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The changes that followed the collapse of Communism in Europe had generated, among other things, intense debates about the future and role of the Black Sea region. Political approaches to the future of the Black Sea countries, both domestically and abroad, have, more and more often, described the Black Sea as a regional unit. It has been implied that, due to their common recent past, the peoples of the Black Sea need regional solutions to common problems.

The next issue of VJHS is dedicated to the issues raised by the Black Sea at the beginning of the new century. By exploring the history and the interactions of the region, this issue tries to offer answers to a number of questions raised by the concept of Black Sea regional cooperation, in the context of globalization and European integration:

- 1) Is the Black Sea a bridge between Europe and Asia? Historical precedents encourage us to see the Black Sea, from the European perspective, as a gateway to Asia, through which new bridges of economic and political cooperation can be established, connecting the Balkans and Caucasians;
- 2) Does or can the Black Sea play a role in redefining the national identities of the Black Sea nations, as a step towards a future regional identity?
- 3) Does the Black Sea represent a political and psychological barrier between spaces of different historical backgrounds or is it a link able to create opportunities and regional solidarity?

Throughout history, the Black Sea area has been controlled by a single power, be it the Byzantine Empire in the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Empire during modernity or the Soviet Union in the 20th century. The dismantling of the Soviet Union created a vacuum in the region, from a hegemonic point of view. It is still an open question whether or not these centuries of single-power domination have built common traditions, values and interests, able to offer the social and cultural background for furthering economic and political cooperation. The Black Sea countries are in the position to develop cooperation without pressures from a hegemonic power, by constructing paths and defining interests according to each country's specificity. Most of the countries in the area are small states, which are insufficiently developed and without solid infrastructure. Their trade is oriented mostly towards other spaces. After 1991, cooperation was delayed by a low rate of structural reforms. This could not offer the institutional framework for a long-term cooperation. Other questions are raised by this situation:

- Can regional cooperation stimulate growth in the Black Sea basin?
- Can regional cooperation substitute a hegemonic power?

Russia's position in the Black Sea basin is also an open question. Russia's quest for international society after 1991, as shown recently by Hanna Smith, relies on a »Great Power politics« approach, in which Moscow pursues its foreign interests by trying to consolidate its position as a regional power. A basic presumption of Russian foreign policy makers is that Russia is a Great Power and should settle key issues of foreign politics through arrangements with other Great Powers, in a 19th century Viennese style.

The countries on the Balkan coast of the Black Sea are not very willing to accept Russia as a hegemonic power, as shown by their EU and NATO memberships. Turkey follows a similar policy, in which the historical caution regarding Russia's intentions at the Straits also plays an important role. As proved by recent developments, some Caucasian states are more inclined towards a Western-oriented foreign policy (see Georgia). In these conditions, will Russia be able to become a long-term member of a Black Sea partnership renouncing its hegemonic aspirations? Other potential conflicts in the area are determined by territorial disputes involving mainly Ukraine but also its neighbors as well (like Moldova). A regional solution to such political animosities is an option worth exploring.

The Black Sea region raises other questions of great current significance. The energy issue is among the most important, given the oil and gas reserves in the Caucasian area, which are linked to Western markets through the Black Sea. In this sense, we can also mention the oil and gas pipelines crossing areas of the Black Sea basin planned or under construction. The Black Sea also has great tourism potential, which has, so far, not been properly exploited. The promotion of tourism and the environmental problems caused by pollution are transnational issues which require regional cooperation. *The Black Sea Forum* was established on such premises, although its functionality has been so far delimited. Since the future of the Black Sea can only be envisaged in the framework of transnational cooperation, it is of a particular relevance to investigate the causes which undermined the reasons for which Black Sea initiatives have been undermined and to explore the possibility of overcoming these impediments.

The next issue of VJHS tries to answer some of these questions, while keeping in mind traditions and historical precedents in the region. Our main focus is to reveal the evolution of the Black Sea as a unit, to explore both the interactions between the Black Sea nations throughout the 20th century and between the Black Sea as a regional unit and other historical and political spaces in Europe and Asia. This way, we hope to shed light upon the realistic possibilities of developing long term cooperation in the region.

Valahian Journal of Historical Studies is a biannual, fully refereed journal, based in Târgoviște, Romania. It is published by the *Grigore Gafencu Center for the History of International Relations* within the *Valahia University of Târgoviște*. It welcomes contributions from scholars in all fields of research which are intertwined with the themes debated in each issue. We are eager and honored to open our pages to both senior and young scholars engaged in studies on the history of international relations, as well as on the political, economic, social, and intellectual developments in the field.

Our journal will also host reviews of any scholarly events focusing on modern and contemporary history in Romania and abroad.

Notice on doctoral studies and partial results available for publishing can also be accepted as a way to promote the closer dialogue and better information of our community.

Publication Norms

- The paper must not have been previously published;
- The paper must contain the full name of the author or authors, institutional affiliation, and their e-mails;
- The paper must be submitted in one of the official languages of publication, which are English, French, Spanish, German, Italian and Russian; submissions must include a title, a short abstract written in English, five to ten key words, as well as biographical note ten lines in length;
- The maximum length is 20 pages, single spaced;
- The contributions must be sent in Word format;
- The documents should be sent in Garamond Font size 12;
- Footnotes must be placed automatically in Garamond Font size 10;
- Images illustrating the text must be sent as .jpg or .tiff files; the author assumes responsibility for the right to publish the images;
- The journal's editorial board reserves the right that upon the review by the referents to publish or reject any of the received papers and to suggest any of the collaborators changes that may be considered as necessary.

Footnotes:

Must respect the Turabian and Chicago citation styles:

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Style.html>

For instance:

Books:

Paul Sjöblom, Finland from the inside. Eyewitness Reports of a Finnish-American Journalist, 1938-1997, ed. Glenda Dawn Goss (Helsinki: New Bridge, 2000), 109.

Articles:

Silviu Miloiu, »Mobilizing the European idea at Europe's eastern frontier. The war propaganda of Romania and Finland as recorded in their bilateral relationship (1941-1944),« Valahian Journal of Historical Studies 3-4 (2005), 67-75.

Chapters in volumes:

Jukka Nevakivi, »Independent Finland between East and West,« in Finland: people, nation, state, ed. M. Engman, D. Kirby (London: Hurst&Company, 1989), 139-140.

Archives:

Sheperd's dispatch no. 127 of 11.06.1946 to Ernest Bevin, PRO FO 371/56177.

