Despite rising antagonisms, Turkey has firmly aligned itself with the West while also maintaining its commitments to regional partners like Russia (“Defence and Security Policy of the Turkish Republic; Turkey’s Security Challenges and NATO”). At the same time, NATO and the EU cannot risk isolating Turkey because it is an indispensable strategic partner, so they are willing to look over rhetorical actions. Further,

these statements were generally made in front of a domestic audience, drawing a parallel between European and Turkish identities and juxtaposing the two in an attempt to gather political dividends.

The biggest change that has occurred as a result of the coup attempt was the restructuring of the NSC that took place after the 2017 referendum (“Turkey’s National Security Architecture post April 16 Referendum”; “Consolidating the Pillars; Rule of Law Perceptions in Turkey”). According to the EU accession chapters, the role of the military in the political life of the country had to be limited. The new constitutional amendments concentrated a lot of the decision-making power in the hands of the President and consolidated Erdoğan’s grasp of the country even more.

The results of securitization processes in Turkey can be summed up in several key positions. As a member of NATO and with a modern army, the country does not seem to feel threatened by outside military interference. This gives Ankara the freedom and flexibility to choose its allies without being coerced by force. Even momentary clashes of interest are quickly overcome due to the foreign policy doctrine of maintaining friendly relations with its neighbors. This could further be explained by looking at trade volumes (OEC, 2019) – Turkey’s biggest trading partners are the US, several EU countries and Russia. With economic development being one of the key elements in maintaining popular support in illiberal elective democracies, it is easy to see the benefit of adopting a “balancing act” approach. The red line for the country, however, lies in internal secessionist movements. Turkey has tried to promote the identity of a modern secular Muslim state that is a key player in several regions of the world. However, the repressions in the post-2016 coup reality have made it increasingly difficult to keep a tight grip on the country while avoiding both civil and international backlash.

#### d. The Russian Federation

In the period 2007-2019, Russia has continuously followed the same foreign policy agenda. Even reactions to major regional events such as the aftermath of the wars in Georgia and Ukraine and the downing of the Russian fighter jet by Turkey were based on the fundamental line that Moscow has had in the past decade.

As a start, one argument made by the presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is that the unipolar world must come to an end and that the West, led by the US, should give way to a restructuring of the balance of power (as presented in all Annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly (AAFA) and Addresses to the UN). In this new era of international relations, it is Russia that should be one of the major actors since it is the one that upholds the ideals of democracy, rule of law and cooperation and all the crises in the world today are merely the death throes of a dying world order that can no longer promote “*the non-use of force; peaceful settlement of disputes; sovereignty; territorial integrity; non-interference in internal affairs*” (UN: 62nd sess. 2007; 73rd sess, 2018). Maintaining this position serves a valuable purpose. On the surface, Russia is playing by the rules of the Liberal World Order established after the fall of the Berlin wall and can thus take the role of a moral compass – an important message in Russian propaganda. The end goal

would be to “*do everything possible to make the world a fairer and safer place*”(AAFA, 2007), while conveniently leaving out who the world would be fairer to.

Secondly, evoking the spirit of the Cold War, Russia has set off to create its own parallel structures as an answer to NATO and the EU, namely BRICS, the Eurasian Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Allying itself with a number of G20 countries, Russia is trying to move beyond its regional ambitions and is attempting to claim a role on a global scale while also reducing the relative influence of the US.

Next, a continuous grievance from Moscow is the feeling of losing grasp of its sphere of influence. From the Kremlin’s point of view, the so-called “end of history” was used as a pretext for the West to expand its geopolitical control without consulting other actors on the world stage. NATO is accused of wanting to “*recreate the climate of the Cold War*” (UN: 72nd sess, 2017) and the US is continuously pointed at as the actor who works “*behind the scenes*” (AAFA, December 2014; AAFA, Crimea Speech; AAFA 2012). America, in particular, is considered as the main conspirator against Moscow, is blamed for “*influencing Russia’s relations with its neighbors*” (AAFA, December 2014) and forcing democratization instead of allowing peoples to naturally reach that point of their political development. The “*policy of ultimatums and a philosophy of superiority and domination*” (UN: 69th sess. 2014) are seen as the logical reasoning of why cooperation with the US is impossible. Collaboration with the EU and Turkey, on the contrary, is possible as long as the US is renounced. The EU, and Germany in particular, is presented as a constructive and credible partner on numerous occasions, typically as an analogue to relations with Washington. Cooperation with Turkey saw a rough period after the downing of the Russian jet in which the act by Ankara was seen as unprovoked and disproportionate and a “*stab in the back*” (Turkey downing of Russia jet 'stab in the back' – Putin). Ultimately, Putin stressed the traditionally close relations between the two nations and said that Moscow was “*ready to cooperate with Turkey on all the most sensitive issues it had; we were willing to go further, where its allies refused to go*” (AAFA 2015). By seeking dialogue on an individual basis, Russia is trying to isolate the US’ strategic partners and sow discord within NATO. The Kremlin, for example, offered Europe a new security architecture with the EU as one signatory and Russia as the other. If realized, that would have meant a huge loss of American influence on the continent, while also giving Russia leverage. Not as one out of the 28 member states, but as an entity equal in influence to the EU as a whole.

The last foreign policy line is that of the shared sense of identity both within and outside Russia’s borders. During his 2007 speech, Putin described the search for a national idea as an old tradition and favorite pastime for Russians. Moscow has full-heartedly adopted this idea. The goal then would be to convince the majority of the populace that what the Kremlin does is 1) effective and 2) in the benefit of the people. Humiliated and isolated after the collapse of the USSR, Moscow wants to demonstrate that it can “*take its deserved place in the world*” and is the vanguard against evil, much like during the Great Patriotic War in the past. It is precisely Russia that promotes the “*proper*” values – namely morality, based on religion, customs and traditions, spiritual unity, unique cultural identity and basic family principles (UN: 64th sess, 2009; UN 73rd sess, 2018; AAFA 2007; AAFA 2008). Moscow has allegedly called for equal, open and fair relations but received no reciprocity while “*being*

*lied to many times, made decisions behind [its] backs and placed [it] before accomplished facts*” (AAFA Crimea Speech). In that sense, the West is promoting decadence and moral degradation so there could never be any trust towards it. Moreover, Russia has put forward a narrative that “*if you are Russian speaking, then you are Russian*” and do not belong to any other nation. Moscow has an obligation to protect you even if it means infringing on another nation’s sovereignty. This was the justification used in South Ossetia, Crimea, Transnistria and the Baltic Republics (“Putin Widens Citizenship Offer to All Residents of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk Regions”).

To conclude, the triptych of Russian foreign policy is a balance of “*economic, civilizational and military forces*”. Despite of using traditional realist tools in its arsenal and viewing the world through a realist lens with international anarchy, spheres of influence, the balance of power and “*might makes right*” mentality, Moscow also looks at non-conventional instruments to affect international relations and promote cooperation where it finds it useful. It attempts to create a messianic image of itself in order to convey an impression of invincibility both for its allies and enemies.

## **7. Conclusions**

To conclude, the Black Sea Region – an area characterized by over-securitization and intense power competition – shows us that multiple levels of analysis are needed to adequately account for the characteristics demonstrated by geopolitical actors’ foreign policy doctrines. In an increasingly complex world with the capacity for mutual nuclear destruction, regional and international geopolitical players must go beyond the classical doctrines of realism and use more non-materialistic concepts like identity, culture and trust. Securitization theory, then, provides a flexible framework that allows aspects from different theoretical schools to be combined in order to reflect on empirical examples. It also shows that countries do not become enemies at the flip of a switch – there are historical antagonisms at play and single incidents have to be distinguished from persistent security threats.

The data shows that NATO still follows a mainly realist perception of security in its neighborhood in general and in the BSR specifically. However, in recent years the Alliance also addressed aspects such as information warfare and cultural identity to manage hybrid conflicts. Internal divisions pose new challenges, which the organization has yet to overcome if it wants to continue projecting its power in the BSR. NATO has demonstrated the ability to adapt and the past should serve as an example of how to better deal with challenges posed by other actors.

Since the EU is – in juxtaposition to NATO – no traditional security provider in the BSR, its focus lies on non-conventional challenges by promoting a shared sense of identity, both across the continent and on a regional level. Despite the ongoing but still insignificant mobilization through the Common Security and Defense Policy, the EU massively struggles to act in a unitary manner in the BSR and beyond. The Union has made significant strides in better managing conflicts though the use of economic and soft power tools, however, it must

further develop its doctrine while finding a consensus between the foreign policy approaches of its member states.

Turkey is following the flexible and pragmatic strategy of “zero problems” in its neighborhood. Ankara’s economic and diplomatic objectives are threatened by potential hostilities in the region so notable attempts have been made to present the country as a mediator. Turkey’s goal, to be involved in the foreign policy calculations of the major actors in the BSR, have put it in a position where, despite seemingly anchored to the West, it still manages to maintain close ties with Russia. As long as its national sovereignty is not questioned by internal secessionist movements, it could be argued that Ankara will maintain its strategy of balancing between camps.

Russia has consistently attempted to regain its position as a World Power by trying to promote international structures like BRICS and the Eurasian Union which could balance out the US and its allies. At the same time, it has exploited societal divisions to spur up conflicts in NATO and the EU’s “backyards” in order to limit their expansion and challenge their hegemony. Moscow’s meddling in the internal affairs of nations should also serve as a warning to both organizations’ member states, especially those that have significant Russian-speaking populations. Targeting the economic stability of the country has proved to be an effective reaction to the Kremlin’s aggression, especially in the context of declining oil and gas prices. However, this poses the risk of alienating the Russian people in the long-term. An effective future approach might make use of promoting grassroots efforts by enhancing cross-border cooperation, while also isolating the ruling regime.

## **8. Appendix**

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[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions\\_151089.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_151089.htm?selectedLocale=en)

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