

## ***A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE DANUBE DELTA***

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**Abstract:** *The Danube Delta is Europe's second largest delta and the world's best preserved one. For Romania, for the European Union and for NATO the Danube Delta constitutes a natural border, separating not only two different geographical areas, but also two separate ways of understanding democracy, politics and international relations. For Romania's national security the Danube Delta constitutes a true challenge, as it is a vulnerable and permeable area that requires special territorial surveillance and defense measures. Historically, the Danube Delta has had, ever since Antiquity, a geostrategic importance for all the great empires that manifested their influence in the region. The present paper wishes to discuss the way in which the geostrategic relevance of the Danube Delta throughout history influenced its current position in the geopolitics of the extended Black Sea Region.*

**Keywords:** *Danube Delta, geostrategic, geopolitics, defense, security*

### **Introduction**

Despite the fact that the Danube Delta is scarcely populated and predominantly rural, the area has a significant geostrategic importance at a regional level. Located between Romania and Ukraine, next to the Black Sea and in the immediate vicinity of the Crimean Peninsula, the Danube Delta is part of the Eastern border of Romania, the European Union and NATO. Due to this fact, ensuring the security of this area is essential both to national and regional security.

Historically, the Danube mouths have constituted a reason for contention between several empires, thus retaining a strategic importance throughout the centuries. A historical perspective on the way in which the geostrategic relevance of the area influenced regional decision making in various periods of time might offer a glimpse into the future of regional security in the extended Black Sea region.

## 1. The Main Geomorphologic Characteristics of the Danube Delta

Before analyzing the geostrategic significance of the Danube Delta, we believe that it is important to review some geographical and morphological coordinates that define this area. Also, we consider that it is essential to bear in mind that the particularities of the Danube Delta determine a specific approach when it comes to ensuring security in the region.

The Danube Delta is located in the North-Western part of the Black Sea, in a seismically active portion of the Earth's crust. Its total surface comprises 4178 square kilometers. Approximately 82% of the entire surface, meaning 3466 square kilometers, is situated within the borders of Romania, and only 18%, meaning 732 square kilometers belong to Ukraine. As Romania's eastern extremity, the Danube Delta represents 2,5% of the country's entire national territory.

From a geomorphological point of view, according to most authors, the Danube Delta is a classic, well individualized, clearly contoured type of delta, without tidal movements and low intensity winds. The generally accepted hypothesis concerning the genesis of the Danube Delta is that it was formed in one of the Black Sea's golfs, which was blocked by a sand bar, thus transforming the west part of the golf into a firth. More precisely, the present configuration of the Danube Delta is largely a product of the interaction of the Danube and the Black Sea during the Holocen<sup>1</sup>, when the sea level rose. The crucial factor of the Danube Delta's evolution is the Danube itself which, by transporting wash, contributed to the Delta's advancement into the sea with an average rate of 17,405 meters per year<sup>2</sup>.

The Romanian side of the Danube Delta was declared a Biosphere Reserve in 1990, followed, in 1998, by the Ukrainian side. The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve has a total surface of approximately 5.800 square kilometers located on the territory of Romania and 465 square kilometers on the territory of Ukraine. Within the borders of the Biosphere Reserve one can identify 18 strictly protected areas, 13 buffer areas and several economic areas. This

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<sup>1</sup>Claudiu TUDORANCEA, Maria M. TUDORANCEA, *Danube Delta: Genesis and Biodiversity*, Backhuys Publishers, London, 2006, p.17

<sup>2</sup>Cristina DINU, Aurel STĂNICĂ, dr. Steluța PĂRĂU, Mihaela IACOB, *Delta Dunării – Așezare și geneză*, available at [http://www.deltadunarii.info.ro/ro\\_asezare.htm](http://www.deltadunarii.info.ro/ro_asezare.htm), accessed on the 13th of January 2015

is important to bear in mind, since all surveillance, defense, security and protection measures „must take into account the special ecological statute of the region”<sup>3</sup>.

Geographically speaking, the Danube Delta is comprised of two parts: the fluvial delta and the maritime Delta. The former occupies over 65% of the Danube Delta’s entire surface, whereas the latter occupies less than 35%. The hydrographic network of the Danube Delta comprises 45 watercourses with a total length of 1742 kilometers and 26 canals with a length of 1753 kilometers<sup>4</sup>. The main waterways are the Chilia, Sulina and Saint George arms.

### **1. The Strategic Importance of the Danube Delta during Antiquity and the Middle Ages**

The strategic relevance of the Danube’s mouths can be traced back to Antiquity. To this stand proof the Roman fortifications and the Greek colonies that bordered the Danube Delta. Archaeological research has revealed the traces of several Roman settlements located on Letea and Caraorman maritime grounds as well as on the present territory of C.A. Rosetti, Periprava and Cardon villages. The archaeological findings show that the area surrounding the Danube’s mouths was an important center for commerce and navigation during the first century BC and up until the 2nd century AD.

The first historical reference about the Danube Delta belongs to the Greek historian Herodotus, who described the incursion of Darius’ Persian fleet in the region, after previously having been stationed in the Greek colony of Histria between 515- 513 BC. Later on, in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, other Greek and Roman historians, such as Polybius, Gaius Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder) and Ptolemy describe the Danube Delta as a place with sand banks among which there are islands, testifying that the area is inhabited by Greek and Roman settlers that deal with trade, crafts, fishing and agriculture.

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<sup>3</sup>Ștefania Florina BALICA, *Development and Application of Flood Vulnerability Indices for Various Spatial Scales*, Masters of Science Thesis, UNESCO –IHE, Institute for Water Education, Delft, 2007, p.79

<sup>4</sup> --, *International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River -Delta – Liman Flood Action Plan*, p.6, available at <http://www.icpdr.org/main/activities-projects/flood-action-plans>, accessed on the 15th of January 2015

Moreover, the historical data available reveals that this area was inhabited by Geto-Dacian tribes, who defended the Danube's mouths from various foreign invaders. For example, there is some historical evidence that, in 339 BC, the Dacian tribes from the Danube's mouths have stopped a Scythian invasion lead by king Ateas<sup>5</sup>. Another example is given by the account of the Greek historian Arrian who writes that, in 335 BC, Alexander the Great started a military campaign against the Geto-Dacian tribes that inhabited an area located in the immediate vicinity of the Danube's mouths, attacking a fortified center and defeating a Dacian army of 4000 horsemen and 10000 foot soldiers<sup>6</sup>. From 46 AD Dobrudja becomes a Roman province, representing a strategic point of the Roman Empire's Eastern border, which ensured its security.

The geostrategic importance of the region was maintained during the Byzantine Empire, mostly due to the intensive commercial traffic and navigation that was taking place at the Danube's mouths. Historical accounts show that, in the 9th century, on the Chilia branch was situated the city of Lykostomion, where the Byzantines had stationed a fleet which had the role of protecting the waterways and conducted military expeditions at the Danube's mouths. Approximately from the same period of time, there are accounts of the city of Periaslavet, which is depicted as „a great commercial center, a convergence point for the most important roads, a trade market for gold, fabrics, wine and fruits from Greece, silver and horses from Pannonia and furs, wax, honey and slaves from the territory that is now part of Russia”<sup>7</sup>.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the region surrounding the Danube's mouths retains its strategic advantage with the settlement of Venetian and Genovese traders in the Danube Delta. The Genovese and the Venetians fortify various settlements and open trading posts and commercial offices at Lykostomo, Chilia and Vicina. The geostrategic position of the Danube Delta contributes to the region's prosperity as one of the most dynamic and rich trading centers of the 12th-14th centuries. Various historical documents from the end of the

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<sup>5</sup>Ion ȚURCANU, *Istoria românilor. Cu o privire mai largă asupra culturii române*, editura Istoros, Brăila, 2007, p. 18

<sup>6</sup>*Ibidem*, p.19

<sup>7</sup>Aurel STĂNICĂ, *Delta Dunării - Aspecte cultural-istorice in secolele VIII-XIX*, available at <http://www.info-delta.ro/delta-dunarii-17/delta-dunarii---aspecte-cultural-istorice-in-secolele-viii-xix-366.html> , accessed on the 19th of January 2015

12th century testify that the fortress of Chilia was an „important Genovese trading center. The city issued its own coins, entitled *asperi boni argenti et spendibilis de chilii*”<sup>8</sup>.

The strategic position of the Danube Delta and the geopolitical relevance of the Danube’s mouths will constitute the main reason for the numerous Ottoman military campaigns that were conducted throughout the 14th -16th centuries against the ports and fortresses located in the region, which will ultimately determine the retreat of the Venetian and Genovese tradesmen from the Danube’s mouths.

With the consolidation of state power in Wallachia and Moldavia, rulers from both voivodates sought to obtain access to the Danube’s mouths. This desiderate is materialised in 1388, when Dobrudja and, implicitly, the Danube Delta become a part of Wallachia during the rule of Mircea the Old<sup>9</sup>. After his death, the Ottoman Empire succeeds in conquering Dobrudja. However, the Danube Delta and the fortress of Chilia remain under the rule of Alexander the Good, the ruler of Moldavia. The strategic importance of this area is fully acknowledged by Stephen the Great, who builds the fortress New Chilia, on the left bank of the Chilia branch, in order to consolidate Moldavia’s influence at the Danube’s mouths. Unfortunately, the Moldavian presence in the Danube Delta will be short lived. In 1484, Dobrudja and the Danube Delta will become an Ottoman province, and will remain under Ottoman rule for more than 400 years. By gaining access to the Danube’s mouths the Ottoman Empire ensured its strategic advantage, controlling commerce and navigation both in the Black Sea and on the Danube.

As part of the Ottoman Empire, the Danube Delta held an increased geostrategic significance, acting as an important tranzit area for tradesmen coming from the Balkans and from the Baltic Sea, as well as for the Ottoman army that used the region as a platform for launching military expeditions. Last but not least, the Danube Delta acted as an important source of supply for the Ottoman Empire, providing the necessary materials for the thrive of the Ottoman Gate and for supporting costly military expeditions.

## **2. The Geostrategic Importance of the Danube Delta during Modernity and Contemporaneity**

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibidem*

<sup>9</sup> Ion ȚURCANU, *op.cit.*, p.32

During modernity, the Danube Delta became a true revolving plate of European commerce, becoming, once again, a source of discord between several powers. Western states, such as France and Great Britain started to contest Ottoman supremacy at the Danube's mouths. On the other hand, the Russian Empire also sought to gain access and consolidate its positions in the Danube Delta in order to increase its influence over navigation and commerce on the river Danube.

### *2.1. The Strategic Relevance of the Danube Delta during Modernity*

As I mentioned earlier, during the 18th century the Danube Delta became the object of several European states' strategic ambitions. As others rise to gain influence at the Danube's mouth, the Ottoman Empire slowly begins to lose its grip on the region. For example, after the Russian- Austro- Turkish wars, Austria and Russia receive the right to freely navigate on the Danube River, in the Black Sea and gain access to all the city- ports from the Danube's mouths. Other states, such as France and England begin to exercise their influence in the region, both commercially/politically as well as military.

In the beginning of the 19th century, after the Russian-Ottoman War (1806-1812), the border between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was set on the Chilia arm, transforming the entire area into a buffer zone between two different powers. The Treaty of Adrianople, signed in 1829, gave Russia almost complete control over the Danube's mouths, significantly decreasing Ottoman influence in the region. However, because Russia did not respect its commitments to maintain the navigability of the waterways, which had a serious negative impact on commerce and navigation on the river Danube, the Great Powers decided to form an European Danube Commission. The Commission first began its activity in 1856 and had its headquarters in Galați and Sulina.

The strategic relevance of the Danube's mouths at that time can be understood if one is to bear in mind that the birth of the European Danube Commission is a result of the Paris Peace Conference, during which the river Danube was placed under international control. The states that participated in the activity of the Commission, thus exercising their authority over the Danube Delta, were Austria, France, United Kingdom, Prussia, The Russian Empire,

Sardinia and the Ottoman Empire<sup>10</sup>. As it can easily be observed, the Danube's mouths were a strategic point of interest not only for riverain states, but also for other European powers that wished to exercise a political, economic and even military influence in the region.

Moreover, one can understand the geostrategic importance of the Danube Delta if one is to analyze the way in which the initial plans concerning the existence and the functioning of the European Danube Commission were modified over the years. For example, it was initially provisioned that the Commission would function only for two years and its main objective during this mandate would be to ensure the proper conditions for starting the necessary technical works that would improve navigation on the Sulina Channel<sup>11</sup>. However, despite these initial provisions, pushed forward especially by Austria, who wished to monopolize river navigation on the Danube, the Commission remained active until the eve of World War II, and its activity was far more diversified than just supervising the regularization of the Sulina Channel. This was possible due to the influence and efforts of non-riverain states such as France, Great Britain and Sardinia, who desired to maintain their newly gained strategic advantage at the Danube's mouths.

After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles (21<sup>st</sup> of July 1919) and the Convention adopted during the International Danube Conference (23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1921), expanded the prerogatives and the membership of the European Danube Commission, by allowing representatives from Romania and, later on, in November 1930, Germany. At the Sinaia Conference (18<sup>th</sup> of August 1938), the Commission ceded most of its responsibilities to Romania, who begins to manifest an increased influence at the Danube's mouths. Romanian control over this area was seriously hampered in 1940, when Nazi Germany began to manifest its influence in the region<sup>12</sup>, stopping Romanian administrative efforts that sought to supplement the activity of the Commission.

It is important to bear in mind that, because of the existence of the European Danube Commission, the Danube Delta is transformed into a European center for commerce and trade. The decision to set up the Commission consolidated the strategic relevance of the

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<sup>10</sup>Spiridon G. FOCAȘ, *The Lower Danube River in the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex: From Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948*, translated from Romanian by Rozeta J. METES, New York, 1978, p. 108

<sup>11</sup>Dimitrie A. STURDZA, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de la navigation du Danube*, Berlin, 1904, p.32-33

<sup>12</sup>Ștefan STANCIU, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională*, Galați, 2002, p.58

Danube Delta on a European level. During the years in which the Commission exercised its control over the Danube's mouths, the area became a prosperous center of trade and multiculturalism. Sulina, where the Commission had its main offices, became a free port ("porto franco") and experienced a rapid economic growth, fueled by its neutrality status. The city had, at the time, nine diplomatic offices belonging to several European powers: the Austrian Consulate, the British, German, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Greek, Russian and Ottoman Viceconsulates. In addition, Belgium had a Consular Agency in Sulina, which also acted to represent the country's political, economic and strategic interests at the Danube's mouths. Moreover, some of the most important shipping companies in Europe maintained offices and representatives in Sulina: : Lloyd Austria Society (Austria), Deutsch LevanteLinie - D.L.L. (Germany), Egeo (Greece), Johnston Line (United Kingdom), Florio et Rubatino (Italy), Westcott Linea (Belgium), Messagerie Maritime (France), and the Romanian Maritime Service<sup>13</sup>.

Unfortunately, the onset of World War II led to the loss of neutrality for the city port of Sulina, which determined the retreat of all diplomatic representatives from the area. During WWII, Sulina and the surrounding area were considered a strategic military point, and were bombarded, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, by Allied forces. After the end of WWII, the port was occupied by Soviet troops, as part of the plan to obtain and maintain military supremacy in the Black Sea.

Another episode worth mentioning in order to fully understand the strategic importance of the Danube Delta in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by the existence, between the 1917 and 1920, of the Danube Delta Security Bureau, led by Mihail Moruzov, whose main purpose was to ensure the defense of the Delta region. Its main activities included espionage and counterespionage, propaganda and military police (for Romanian deserters of Russian origins), as well as border control responsibilities. The accounts of the Bureau's activity stand proof of the geostrategic relevance of the Danube's mouths at that time. For example, during the last year of the First World War, the Bureau arrested 156 German spies, and identified 178 enemy spies, prevented several attacks on the munitions and armaments deposits located in the area, protected the river vessels from sabotage and took control over several Bolshevik military capabilities<sup>14</sup>, a fact which fully

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<sup>13</sup> Paul GOGEANU, *Dunărea în relațiile internaționale*, București, 1970, p.74

<sup>14</sup> Mihail Moruzov in dr. Sorin APARASCHIVEI, "Mihail Moruzov- Spionul și Omul" in *Revista Română de Studii de Intelligence*, nr.9/ Iunie 2013, Bucharest, 2013, p.191

demonstrates the intense military and intelligence activity that took place in the region as well as the strategic importance that the Danube Delta had for both parties involved in the war.

Moreover, according to several historic documents, the officers of the Bureau carried out extremely dangerous missions behind enemy lines, capturing several German officers. Last but not least, realising the strategic potential of the area, as well as the need to build up effective military capabilities at the Danube's mouths the Bureau's chief, Mihail Moruzov, bribed several Russian officials in an effort to take over, in the interest of the Romanian state, the Russian fleet that operated in the Danube Delta and in the Black Sea, a grandiose plan that, unfortunately, could not be carried out.

As it can be observed, during WWI, the Danube Delta was considered, by both opposing forces, a strategic point for carrying out military operations and launching attacks on the enemy. During World War II, the Danube Delta retained its strategic relevance, posing security challenges for both sides involved in the conflict. A perfect example to illustrate this statement is that of the soviet attack from the 25th- 26th of October 1940 on the Chilia arm, followed by the battles of 1941. In 1940, four river patrol boats debarked troops on the islands of Daleru Mare and Salangic on the Chilia arm, subsequently occupying the islands of Tătaru Mare, Daleru Mic, Maican and Limba (in the Musura Gulf, at the confluence of the Chilia arm with the Black Sea). The configuration of the river bank and the climate conditions specific to the autumn season in the Danube Delta (thick fog), decisively contributed to the success of the Soviet offensive, hampering Romanian defensive efforts. According to some authors, the attack aimed at gaining a strategic advantage, by establishing several offensive avanposts with the mission to cut off the Sulina and Saint George arms in order to further occupy Dobrudja, with the aid of a maritime offensive and parachuted ground troops, already dislocated in Crimea<sup>15</sup>. According to the same authors, the specific characteristic of the Delta's landscape made defense extremely difficult to organize and exercise, which is why the region was regarded by the Soviet Union as a strategic point of offensive<sup>16</sup>. In order to ensure its control over the area, the Soviet Union created and dispatched the Danube Fleet, that stationed and fought on the Chilia arm for almost the entire duration of the war.

After World War II, the new geopolitical configuration of the world changed the way in which the Danube Delta region was regarded by European countries. From an open space

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<sup>15</sup> Victor SUVOROV, *Spărgătorul de gheață. Cine a declanșat al Doilea Război Mondial?*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2010, p.139

<sup>16</sup>*Ibidem*, p.140-141

of commerce and multiculturalism, the Danube Delta was transformed into a closed, rural region, with limited access to resources. As it can be inferred from the events mentioned above, the geostrategic importance of the Danube Delta maintained until after WW2 when, after the formation of the communist block, the strategic relevance of the area for Europe began to decline.

### *3.2. The Geostrategic Relevance of the Danube Delta- Present and Future*

During the communist regime, the strategic relevance of the Danube Delta on a regional level was almost inexistent. The area surrounding the Danube's mouths, as well as the neighboring Black Sea were part of a closed, isolated block, with planned economies and a shared ideology. Security concerns were mainly aimed towards the West, leaving Eastern borders relatively unprotected.

The strategic relevance of the Danube Delta began to represent a concern for Romanian authorities after the fall of the communist regime, when the new democracy began to realize the security issues that surrounded our Eastern frontier. After Romania's accession to NATO and subsequently to EU, the Danube Delta regained its strategic significance, as a buffer zone between two geopolitical spheres. And even though the commercial importance of the area has drastically decreased, as river navigation steadily lost ground in favor of other means of transportation, the importance of this area for regional and transatlantic security has become a subject of interest for several international actors.

From the point of view of ensuring security in the area, the Danube Delta represents a terrain that presents a series of vulnerabilities and poses challenges for the Armed Forces. This small part of the Eastern border of the EU and of NATO is located in the immediate vicinity of Crimea something which, given the existent international context, can be considered a serious concern for those responsible of protecting the security *status-quo* in the region. Moreover, the geophysical characteristics of the Danube Delta (a great number of canals, lakes, thickets and reed plots) make it a relatively permeable space, vulnerable to trespassers, which makes the defense of the area a game of major financial investments and state of the art technologies (radar and GPS systems, river patrol boats and other types of ships, night vision capabilities etc.).

Needless to say, modern day armed conflicts greatly differ from the wars of the 20th century, following different rules of engagement. However, the specific geophysical characteristics of the Danube Delta have not altered in time, posing the same security dilemmas as they did during the two World Wars. For example, we consider that, in the event of a naval or ground aggression/invasion, the difficulties of organizing an effective defensive still constitute a serious vulnerability for security in the region. The Danube Delta largely remains a wet, intricate territory filled with swamps, thickets, and reed plots. Even today it is hard to access portions of the Danube Delta, even if modern defense and security capabilities exist in the region. To the above mentioned characteristics, one might easily add the precarious state of the river fleet. The vessels that ensure the security of the Danube Delta are rather old and in need of repairs, modernization works and new technical endowments. Last but not least, the importance of maintaining the security of the frontier existent on the Chilia arm is still an issue of interest both for Romania, as well as for the EU and NATO. We believe that this sector of the Eastern frontier is especially vulnerable to potential threats, thus requiring special care for ensuring optimal surveillance and security conditions.

Given the current international security climate, the Danube Delta begins to appear once again as a strategic point for possible military confrontations. The Russian military intervention in Crimea, which led to a new statute of the Peninsula and a reconfiguration of the balance of power in the Black Sea Basin, the armed clashes between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian militias that were taking place, until very recently, in the Eastern part of Ukraine and in the Odessa region, as well as the ample Russian Naval exercises in the Black Sea that took place in February 2015, after NATO announced its plans to increase Allied military presence in Eastern Europe, including in Romania, shape the hypothesis that the Russian Federation is aiming to create a corridor that would act as a buffer zone between Russia on the one hand, and NATO and the EU, on the other hand. In the event of this scenario proving true, Romania would come to have, once again, a common border with Russia, which would include the Danube Delta. Furthermore, leaving aside the massive Russian naval presence in the Black Sea, the perspective of a common frontier on the Chilia arm with a region controlled by an aggressive Russian Federation represents a worrisome scenario for our country. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned situations, some experts consider that, in order to maintain an effective defensive force in the Danube Delta, apart from the existing surveillance mechanisms and technologies, the Romanian Naval Forces, would have to acquire, by 2016, at least ten new river vessels and to begin, by 2020, the building of a new

class of river Patrol Boats, river monitors and gunboats, in order to fully replace the existing fleet<sup>17</sup>, which is technically outdated. In addition, it is necessary to continue the perfection of the electronic, radar and GPS surveillance systems for the Danube Delta, by using integrated security systems.

It is important to bear in mind that a potential aggression coming from the Black Sea or from the territory bordering the Danube Delta would have serious consequences on national security and sovereignty. For this reason, it is essential to configure in the immediate vicinity of the Danube Delta a credible, well structured Naval Force that consists of modern ships, state of the art warfare technologies, performant armaments and integrated communication systems able to discourage any potential aggressor. Also, we consider necessary for the Romanian Naval Forces to develop „modern electronic and cyber warfare capabilities for early warning, electronic countermeasures and cyber protection mechanisms, as well as their own aviation force for permanent surveillance missions and potential interventions”<sup>18</sup> in the Danube Delta and the Black Sea Basin.

### Conclusions

To conclude with, over the course of European history, the Danube Delta represented an area of flourishing commercial ties, diverging political and military interests, multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. Ensuring the security of the region adjacent to the Danube’s mouths represented, ever since Antiquity, an essential component for regional stability. For this reason, all of the international actors (Empires and states) that exercised their influence over the Danube Delta have consolidated their military and/or diplomatic presence in the area, either by building fortresses, or by dispatching naval forces in the lower Danube Basin.

Considering the current international security climate, Romania should pay particular attention to securing this part of its Eastern border, by analyzing and understanding the specific vulnerabilities created by the morphological traits of the Danube Delta. Our country should invest more not only on electronic surveillance of the area, but also in a modern fleet

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<sup>17</sup> Bob NUGENT, Josh COHEN, ”*The Modernization of the Romanian Army. Assets, Innovations and Systems*” in *Naval Forces*, IV/2012, available at <http://www.amiinter.com/pdf/The%20Modernization%20of%20the%20Romanian%20Navy.pdf>, accessed on the 29th of January 2015

<sup>18</sup> Cdr. Nicu DURNEA, ”Rolul Forțelor Navale Române în apărarea intereselor țării în bazinul Mării Negre la începutul mileniului III” in *Buletinul Forțelor Navale (Naval Forces Bulletin)*, nr. 19/2013, p.36

of river monitors and gunboats, antimissile defence systems and integrated command and control centers designated for coordinating defence activities in the Danube Delta and the Black Sea.

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning that maintaining a strategic advantage in the region depended, many a time, not only on raw military force, but also on intimately knowing the geophysical characteristics of the Danube Delta, understanding the economic and social realities of the region and on comprehending the particular dynamics of the various ethnic groups that inhabited the Danube Delta since the dawn of humanity.

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