Writing “Eastness”: Romania and the Conundrum of Regionness in the Black Sea Area

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Abstract
The article sets out to explore how Romanian authorities have struggled to get rid of the border country syndrome through subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area once Romania joined the Euro-Atlantic community. The article examines how such subregional policies have performatively constituted Romania’s strategic identity in the area. Formally, all the subregional initiatives that the article addresses have drawn on an institutional logic of security. Informally, though, they promoted a geopolitical vision of security. Such a logic has sharply conflicted with the underlying security philosophy of both the European Union and other successful subregional initiatives in the area. Thus, instead of improving Romania’s level of regionness, these subregional policies have ended up creating more dividing lines in an already strained security environment. The article draws on David Campbell’s political criticism and shows how Romania’s security practices in the Black Sea area, instead of instilling Europeanness into the country’s strategic identity, have ended up reinforcing its “Eastness.”

Keywords
regionness, Eastness, subregionalism, the Black Sea, Romania

Introduction
Once Romania joined NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 2004, a major turn occurred in its security policies in the Black Sea area—from a closed-sea perspective, which is rather an “Eastern security perspective” (Malitaș & Dungaciu, 2014, p. 336), to an open-sea view. A signatory of the 1936 Montreux Convention, Romania promoted a closed-sea view for almost a century in the Black Sea area. From this perspective, only the riparian states are allowed to have military vessels in the Black Sea region in line with the provisos of the 1936 Montreux Convention. As a NATO member and, later on, as a member state of the European Union (EU), Romania has attempted to alter the 1936 Montreux Convention through different subregional policies that aimed at the internationalization of the Black Sea area.

This article seeks to trace a paradox regarding Romania’s strategic identity in the Black Sea area. According to Ciută (2008, p. 139), once Romania became a NATO member in 2004, it strived to demonstrate that it can solve both its neighborhood and its own security issues through integration. Romanian authorities have sought to deal with the issue of integration by promoting three subregional initiatives, that is, the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership (BSF), the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), and the Black Sea Flotilla (BSFt). Had they been successful, such initiatives would have increased both Romania’s military security in the Black Sea area and its political stature within the Euro-Atlantic community. Thus, as a country capable of creating regionness, Romania would have turned itself from a security consumer into a security provider. Consequently, a Romanian state capable of displaying regionness in the Black Sea area—namely, a state capable of creating good neighborhood relations in a complicated security environment—will not be labeled as “not yet European” (Kuus, 2007, p. 37) or as “Europe, but not Europe” (Mälksoo, 2010). The trouble with Romanian elites’ subregional initiatives is that they have all been anchored in a geopolitical logic instead of an institutional one (Ciută, 2008). Therefore, regionness has had nothing to do with creating a “cohesive (acting) subject or actorness” (Riggirozzi, 2012, p. 427) in the Black Sea area and everything to do with avoiding Romania’s “political marginalization” (Manoli, 2016) within the Euro-Atlantic community. In short, the military motives aside, Romania’s
subregional policies in the Black Sea region should also be read as an attempt of the Romanian elites to get rid of the “border country syndrome” (Ciută, 2008, p. 123) and to demonstrate the country’s newly acquired European strategic identity. The trouble with Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area is not that they failed. This article concerns itself with the fact that the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFr failed because they had massively drawn on a philosophy of securitization, that is, a geopolitical logic. Such a geopolitical logic sharply conflicts with the formal security vision of the EU, which, at least formally, draws on an anti-geopolitical view (Cooper, 2004; Kuus, 2014; Tocci, 2017). Moreover, Europe is also “a rhetorical pillar of foreign and security policy” (Kuus, 2007, p. 21). From this perspective, the Eastern countries’ lack of Europeanness has been inscribed through a discourse that lays emphasis on these countries’ ethnic nationalism and political practices that stems from traditional geopolitics (Kuus, 2007). Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area have revealed a security discourse completely anchored in a geopolitical logic. Not only that these subregional initiatives, that is, the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFr, have performatively constituted Romania’s strategic identity in the Black Sea area, but at the same time they put it at odds with “the very normative essence of ‘Europe’” (Ciută, 2008, p. 133). Driven by a geopolitical logic, instead of an institutional one, such a security discourse has systematically reinforced Romania’s Eastness.

In my view, Romania’s case is relevant for the following motives. First, Romania has been the only NATO member state in the Black Sea area which has constantly strived to alter the provisos of the 1936 Montreux Convention since 2004, when it joined NATO. Second, some authors argue that Romania joined both NATO and the EU mainly for strategic reasons, that is, a riparian state in the Black Sea region and its proximity to the Balkans (Asmus et al., 2004, p. 17; Gallagher, 2004, 2010). Arguably, one also needs to pay heed to the economic and political motives behind Romania’s accession to the Euro-Atlantic community. But if the security reasons have been prevalent, more weight needs to be placed on Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area to decipher the bearing of both NATO and the EU on the country’s strategic identity. Third, Romanian authorities have come up with three subregional initiatives to internationalize the Black Sea area and they all have failed. Fourth, and this is why I selected the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFr as relevant cases, Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area have all sought to create security through cooperation, despite the fact that they have been anchored in a geopolitical logic and thus prone to creating more dividing lines in an already strained security environment. In short, at least formally, Romania’s subregional initiatives aimed at increasing the general level of regionness of the Black Sea area. Informally, though, due to their underlying geopolitical logic, such initiatives have not improved the weak sense the riparian states had already had of “sitting in the same boat.”

It followed the paradox that, instead of strengthening Romania’s Europeanness, the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFr ended up reinforcing Romania’s Eastness.

Previous articles that have paid heed to Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area employed mainly a why approach, which focused on tracing the reasons why these initiatives have failed (Angelescu, 2011; Ivan, 2016; Milevschi, 2016). The trouble with the above-mentioned articles is that they are inclined to assess Romania’s regional initiatives in the Black Sea area in the dichotomous terms logic of consequences versus logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998), according to which the initiatives in question are insincere because they stem not from intrinsic or normative motivations, but exclusively from extrinsic or strategic motivations. This approach is reductive, as all ideal-typical approaches. The behavior of a state may be impelled by distinct reasons, that is, “by both normative and strategic considerations, but their overall balance might vary from dimension to dimension as well as in aggregate” (Petrova, 2014, p. 97). Moreover, a state can pursue strategic objectives through different types of foreign policy: normative, realpolitik, imperial, and status quo (Tocci, 2008, pp. 12–13). This article employs a how approach and draws massively on “political criticism” (Campbell, 1998b, p. 5). An inquiry guided by political criticism pays heed to “how something is what it is rather than what it means (or why it is what it is)” (Campbell, 1998b, p. 5). In my view, what has stabilized Romania’s strategic identity in the Black Sea area is not only the fact that its subregional projects in the region have systematically failed and, thus, revealed the country’s inability to create regionness. Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area have reinforced its Eastness mainly because they have systematically drawn on a geopolitical logic, that is, a philosophy of securitization, that sharply contradicts with the EU’s “sacred identity” (Risse, 2010, p. 28). In short, the Romanian state’s strategic identity has been “written” in the Black Sea area (Weber, 1995) mainly by the underlying geopolitical logic of its subregional initiatives. Writing “Eastness” has been tantamount to writing lack of regionness, that is, writing insecurity.

The article unfolds as follows. In the first section, the article addresses the question of regionness. Then, it seeks to demonstrate that, by enforcing regionness, Romanian elites aimed at getting rid of Eastness. In short, Romanian elites hoped that through successful strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area, Romania would demonstrate that it internalized the sacred identity of the EU. The last section addresses the impossibility of creating regionness in the Black Sea area in a geopolitical manner. It also reveals how the underlying geopolitical logic of the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFr, instead of inscribing Eastness further East, has reinforced a marginal strategic identity for Romania within the Euro-Atlantic Community.

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Regionness, as an Attempt to Create Europeanness in the Case of Romania

One of the main assumptions this article works from is that regionalism, as a geopolitical program, is different from the process of regionalization which “implies increasing ‘regionness’” (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 458). In short, regions are socially constructed areas by reflective actors whose interests, ideas, and identities are negotiated in the very process of interaction. In contrast to neoliberal institutionalism, which maintains that actors’ interests are predetermined, social constructivists argue that both interests and identities are shaped in the process of regionalization. The New Regionalism Theory (NRT), which draws on the social constructivist perspective, presents the process of regionalization as creating different levels of regionness. The higher the level of regionness, the more coherent and integrated are the identity and interests of the regional states. In short, the higher the level of regionness, the more effective the actor-ness of a given region. “Regionness defines the position of a particular region in terms of regional cohesion” (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 461). Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) have come up with five generalized levels of regionness, that is, the regional space, the regional complex, the regional society, the regional community, and the region-state. The first three generalized levels are characterized by low levels of regionness, in the sense that there is hardly a sense of “sitting in the same boat” among the member states. In short, the socialization process the regional members have gone through has created, at best, a “first type internalization” (Risse, 2010) of regional values, that is, agreed general rules for institutional interaction at a regional level. Moreover, this first type internalization tends to emerge only in the case of the regional society, that can be called a “‘formal’ or de jure region” (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 464). Regional community, which stands for the fourth level of regionness according to the taxonomy that Hettne and Söderbaum have put forward, already transcends old state borders. In other words, regional community is tantamount to a security community, that is, a high level of regionness, which makes inconceivable the solving of conflicts through “violent means between, as well as within, former states” (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 466). Finally, the highest level of regionness is substantiated in the region-state. In this case, a “second type internalization” of the regional values has already occurred (Risse, 2010) that leads to the formation of regional emotions underpinned by regional symbolic networks. In addition, decision-making processes are no more centralized but layered. Based on the provisos of the Maastricht Treaty, the contour of the EU is synonymous to that of a region-state. Emerson (2013), who also draws on a social constructivist perspective, scrutinizes regionness as an inter-subjective process of constructing a common space by different actors through forms of behavior and practices of identity that are seen as acceptable. In this case, regionness also points to the construction of inter-subjectivity at a regional level, that is, what the members of a region share through “inter-subjective beliefs, ideas and rituals” (p. 15). In contrast to structuralist perspectives, which hold that regional interests are pre-given, Emerson (2013) argues that “a study of regionness is thus a study of how a regional space is configured” (p. 8). Thus, by bringing into relief the politics of regionness, one gets a grasp on “whose region is constructed and how” (Emerson, 2000, p. 9). Riggiorozzi (2011) argues that one needs to get over both “regionalism as a coherent model, and regionness as a cohesive (acting) subject or actorness” (p. 427). Otherwise, a researcher might run into trouble in explaining why allegedly similar regional processes have produced divergent outcomes. Thus, in contrast to Hettne and Söderbaum (2000), who addressed the question of regionness in terms of region as actor, Riggiorozzi (2012) tackles regionness as “region-as-arenas for action” (p. 423). “Dynamics in these arenas are driven by different actors, projects of integration, linkages mechanisms, institutional structures and distributive consequences” (Riggiorozzi, 2012, p. 427).

The trouble with Romania’s subregional initiatives is that they do not perfectly gel with either regionness understood as actorness or with regionness understood as “region-as-arenas for action.” Formally, the three subregional initiatives that I bring into discussion have all aimed at solving Romania’s and its neighborhood’s security problems through integration. Consequently, Romania’s subregional projects in the Black Sea area have been attempts that aimed at turning the region into a cohesive actor. In short, BSF, BSS, and BSFt have all been anchored in an institutionalist logic. Informally, though, the above-mentioned subregional projects have massively drawn on a geopolitical logic. Consequently, Romania’s attempts to increase its regionness are rather tantamount with the perspective of “region-as-arenas for action” (Riggiorozzi, 2012).

According to Ciută (2008), once Romania became a NATO member, it projected its strategic identity onto the Black Sea area along three lines (p. 139). The first one brought into relief the pros and cons of Romania’s geostrategic position, as a border country of the Euro-Atlantic community. The second one stressed Romania strategic role at the crossroads of civilizations, whereas the last one highlighted the issue of integration as a solution to the security problems of both Romania and its strategic vicinity. The article addresses especially the latter aspect of Romania’s strategic identity. Romanian authorities have sought to deal with the issue of integration by promoting three subregional initiatives. As a country capable of creating regionness, Romania would have turned from a security consumer into a security provider. In short, Romania’s subregional initiatives could be read from both a strategic and a normative perspective. But the article moves beyond the logic of consequences versus the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998), and argues that Romanian elites’ strategic initiatives in the
Black Sea area have “written” the Romanian state in the very process of forging its strategic identity. For, by promoting subregional initiatives that have drawn on a geopolitical logic, instead of an institutional one, Romanian authorities have managed to instill more Eastness, instead of more Europeanness, into Romania’s strategic identity in the region. Subregional initiatives that are anchored in a philosophy of securitization have nothing to do with the EU’s “sacred identity” (Risse, 2010, p. 28), which revolves around especially an institutional logic and a philosophy of desecuritization. In short, the EU’s strategic identity (Schmidt & Zyla, 2013) draws on an anti-geopolitical logic.

States usually go through a process of international pre-socialization within subregional international organizations before they acquire membership in wider regional projects (Risse & Sikkink, 1999, p. 5). This is why Romania became a member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the early 1990s. Also, Romanian diplomacy initiated an interesting “trilateral diplomacy” out of which would-be subregional partnerships occurred, such as Romania–Ukraine–Poland, Romania–Hungary–Austria, Romania–Bulgaria–Turkey, and Romania–Bulgaria–Greece (Severin, 2015). Eventually, such initiatives turned out to be “‘mainly rhetorical’, ‘dormant’ or ‘defunct’” (Collins, 2009, p. 265). This pre-international socialization is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the success of international socializing inside organizations such as NATO or the EU. What’s striking about Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area is that they were promoted not prior to, but after, Romania’s integration into the NATO and EU. Consequently, such initiatives should also be scrutinized from an identity perspective. Arguably, the internationalization of the Black Sea area has had a normative dimension, that is, exporting liberal-type democracy in the Black Sea area. In doing this, Romania intended to contribute to the mitigation of the political and economic unpredictability of the former Soviet Republics (Petrova, 2014). As such, through the initiation of subregional projects, Romania would generate security for itself, for the EU’s neighbors, and, implicitly, for the EU. Consequently, at least from a normative perspective, Romania’s subregional initiatives could be read as a security discourse that aimed at “inscribing Eastness further East” (Kuus, 2007). This has been a tactic that Central European countries resorted to in order to get rid of their “Eastness” (Kuus, 2007).

**Getting Rid of “Eastness”**

As noted above, Romania’s subregional projects in the Black Sea area could be read as a twofold tactic, that is, instilling Europeanness into Romania’s strategic identity and simultaneously purging it of Eastness. In short, by increasing their country’s level of regionness in the Black Sea area, Romanian authorities have sought to solve Romania’s security problems in the region and, at the same time, to inscribe their country’s Eastness further East. This section addresses some practices that reinforced Romania’s Eastness after the fall of the Berlin Wall. But prior to revealing these practices, I highlight the nexus between Europeanness and Eastness.

According to Thomas Risse (2010), the 1993 Copenhagen criteria—namely, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy—have been the elements of the EU’s “sacred identity” (p. 28). Like any other type of identity, sacred identity has its own alterity. The novelty of the sacred identity of the EU lies in the possibility for out-group members to convert to “true faith” (Risse, 2010, p. 28). The “conversion” that Risse refers to has been carried out through the international socialization process, which has produced democratization in the case of would-be members of the EU. It follows that the lower the degree of internalization of the “sacred identity” of the EU, the more pronounced the former Communist countries’ own “Eastness.” The “Eastness” discourse essentially represents a “moral geopolitics” (Boatcă, 2015, p. 214) which gives rise to a moral geography of the continent, with direct impact on the strategic identity of former Communist countries. Moral geopolitics is equivalent to the strategic narrative of Western exceptionalism, namely, a civilization discourse that places the founding states of the EU at the top of a value hierarchy designed by themselves. Such a moral geopolitics has engendered the internal otherness of the EU, which tends to be a rather relative one (Triandafyllidou, 2001). However, these internal alterities have turned themselves into absolute ones in some specific situations. The typical example is that of political narratives that have securitized Roma immigrants. Once they have been defined as a security threat, Roma immigrants have been perceived as carriers of an ethno-religious past that represents the absolute otherness of the EU (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. 3). In this way, the ethno-religious past, the most important constituent of the EU’s absolute otherness, has been projected upon the countries of origin of Roma immigrants. Consequently, these countries’ level of Eastness has constantly increased, due to the fact that a temporal alterity has gained geographical connotation. In most cases, the difference between Europeanness and Eastness is one of degree, not of species. “The Other is differentiated not in terms of being not European, insecure or non-democratic, but in terms of being not ‘fully’ or ‘truly’ or ‘not yet’ European” (Kuus, 2007, p. 37). However, such a difference of degree may turn into one of species, once a post-colonial discourse starts projecting different elements of the core countries’ absolute otherness onto the strategic identity of the former communist states. It is already commonsensical that the enlargement of the EU gave rise to a “multitiered Europe” (Kuus, 2007), whose Europeanness is diluted as it progresses toward border states. For this reason, former Communist states that have become members of the EU have been striving “to shift the European discursive border further towards the new Eastern neighbors of the EU” (Mälksoo, 2010, p. 30). Thus, states that—through strategic
narratives and regulatory strategic initiatives—fail to push further the EU’s civilization border towards the East will reproduce, on the level of perceptions, their own deficit of Europeanness.

Tulmets (2014) shows that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former Communist countries began the process of “returning to Europe” (p. 25). Essentially, returning to Europe was understood as a reentry into modernity, and reentry into modernity was conditioned by NATO and EU integration. At first glance, the return to Europe involved only a one-way process, namely, the adoption of the values and institutions of liberal democracy. However, the process of returning to Europe was bidirectional. Former communist countries, besides having to adopt the constitutional norms of liberal democracies, had to escape at the same time the status of boundaries of Western civilization. And repudiating any stigma represented by symbolic geography could only be accomplished by pushing the boundary of Western civilization toward the East. It is what Romanian elites did. President Băsescu declared in 2007, the year of Romania’s accession to the EU, that Romania wished the Republic of Moldova to have the same chances of EU integration as the Western Balkan states. In fact, President Băsescu stressed that support for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova is ‘Romania’s soul project’ (Tulmets, 2014, p. 121). President Băsescu also declared that Romania supports the export of democratic values to the Ukraine, allowing its people to benefit from stability, democracy, and prosperity. Therefore, Romania’s geostrategic initiatives in relation to the Republic of Moldova, the Ukraine, and the Black Sea can also be construed as attempts made by Bucharest to push the border of Western civilization toward the East, and thus to mitigate its specific political status of border state.

I now turn to some (geo)political practices through which Romania’s “Eastness” has been consolidated after 1989. First of all, Romania’s “Eastness” stems from the communist era. In the late 1980s, had a ranking of the brutality of political regimes in Central and South-Eastern Europe been plotted, Romania would have easily won the first place. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2006) shows that, in 1989, Romania had “the worst totalitarian regime of post-Communist Europe” (p. 310). Romania was perceived, in the early 1990s, as having an anti-reformist and anti-democratic predilection, especially because of the last decade of the Communist regime (Roper, 2000, p. 65). If, in the 1960s and 1970s, Romania opened up to the West—witness, in this sense, the period between 1962 and 1972, also called “the decade of opening”—the 1980s represented a true “decade of closure,” on a background of tensions between Bucharest and Washington, as well as between Bucharest and Moscow. During the “decade of opening,” Romania had the most Western foreign policy among all the Warsaw Pact member states (Malița & Guirescu, 2011; Roper, 2000, p. 111). Witness the visits of the U.S. Presidents Nixon and Ford to Bucharest, as well as the fact that Romania was the first Eastern European country to become a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Also, Romania maintained trade relations with Western countries and received the “most favored-nation clause” from the United States. In the 1980s, Ceausescu’s sultanism, translated by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) as “unchecked authority,” materialized not only in accentuated international isolation but also in the persecution of various ethno-religious groups in Romania.

Second, another trait of Romania’s “Eastness” is represented by the strategic culture of the Bucharest elite in the early 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Romania was the only member of the Warsaw Pact to formally declare that it would comply with the provisions of the Treaty. The loyalty of post-Communist elites to the provisions of the Warsaw Treaty was declared not only on December 22, 1989, in the very beginning of a revolution that caused the overthrow of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, but also on January 6, 1990, on the occasion of the visit to Bucharest of Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union (Celac & Dungaciu, 2015). Romanian President Ion Iliescu even signed, on April 5, 1991, in Moscow, the Treaty on Cooperation, Good Neighborly Relations and Friendship between Romania and the USSR, but the Treaty was not ratified by the legislative bodies of the two States as following the events of August 1991, which led to the collapse of the USSR.

Third, Romania’s “Eastness” was reinforced by convening of Extreme Right parties to government in the 1990s. In 1995, the Social Democracy Party in Romania (SDPR), the ruling party, concluded a political alliance with extreme right parties, such as the Party of Romania National Unity (PRNU), the Great Romania Party (GRM), and the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), to stop anti-Romanian manifestations (Roper, 2000, p. 77). Linz and Stepan (1996) have termed this alliance as a “sinister ‘brown-red-sultanistic’ four-party ruling coalition” (p. 364). Therefore, there was hardly a surprise that in 1995 Romania was not yet a consolidated democracy, whereas its former communist counterparts, such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, had already made significant institutional steps toward democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Under such circumstances, a covenant emerged among Romanian politicians. Following the 1995 Snagov Covenant, President Ion Iliescu acted for Romania’s integration into NATO and the EU. For this reason, negotiations between Bucharest and Budapest for the signing of the treaty between Romania and Hungary began in July 1995. Both the GRM and SLP opposed this political approach, which is why the two parties were removed from government in August 1995. After signing the treaty between the two states, the SDPR also excluded the PRNU from government in September 1996. All these actions have had a decisive bearing on the way the ruling elite in Romania was perceived in the West. By the end of 1990, the West had already perceived the National Salvation Front (NSF), the forerunner of the SDPR, as a neo-Communist organization.
Unlike Solidarity or Charter '77, the NSF lacked democratic credentials and the vast majority of its members were the former *nomenklatura* (Gallagher, 2004, 2010; Roper, 2000, p. 112).

Fourth, Romania’s “Eastness” was reinforced by the economic reforms of the 1990s, initiated by the Ciorbea and Vasile governments. Shock therapy was triggered in Romania by the Ciorbea government in 1997. The negative social effects of shock therapy in Romania forced the Ciorbea government to rethink economic restructuring, which attracted mistrust from international financial institutions who hesitated, for a long time, to give Romania the status of a functioning market economy. A November 1998 report from the European Commission highlighted political and foreign policy developments made by Romania in the process of EU accession. At the same time, the report highlighted Romania’s significant delays in the economic sector, with a focus on limited privatization, financial indiscipline, and limited foreign direct investments (Gallagher, 2004, 2010; Roper, 2000, p. 119).

In contrast to Risse, who equates the EU’s “sacred identity” to human rights, the state of law, and market economy, Kuus (2007) argues that Europe also stands for “a rhetorical pillar of foreign and security policy” (p. 21). According to this security discourse, the ex-communist countries’ Eastness has been reinforced through political practices that stem from traditional geopolitics and ethnic nationalism (Kuus, 2007). I argue that Kuus loses sight of a cardinal constituent of the European security discourse, that is, the issue of corruption, that has continued to shape ex-communist countries’ Eastness. Through the rhetoric of corruption, both European officials and Romanian politicians have presented Romania as a “space of insecurity” (Ingram & Dodds, 2009) that lacks institutional predictability. Arguably, the bureaucracy in Romania is a low capacity one, dominated by a patrimonial logic and imbued with rent-seeking agents (Migdal, 1988). It is beyond the scope of this section to address either the deep-seated institutional causes of corruption in Romania or the corruption rhetoric as a post-colonial discourse. I just seek to bring into relief some institutional practices that have strengthened Romania’s Eastness. Some authors argue that Romania joined the Euro-Atlantic community mostly for strategic reasons (Asmus et al., 2004, p. 17; Gallagher, 2004, 2010), such as its vicinity to the Black Sea region and the Balkans. Therefore, the fact that Romanian institutions did not meet good government criteria was a well-known one when Romanian became a member of both NATO and the EU (Gallagher, 2004, 2010). However, Romania’s institutional performance within the Euro-Atlantic community has been systematically assessed with good governance criteria. The trouble is neither the criteria nor the fact that Romanian institutions have not yet met the benchmarks of good governance specific to the Euro-Atlantic community. The trouble is that, out of an assessment that has covered more than a decade, a discourse of Romania’s dispensability within the Euro-Atlantic community has emerged (Jackson, 2009). More precisely, reports of the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO), reports of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (MCV), and also lack of membership of the Schengen area have performatively constituted Romania’s Eastness, that is, the fact that Romania is “Europe, but not Europe” (Mälksoo, 2010). Jackson (2009) argues that, thanks to the discourse associated with the European Recovery Program, Germany “was firmly anchored in ‘the West’, reclaimed for ‘Western civilization’ as opposed to being turned over to ‘the East’” (p. 159). In my view, practices related to GRECO and MCV, the symbolism of not being a Schengen area member, and also self-orientalization practices of Romanian politicians that have won presidential elections with an anti-corruption rhetoric (Spendzharova & Vachudova, 2012) have systematically anchored Romania in “the East,” instead of reclaiming it for “the West.” In short, such practices have revealed that Romania has not yet become a “true believer” (Risse, 2010) and, from an identity perspective, constantly reinforced Romania’s Eastness.

One could easily notice Romania’s contentious record of institutional practices that had constantly reproduced its Eastness prior to joining NATO in 2004. Therefore, Romanian authorities planned to instill Europeanness into their country’s strategic identity through a sharp turn in their strategic vision on the Black Sea area, from a closed-sea view to an open-sea view for its strategic vision on the Black Sea area, from a closed-sea view to an open-sea perspective. However, Romania’s strategy to internationalize the Black Sea area consisted in subregional initiatives that drew massively on a geopolitical logic, instead of an institutional one.

### Writing “Eastness”: Creating Regionness in a Geopolitical Vein

David Campbell (1998a) maintains that “identity is constituted in relation to difference” (p. 9). In counterpoint to structuralist views that work from a foundational assumption of identity, that is, identity stems from nature, God or intentional behavior, Campbell argues that identity/difference is performatively constituted in its very operation. In other words, there is no difference, ontologically speaking, between identity and “the various acts that constitute its reality” (Campbell, 1998a, p. 9). In a post-structuralist view, identities are produced and reproduced through the formulation of foreign policy. Thus, “the relationship between identity and policy is constitutive or performative” (Hansen, 2006, p. 2). Campbell (1998a) maintains that there is no difference between the performative constitution of gender and the body, and the performative constitution of the state (p. 10). Naturally, one would like to have a better heuristic grasp on the acts made under the sign of the state that performatively constitute the state (Debrix, 1992; Dillon & Everard, 1992). According to Campbell (1998b), such acts range “from foreign and security policies to crises of intervention, immigration strategies, the
protocols of treaty-making, representational politics of the United Nations, and beyond . . .” (pp. 25–26). Campbell (1998a) adds that the above-mentioned acts systematically inscribe boundaries that demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’, a ‘self’ from an ‘other’, a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign’ (p. 9). He stresses the strong link between identity and foreign policy, the latter being a “practice of differentiation” that inscribes “a particular geography of evil in order to fix a state’s subjectivity” (Campbell, 1993, p. 98).

David Campbell has brought into relief how the U.S. authorities, through specific representations of the Soviet Union that were inserted in countless strategic documents, systematically reproduced an evil otherness. In contrast to Campbell, my analysis does not dissect the political representations included in Romania’s strategic documents about the Black Sea area due to two reasons. First, in the particular case of Romania, the otherness has always been rather internal instead of an external one, a trait particular to low capacity states that have had to deal mostly with “internal enemies” (Barany & Moser, 2005; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Second, I maintain that a given state’s “body language” (Hansen, 2006, p. 21) is revealed not only through written texts but also through “the movement of troops or undertaking of military exercises” (Hansen, 2006, p. 21). In short, language does not need to be only verbal (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). It could also be institutional, especially in the case of (geo)political interactions between low capacity states and their high capacity counterparts. “Discourses are embedded in practices and institutions that dominate Western encounters with the ‘Third World’” (Doty, 2002, p. 45). Considering that, once it joined NATO in 2004, Romania projected a Western security agenda in the Black Sea area, I argue that Romania’s subregional initiatives have been the most relevant part of its regional security discourse. Therefore, Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area, that is, BSF, BSS, and BSFt, could be read as texts that performatively constitute Romania’s strategic identity in the area. Consequently, in counterpart to Campbell’s view, I maintain that subregional projects such as BSF, BSS, and BSFt have performatively constituted Romania’s strategic identity in the Black Sea area not through particular representations of its geographical neighborhood. But rather through a security agenda anchored in a geopolitical logic that is in accordance neither with the security philosophy of subregional initiatives nor with the EU’s sacred identity. Both the former and the latter have been anchored in an institutional logic, that is, a philosophy of desecuritization. The geopolitical logic that has guided Romania’s subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area has already become “banal” considering that it has been the same since 2005. By promoting such a logic in an area with “little sense of regionness” (Ciută, 2008), Romania’s subregional initiatives have created new dividing lines and, consequently, insecurity.

I now turn to Romania’s subregional projects in the Black Sea region in an attempt to reveal their underlying geopolitical logic. This section does not pay heed to the motives that explain why BSF, BSS, and BSFt have failed. Instead, I seek to bring into evidence how the securitization philosophy that guided all the above-mentioned security policies turned into a security discourse that reinforced Romania’s Eastness in the Black Sea area and, thus, within the Euro-Atlantic community.

The BSF is the first regional initiative that Romanian authorities launched in the Black Sea area in 2005. Formally, the main purpose of BSF was to create a common vision about the Black Sea that was to be voiced by the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector of the riparian states. Informally, though, on the initial security agenda of BSF figured hard security concerns. Therefore, a significant cleavage occurred between the institutional logic and the geopolitical logic that impelled the BSF. The BSF’s objective was that civil society in the Black Sea states, and not the states themselves, should be able to develop and promote a common regional vision (Triantaphyllou, 2010). From this point of view, the BSF was supposed to be a form of “region- alism from below,” which had only limited success because it was underfunded and not politically supported by other states (Ivan, 2016). To some extent, the BSF doubled the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN), which was set up in 1998 as a regional, independent, and non-political association of NGOs in the Black Sea riparian states. With over 50 regional NGOs in place, BSNN’s goal was “to create and bring the importance of a healthy Black Sea and a sustainable future to the public’s attention” (Aydın, 2004, p. 28). It is worth mentioning that BSF was announced by Traian Băsescu during an official visit to Moscow in 2005, less than a year after Mr. Băsescu had won the presidential elections in Romania. Although the statement was made in Moscow “in very bold political terms” (Ivan, 2016, p. 161), President Băsescu’s initiative had no broad echoes in the Black Sea area. The only edition of the BSF took place in Bucharest in 2006, but without the participation of the Russian Federation. It was perceived as an attempt, both strategic and normative, to undermine the Turkish and Russian Federation Black Sea leadership in the area, because the BSF was built around the values of liberal democracy.

The general information about BSF aside, what really made this subregional initiative to stand out was the quick shift from a geopolitical logic to an institutional one. In an initial phase, the BSF’s security agenda comprised hard security concerns, such as “regional implications of the continuing ‘frozen’ conflicts,” “the implementation of the ‘Southern Flank’ provisions of the CFE Treaty,” and “broader issues of regional cooperation, including the feasibility of major transnational projects” (Manoli, 2016, p. 55). Romanian authorities knew that it was almost impossible to impose such an agenda to the riparian states that attended the first edition of the BSF in 2006. First of all, it is a common place in the realm of subregional studies that such initiatives are anchored in a philosophy of desecuritization (Dangerfield, 2001; Manoli, 2016). In other words, to be successful, subregional initiatives revolve around issues related to agriculture, tourism,
economy, the environment, and civil society, that is, low security concerns. In addition, all subregional initiatives that occurred in post–Cold War Europe removed from their security agenda “traditional notions of security cooperation (military alliances, arms control agreements and so on)” (Dangerfield, 2001) and concerned themselves with “more subtle, less ‘hard’ security functions” (Dangerfield, 2001, pp. 57–58). Second, Romanian authorities have witnessed the experience of the BSEC, the only subregional initiative that has survived in the Black Sea region since the early 1990s. What explicates the long institutional life of BSEC in an area endowed with a “little sense of regionness” (Ciută, 2008) is that BSEC has constantly removed from its security agenda hard security concerns. In other words, BSEC has always rested on an institutional logic that produced a “cumulative effect” (Manoli, 2016, p. 154) of stabilizing the region. Finally, Romanian authorities knew, based on the direct experience of the BSEC, that the economic factor has been the only one capable of creating a common political denominator among the riparian states in the Black Sea area. Under such circumstances, how come that Romanian authorities put forward a security agenda dominated by high security concerns at the BSF summit that took place in Bucharest in 2006? The explanation I come up with is that Romanian authorities intended to place an institutional project, such as the BSF, in a geopolitical framework. The outcome was an unsustainable subregional initiative. Besides the initial security agenda of the BSF, there are other hints of Romanian authorities’ geopolitical vision. First, as I have already pointed out, President Băsescu launched the idea of the BSF in Moscow. It is a common place in the remit of Black Sea studies, that the Russian Federation has always vetoes projects that aimed at the internationalization of the Black Sea. Along with Turkey, the Russian Federation has been the most important custodian of a closed-sea vision on the region. Second, the first and only edition of the BSF was a regional summit, which Ambassador Sergiu Celac assessed as a “tactical error” (Manoli, 2016, p. 55). Participant states perceived the summit as an expression of Romania’s ambition in the Black Sea area. And, indeed, Mr. Băsescu planned to turn Romania into a regional leader of the Black Sea area (Ivan, 2016, pp. 194–195). Third, the cardinal principle of President Băsescu’s vision regarding the Black Sea region was expressed in September 2005. Addressing the Romanian diaspora in San Francisco, President Băsescu stated that the Black Sea should not become a “Russian lake” (Ziarul de Iași.ro, 2005). Almost a decade later, at the 2014 Newport NATO Summit in Wales, Mr. Băsescu restated the essence of his administration’s policies in the region and stressed his intention to turn the Black Sea area into a “NATO lake” (click.ro, 2014). In my view, the initial agenda of the BSF, the profile of the 2006 regional summit, and President Băsescu’s rhetoric on the Black Sea region reveal the geopolitical vision beyond the BSF which contrasts sharply not only with the underlying logic of subregional initiatives but also the ideal type of Europeanness. The initial agenda of the BSF, dominated by high security concerns, produced two major diplomatic effects. First, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Bucharest did not formally attend the BSF Summit. Second, the representatives of Turkey and Greece stated that BSF was a copy of BSEC but with a high politics agenda. There was hardly a surprise that Russia, Turkey, and Greece did not support the initial security format of the BSF. Consequently, Romanian authorities put forward a different agenda, one that revolved around low security concerns. In short, Romanian authorities proposed that the NGO sector, instead of the riparian states, to address different problems specific to the Black Sea region. Thus, Romanian authorities made a significant shift from a geopolitical vision to an institutional logic overnight. The BSF’s new security agenda comprised no innovations. It just duplicated an already existing organization, namely, the BSNN (Aydin, 2004). Therefore, the BSF has had only one edition.

I now bring under scrutiny the BSS, which represented the first regional policy of the EU by the Black Sea (Weaver, 2016). Proposed by Romanian authorities at the BSF Summit in 2006, BSS was taken over by Germany and launched into the public space in April 2007. BSS marked a change in the EU’s vision—from bilateralism to regionalism. Through the BSS, the EU aimed at enhancing mutual trust at a regional level, but it also sought to propose a resolution of the frozen conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In the economy of this article, it is less important why BSS did not work. What matters is that the BSS, exactly like the BSF, was also anchored in a geopolitical logic, instead of an institutional one. The following aspects reveal the underlying geopolitical vision of the BSS. First, the BSS was an attempt of the Romanian authorities to bring the EU in the Black Sea region. Due to security reasons, that is, Romania’s small and backward navy incapable of providing military security in the Black Sea area (Sanders, 2014), Romanian authorities have also supported NATO’s Black Sea strategy, which aimed at a large naval presence. Tensions emerged between Bucharest and Ankara following the above-mentioned initiatives, considering that Ankara assessed the BSS as a competitor for the BSEC. Also, as a stark defender of status quo in the Black Sea area, Turkey did not want an increased military presence in the region. Consequently, instead of strengthening Romania’s level of regionness, such security policies put Romanian authorities at odds with the Turkish by creating a quasi-dividing line. In essence, regionness is more about cooperation and less about competition Second, by bringing NATO and the EU in the Black Sea area, Romanian authorities aimed at turning Romania into a regional leader (Ivan, 2016, pp. 194–195). Thus, the BSS was supposed to improve both Romania’s military security and its political stature in the region. Again, the geopolitical logic took prevalence over the institutional one. Third, the question of frozen conflicts that made it onto the BSS’s security agenda also accounts for the geopolitical underpinnings of this
subregional initiative. Romanian authorities backed the BSS for they perceived it as a support for the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). More precisely, Romanian authorities worked from the assumption that both the ENP and the BSS were to provide solutions for the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region, with a focus on Transnistria. Romania was specifically interested in the Transnistrian conflict and President Băsescu even stated that “we believe that the UE involvement in the region may bring its contribution to the solving of frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area” (dcnews.ro, 2014). Through the BSS, Romanian authorities continued to disseminate a high politics security agenda, that is, a geopolitical logic, in an already strained security environment. It is less important that the BSS failed due to the emergence of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which was better financed and was supported by more countries. What matters is that by insisting on a geopolitical logic, Romanian authorities failed to create security through cooperation. Eventually, and in a rather indirect manner, President Băsescu acknowledged that the geopolitical logic that impelled the BSS could not be a fruitful one.

For the time being, in the Black Sea region we’ve noticed the need for a pragmatic approach, focused on cooperation on less sensible areas, such as researches devoted to the environment protection, that at the same time may strengthen the current cooperation format. (dcnews.ro, 2014)

Therefore, in a rather implicit vein, President Băsescu argued that Romanian authorities needed to part ways with a high politics security agenda in the Black Sea area.

However, Romanian authorities kept promoting a geopolitical vision in the region as in the case of the following subregional initiative. BSFt was announced in January 2016 on the site of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense. The Ministry revealed the prospect of setting up a “flotilla” in the Black Sea under the name of BSFt. Then, President Iohannis took over the initiative and stated that NATO could effectively exploit the Black Sea through a “multinational naval grouping” (Drăghici, 2016). President Băsescu sought to internationalize the Black Sea region through a Freedom Agenda type security vision and by increasing the NATO’s naval presence in the region. In contrast to President Băsescu, President Iohannis completely abandoned Romania’s civilizing mission in the Black Sea area in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. Also, President Iohannis toned down the modification of the 1936 Montreux Convention. Yet, Mr. Iohannis continued to promote a geopolitical logic in the Black Sea region. For, irrespective of how one looked at it, the underlying logic of the BSFt continued to be a geopolitical one. In short, the BSFt also promoted an agenda dominated by high security concerns. The BSFt aimed at the internationalization of the Black Sea through a military mission that involved Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, that is, those riparian states which are also NATO members. In 2006, Turkey opposed the spillover of the Operation Active Endeavor into the Black Sea, while Romania and Bulgaria supported it. In 2016, Romanian authorities secured the endorsement of Turkish authorities for the BSFt but lost the support of Bulgaria. It is notable that high-ranking Bulgarian officials, such as the President and the Defense Minister, supported BSFt, whereas Prime Minister Borisov vetoed it. Again, it matters less that the BSFt was another failed subregional project of the Romanian authorities. Or that Romanian authorities defended their project by stating that BSFt had nothing to do with a NATO fleet. It was meant to be a naval cooperation between Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey for “joint exercises” under the aegis of NATO (Drăghici, 2016). What matters is that Romanian authorities kept promoting a geopolitical logic instead of an institutional one. Thus, Romania failed to increase its level of regionness once again and to create security through cooperation in the Black Sea area. Consequently, the Romanian state’s security discourse in the Black Sea area kept reinforcing Romania’s Eastness.

Conclusion

The article has sought to demonstrate that Romanian authorities have strived to get rid of the “border country syndrome” once their country joined the Euro-Atlantic community. To that end, Romanian authorities have initiated three subregional projects, that is, the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFt. More exactly, by promoting security through cooperation, Romania’s subregional initiatives were supposed to increase the country’s level of regionness in an area traditionally characterized by manifold dividing lines. In contrast to prior approaches of Romania’s security policies in the Black Sea area, that have employed either neo-realist or constructivist views, this article has addressed the Eastness component of Romania’s strategic identity in a rather post-structuralist vein. In other words, the article has worked from the assumption that the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFt have been an integral part of the Romanian state’s “body language” in the Black Sea area. Thus, the BSF, the BSS, and the BSFt have performatively constituted Romania’s strategic identity in the region.

One of the main assumptions the article has worked from is that getting rid of the “border country syndrome” is actually tantamount to getting rid of Eastness. Due to different historical and institutional practices that had reinforced Romania’s Eastness after the end of the Cold War era, Romanian elites have strived to instill Europeanness into their country strategic identity through different subregional initiatives in the Black Sea area. If such initiatives would have been successful, Romania would have turned from a security consumer into a security provider. The article has paid little heed to the motives that explicate the failure of Romania’s strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area. Instead, the article has brought into discussion the underlying geopolitical logic of all these initiatives. The trouble with such a logic is that it sharply contrasts with both the institutional
logic of all successful subregional initiatives that emerged in post–Cold War Europe and the security logic of the EU. In short, an institutional logic lays emphasis on low security concerns, whereas subregional initiatives guided by a geopolitical logic tend to promote a high politics security agenda. Thus, a geopolitical logic, instead of creating security through cooperation or integration, is rather prone to creating new dividing lines. Romania’s subregional initiative in the Black Sea area have also demonstrated that Romania’s security discourse is rather NATO-prone and less adapted to the security vision of the EU.

Strategically, the trouble with Romania’s subregional initiatives is that they all have failed and, thus, Romania has not been able to demonstrate that it can turn from a security consumer into a security provider. Discursively, though, the trouble with these initiatives is that their underlying logic has been a geopolitical one. Thus, Romania has not been able to get rid of Eastness by inscribing it further East. Consequently, Romania has retained, or even reinforced, its level of Eastness. Merje Kuss has pointed out that Eastern countries’ lack of Europeanness has been inscribed though a discourse that lays emphasis on these countries’ ethnic nationalism and political practices that stems from traditional geopolitics (Kuus, 2007). By scrutinizing three subregional initiatives that have covered more than a decade, the article has revealed that the geopolitical logic has already become a banal one in the particular case of Romania’s security policies in the Black Sea area. This is how Romanian elites, by systematically favorizing a geopolitical logic over an institutional one, have brought their own contribution to inscribing Eastness on their country’s strategic identity.

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