

The Lower Danube – from borderland to a regional strategic heartland. The need for stronger strategic coordination¹

Valentin Quintus Nicolescu

1. Introduction: context and objectives

In the current context, marked by the deterioration of the regional security environment and characterised globally by the volatility and unpredictability typical of periods of realignment of the international order, the identification and initiation of new mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation at regional level have become an urgent necessity, particularly for small and medium-sized powers located in regions with a high risk of instability, as is the case with Romania and Bulgaria. At the same time, countries in the region must recognise that emerging local and global realities require them to move beyond the status of mere consumers of security and become generators of stability and peace in South-Eastern Europe.

In this context, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the two countries have initiated a series of measures and projects /most notably the Strategic Partnership signed in March 2023 - aimed at strengthening and deepening bilateral relations while jointly building a proactive regional security platform capable of making a substantial contribution to the security of the European Union and NATO. However, as this paper will argue, these initiatives remain limited and relatively insufficient, as they are not embedded within a broader strategic vision, but rather constitute ad hoc responses with limited timeframes and impact. From this perspective, the paper goes beyond a simple assessment of the current state of cooperation in the fields of security and defense and seeks to advance a strategic vision for long-term cooperation between the two countries. *This vision entails the expansion and deepening of an emerging regional security community capable of generating stability, predictability, and deterrence in the Lower Danube region.*

The main objective of this analysis is to critically examine defense and security cooperation since 2022, identify key vulnerabilities and threats, and highlight common areas of opportunity. Building on this assessment, the second objective is to outline a minimal framework that could serve as the foundation for a regional security community initially focused on deepening and expanding bilateral cooperation and integration, but designed to evolve from bilateralism to multilateralism by engaging other actors in the Danube and Black Sea region on the basis of shared interests.

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2. Assessment of the strategic and security environment

Since 2022, the Lower Danube region has been more of a partially contested buffer zone than a safe space behind the front line. The main risk is not a major conventional attack from across the Danube, but the constant spillover from the Russian – Ukrainian conflict zone: drone incursions, airspace violations, strikes on ports and energy infrastructure, disruption of maritime and river traffic, or other types of actions characteristic of hybrid warfare. The recent drone incursions in the Galați area confirm that the region is currently one of the most exposed borders of NATO and the European Union.

The region's strategic value derives from its role as a vital East-West logistics and transport corridor linking Central and Western Europe to the Black Sea. Any disruption to this corridor could seriously affect not only international trade (particularly grain exports), but also military mobility and energy supplies. Although the Danube-Black Sea Canal, located in an area less exposed to spillover from the Ukrainian theatre of war, mitigates some of these risks the broader context of Russia's hybrid warfare means that vulnerabilities remain significant.

At the same time, the region is more than a transport corridor. It also functions as a strategic buffer zone, offering an alternative north-south route for trade, energy flows and military mobility, thereby connecting the Mediterranean region with Central Europe. The Port of Constanța, the largest on the Black Sea, is also an inland port and the terminus of European Corridor IV, linking the European Union with the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Threats and vulnerabilities

The security environment in the region is *dominated by the Russian-Ukrainian war* and can be understood as a three-tiered system of threats, in which each tier amplifies and complicates the response to the others, creating a composite rather than merely cumulative risk picture: kinetic threats, hybrid threats, and structural vulnerabilities.

The kinetic level refers primarily to the spillover effects generated by Russian operations targeting Ukrainian ports and transport hubs along the Danube. Drone and missile attacks against the ports of Izmail and Reni, as well as the rail links connected to them, aim to disrupt exports of grain and fertilisers, as well as military logistics flows. This level is characterised by the repetitive nature of incidents, the low costs incurred by the aggressor, and the relative impunity with which such attacks are conducted, making proportionate responses difficult or impossible. At the same time, spillover from the Ukrainian theatre of war has exposed Romania's operational shortcomings in the areas of air defence and counter-drone capabilities, suggesting that the country will remain vulnerable to incursions by low-cost Russian drones.

The second level concerns the **hybrid pressure** exerted by Russia to test the cohesion of NATO and the European Union, undermine public confidence, and challenge the response capacity of

member states. Although more subtle, this level is no less dangerous. Hybrid activities may include cyberattacks, disinformation and online manipulation campaigns, acts of sabotage, and attempts to interfere with political processes and decision-making in order to weaken or destabilise democratic institutions and practices. The objective of such actions is not necessarily to inflict significant damage on infrastructure, but rather to generate public mistrust and erode confidence in the state's ability to control its territory, protect its citizens or ensure the reliable functioning of essential services. In a border region already characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, the information environment becomes an integral component of the battlefield, and both Romania and Bulgaria are targets of Russia's hybrid warfare apparatus. These forms of interference are deliberately designed to avoid triggering direct military consequences, such as the invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, while nevertheless generating tangible gains by saturating response capabilities and creating strategic fatigue within targeted societies.

The third level consists of **structural vulnerabilities** arising from factors such as dense cross-border trade, the concentration of critical infrastructure, and the importance of the Danube for food security, energy supply, military logistics, and transportation. This level is fundamental because it does not depend on the intentions and actions of a hostile actor such as Russia, but rather on the underlying architecture of the region's economic, logistical and security systems. These systemic vulnerabilities carry potentially significant consequences, as disruptions can spread through chain reactions and generate disproportionate effects in both civilian and military domains. Furthermore, the absence of a joint regional body responsible for monitoring and investigating traffic on the Lower Danube, the lack of an integrated network of law-enforcement authorities along the river, and the nonexistence of a shared database identifying and tracking suspicious vessels all highlight pre-existing structural weaknesses. In this regard, the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), which began on 1 January 2026 under the motto "Bridging Regions, Building Cohesion: A Stronger Danube for All", is of critical importance for managing these key challenges.

Added to these concerns is *the broader geopolitical and geo-economic context* of the profound transformations currently affecting the international system. Romania and Bulgaria must take into account tensions within NATO, particularly following the outbreak of the war against Iran, President Donald Trump's longstanding scepticism towards the Alliance, his threats directed at Denmark regarding Greenland, and the gradual strategic reduction of the U.S. military presence in Europe.

The concept of 'NATO 3.0', introduced in 2026 following the publication of the U.S. National Security Strategy in early December 2025, reflects this strategic repositioning of the United States vis-à-vis its global interests and its relationship with allies. Synthesized by Wilson Beaver and Robert Peters in '*NATO 3.0 and American Security Strategy in Europe*', published by the Heritage Foundation in mid-June 2026, NATO 3.0 entails a rebalancing of roles: it stipulates that European allies must assume the primary burden of conventional defense, while the U.S. continues to provide a nuclear umbrella, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR),

alongside a limited conventional presence on the continent. Furthermore, the NATO 3.0 vision appears to promote a form of allied specialization based on geographical positioning and specific capabilities – for instance, Northern European states ensuring strategic deterrence against Russia in the Baltic Sea, or major powers providing the mechanized forces required for an advanced multinational corps capable of effectively defending the Alliance's Eastern Flank.

Together, these developments demonstrate that, in the short and medium term, existing security arrangements are, if not fundamentally questioned, at least under severe pressure and subject to unpredictable changes. This creates an important opportunity for European allies– including Romania and Bulgaria – to strengthen their bilateral ties and reaffirm the community of political values upon which the Euro-Atlantic space has been built. Such efforts are all the more necessary given the increasing likelihood that the regional security environment will be influenced by exogenous global developments, including the economic consequences of the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Opportunities

It is important to recognise that Romania and Bulgaria have an important opportunity to transform the Lower Danube region from an area of vulnerability into a space of resilience and strategic influence:

The nature of modern warfare – as demonstrated by the conflicts in Ukraine and Iran – has changed significantly. The emergence of drones as the dominant kinetic vector represents a major departure from the military logic that shaped defence planning until 2022. In the short and medium term, this new state of affairs creates substantial vulnerabilities, particularly for major military powers whose traditional capabilities are increasingly challenged and which are now forced to undertake complex adaptation processes. At the same time, this new reality presents important opportunities for medium and small powers, especially those in the Lower Danube region. Given their proximity to the Ukrainian theatre of war, Romania and Bulgaria are uniquely positioned to benefit from the lessons learned on the battlefield. Smaller states with limited resources often depend on external partners for advanced military technology and production capabilities. The bilateral agreements signed by both Romania and Bulgaria with Ukraine, which include, among other things, cooperation in the production of defence systems, particularly drone-based technologies, provide access to Ukraine's frontline expertise, as well as to combat-tested drones, software and AI-enabled guidance systems. However, President Zelensky's initiative could be taken a step further. Romania and Bulgaria, together with Ukraine, have the opportunity to develop an integrated regional military-industrial complex capable of strengthening NATO's and the EU's eastern flank.

The two countries can further deepen military cooperation by establishing joint command structures within NATO, such as the Regional Special Operations Component Command, and by enhancing interoperability through the continuation and expansion of bilateral military exercises.

Greater cooperation and integration in the logistics and energy sectors could facilitate the development of a regional hub on NATO's and the EU's eastern flank. Such a hub would not only increase the resilience of both countries, but also enhance their strategic influence over regional decision-making processes.

The development of a joint political-military diplomacy focused on clearly defined strategic priorities would allow Romania and Bulgaria to build upon existing achievements while ensuring that the challenges facing the Lower Danube and the Black Sea regions receive greater attention within NATO and EU agendas. In this way, the two countries could assume a leading role in regional security initiatives, particularly those related to the Black Sea and the Lower Danube corridor. Much like the Baltic states, our region would benefit from speaking with a more coherent voice, especially given NATO's relative vulnerabilities in the Black Sea and Türkiye's tendency to prioritise other areas of strategic interest while maintaining strict control over the Turkish straits.

Together with regional partners, Romania and Bulgaria can develop an integrated framework for hybrid resilience, focusing on areas such as cybersecurity, intelligence and information sharing, counter-disinformation efforts, and the protection of critical infrastructure.

The joint development of soft-power instruments would also help amplify the region's international visibility, influence, and capacity to shape broader European and transatlantic debates.

3. Formats for cooperation in the Lower Danube region

Romania and Bulgaria participate in a number of broader regional cooperation frameworks. Some are explicitly focused on defence and security, as is the case with the Bucharest Nine (B9) format, which brings together NATO's eastern flank members. Others address security-related issues more indirectly, including the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) and its financial instrument, the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIF), as well as the Black Sea Synergy and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). This section does not seek to provide an exhaustive inventory of all such arrangements, but rather to highlight those most relevant to Romanian-Bulgarian cooperation in the Lower Danube region.

NATO and the European Union

Since February 2022, the strategic relevance of the Black Sea and Lower Danube regions has increased significantly for both NATO and the European Union, of which Romania and Bulgaria

are members. Moreover, as in the case of Poland, the growing frequency of hybrid incidents affecting Romanian territory has prompted both organisations to strengthen security measures for their member states and to send a clear and strong message of unity to Moscow.

- Within NATO, Bulgaria and Romania participate in Operation *Eastern Sentry*, launched in autumn 2025 in response to the increasing number of drone-related incidents in Alliance airspace. The operation is primarily a political and strategic signal demonstrating NATO's readiness to defend its borders against potential Russian aggression, thereby reinforcing Euro-Atlantic unity and resolve. From a military perspective, however, the initiative may be difficult to sustain over the long term, particularly because intercepting low-cost drones with expensive air-to-air missiles is not a cost-effective solution.
- Also in autumn 2025, Romania and Bulgaria hosted the NATO *Dacian Fall 2025 Multinational Exercise* (DAFA 25), organised by the Headquarters Multinational Division South-East (HQ MND-SE) in Bucharest. The exercise marked the transition of NATO Battle Groups in both countries to brigade level and involved approximately 2,400 French soldiers from the 7th Armoured Brigade. Its main objectives were to improve the operational integration of HQ MND-SE subordinate structures and to test NATO's logistical and coordination capabilities for deploying brigade-level forces across Europe.
- At the EU level, the European Commission announced at the end of 2025 *the European Defence Readiness Map*, an initiative aimed at strengthening the Union's defensive capabilities by 2030. The plan revolves around four major projects: the European Drone Defence Initiative, also known as the Drone Wall, Eastern Flank Watch, European Air Shield, and European Space Shield. These initiatives are designed to complement NATO's security umbrella by enhancing the EU's defence capabilities. While the first two focus on counter-drone warfare and situational awareness along the Union's eastern border, the latter two aim to strengthen air, missile and space defence capabilities. Built upon the foundations established by the March 2025 White Paper on European Defence and the ReArm Europe plan, the initiative is ambitious. However, at the time of writing, it remains subject to approval by member states, a process often complicated by divergent national positions. Importantly, the initiative is expected to be informed by an ongoing classified assessment conducted by the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) within the European External Action Service (EEAS), examining member states' military capabilities (including differences regarding NATO targets) and the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.
- Also, within the EU, both countries are part of the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) mechanism, a component of the ReArm Europe Readiness 2030 program. SAFE is designed to provide large-scale emergency financing for the European defense industrial base, strategic infrastructure, and military technology. Romania and Bulgaria do not have joint projects under SAFE; instead, they are applying for funding separately. In

Romania's case, this involves a funding line worth €16.68 billion, the second largest after Poland's. The priority investment axes will focus on projects related to military equipment, defense technology, and the construction of strategically significant infrastructure and transport networks. Bulgaria also plans to access the SAFE mechanism. The latest investment plan published by its Council of Ministers indicates an intention to allocate approximately €19 billion toward military procurement and infrastructure by 2035, with funds sourced from both the national budget and the SAFE mechanism.

- Within the bilateral framework, Romania and Bulgaria are currently spearheading the development of a European Black Sea Maritime Security Hub, a project formally sanctioned by the European Commission in early 2026 and advanced under the auspices of the Black Sea Security Strategy. This dual-sited architecture, to be established concurrently in Constanța and Varna, is designed to facilitate the joint identification of contingencies, the consolidation of surveillance and reactive capabilities, and the augmentation of systemic resilience against hybrid threats. Nevertheless, the initiative remains in its nascent planning phase; according to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oana Țoiu, the project is currently undergoing bilateral codification prior to its formal presentation to the relevant European institutional fora.

Although NATO and the EU have often been criticised for their relatively slow responses to rapidly evolving security challenges, they nevertheless provide the institutional framework necessary to foster horizontal cooperation among member states. This creates important opportunities for Romania and Bulgaria to deepen bilateral relations in the fields of defence and security. The aforementioned Dacian Fall 2025 exercise illustrates NATO's role in this sense. Similarly, the Romanian-Bulgarian Interreg programme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), demonstrates how the European Union can act as a catalyst for regional cooperation. Approved in November 2022 and scheduled for completion in 2027, the programme seeks to strengthen the Lower Danube border region by enhancing the resilience of cross-border transport corridors while also promoting inclusive social and economic development, culture, sustainable tourism and security.

The Romanian-Bulgarian Strategic Partnership

Against the backdrop of the rapidly deteriorating regional security environment caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria signed a Strategic Partnership in March 2023, at Romania's initiative. The agreement was designed to deepen the long-standing relationship of good neighbourliness and cooperation between the two countries. Initially, it was viewed primarily as a vehicle for advancing common European objectives (particularly Schengen accession) and promoting cooperation in strategic areas such as political dialogue,

regional cooperation, and security. In the political-military sphere, the joint declaration committed both countries to strengthen cooperation by aligning initiatives the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and NATO, while also advancing the specific interests of the region.

The achievement of the immediate objective Schengen accession on 1 January 2025 prompted a reassessment of the partnership and a shift in focus toward security issues, centred primarily on the Black Sea. This evolution was reflected in both diplomatic and military initiatives.

In early 2025, Bulgaria and Romania, together with Türkiye, launched the *Mine Countermeasures Black Sea* (MCBS) initiative, a permanent regional military mechanism designed to protect commercial shipping routes by detecting, tracking, and neutralising sea mines originating from the conflict in Ukraine. By securing maritime routes, the initiative also indirectly protects river trade, given the connection between the port of Constanța and the Danube-Black Sea Canal, as well as the role of Ukrainian river ports such as Ust-Duniask in facilitating maritime cargo transfers.

During the first half of 2025, Romania and Bulgaria also played a key role in the drafting and adoption by the European Union of the Strategic Approach to the Black Sea. In doing so, the two countries demonstrated that they can act not only as recipients or consumers of security but also as providers of security and drivers of regional policy. As the only EU and NATO members located in both the Lower Danube and the Western Black Sea regions, they increasingly position themselves as key actors in shaping NATO and EU approaches to regional security.

The strategy is built around three main pillars: (1) Security, Stability and Resilience; (2) Sustainable Growth and Prosperity; and (3) Environmental Protection and Civil Preparedness. While the first pillar focuses on traditional security concerns such as maritime security, military mobility, and responses to hybrid threats, the second and third pillars adopt a broader understanding of security, centred on societal and economic aspects concerning quality of life, innovation, connectivity, the green transition. Despite its ambitious scope, the strategy remains largely declaratory in nature, given that the EU currently lacks military assets of its own in the Black Sea and continues to rely primarily on NATO's security framework.

The strategic partnership also includes a significant connectivity dimension. Planned infrastructure projects are particularly important for the development of the North-South transport corridor, which remains underdeveloped and creates logistical bottlenecks, especially for military mobility. In the current geopolitical context, the establishment of a land transport corridor linking Alexandroupolis in Greece and Constanța in Romania as an alternative to maritime transit through the Bosphorus has become of utmost importance from both economic and military perspectives.

To support this objective, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece signed a memorandum of understanding in early December 2025 establishing the Black Sea – Aegean Sea Corridor

Platform (BACP). The platform aims to coordinate national transport policies with European transport corridors and TEN-T regulations, facilitate joint planning and implementation, accelerate dual-use civil-military infrastructure projects, and integrate climate resilience and military mobility consideration into infrastructure development. This represents a significant step forward in terms of modernising transport and logistics infrastructure in the region. However, for the time being, implementation on the ground remains slow. At the time of writing, the Giurgiu-Ruse bridge was undergoing repairs, while the second bridge is still at the planning stage. The feasibility study tender was launched in summer 2024, and by February 2026 the project entered had only reached the financial evaluation phase. Given the lengthy preparation of technical documentation, it is likely that Romania and Bulgaria will still not be connected by a third Danube bridge on the North-South axis by 2030.

Overall, the Romanian-Bulgarian Strategic Partnership is emerging as an increasingly effective instrument of Euro-Atlantic and regional integration, with the potential to evolve into a broader platform for strategic cooperation in South-Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, it continues to face a persistent regional challenge: the discrepancy between the rapid pace of political and diplomatic initiatives and the slow implementation of infrastructure projects. While political commitments are often achieved quickly, tangible progress in connectivity remains limited. In the long run, this disconnect undermine not only the effectiveness of the partnership but also its credibility and sustainability concrete results fail to materialise.

The Ukraine-Romania-Moldova Trilateral

Another relevant regional framework is the so-called **Odessa Triangle**, involving Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The initiative focuses on energy security, cyber security and connectivity among the three countries. Its strategic objective is to enhance resilience in these key areas. The most recent development within this framework was the signing, in early 2026, of the Cyber Alliance for Regional Resilience (CARR), also known as the Triple Cyber Alliance. The initiative seeks to strengthen cooperation in countering hybrid and cyber threats, combating disinformation and state-sponsored cyberattacks, particularly those attributed to the Russian Federation, and protecting critical energy and communications infrastructure.

At the operational level, CARR focuses on the real-time exchange of threat intelligence, the coordination of incident response and the development of mutual assistance mechanisms. At the end of April 2026, CARR successfully organised, together with the European Union, the Resilient Trident Exercise, which brought together experts from 40 public and private organisations across the region. The exercise included cyberattack simulations in a realistic operational environment ('live-fire' exercises), tabletop incident management scenarios, and information-sharing procedures.

In early 2026, the three countries also held a meeting, attended by representatives of the European Commission, in the so-called “Danube/Black Sea Quad” format. Discussions focused on the situation in the Danube region, particular the consequences of Russian attacks on port infrastructure and their impact on the Danube logistics corridor, especially in the Ukrainian river sector comprising the ports of Izmail, Reni and Ust-Duniask. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to continuing the implementation of the Danube Action Plan 2.0, launched in 2025 under the European Commission’s Solidarity Lanes initiative. The plan aims to strengthen cooperation in ensuring safe navigation on the Danube, improve communication among Ukrainian, Romanian and Moldovan ports, and optimise information exchange to better manage potential disruptions to maritime and river traffic. The long-term objective is to increase the resilience, security, and interconnectivity of the regional transport system while facilitating the integration of the Ukrainian and Moldovan transport systems into the European Union.

The fact that Bulgaria is not part of the Odessa Triangle is understandable, at least at a superficial level, given that it is not directly affected by the conflict in Ukraine. However, its absence from certain aspects of this framework can be regarded as a strategic oversight. CARR provides a relevant example. Bulgaria is also target of hybrid threats, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns. Since 2022, the number of cyber incidents – some originating from Russia – has steadily increased. The most recent example occurred on 19 April 2026, when several online services operated by Bulgarian government institutions, including the egov.bg, the Ministry of e-Government and the Council of Ministers, experienced disruptions. From this perspective, Bulgaria’s absence from the CARR framework creates a significant vulnerability in the regional security architecture.

The experience accumulated by Ukraine and Moldova in the fields of hybrid threats, cybersecurity and counter-disinformation is particularly valuable. It is therefore essential that all states in the Lower Danube region, whether directly or indirectly affected by the war, have access to this expertise in order to strengthen the regional security environment. In this regard, Bulgaria’s inclusion in such cooperation mechanisms should be considered a priority.

The growing number of regional cooperation frameworks involving the Lower Danube region represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Romania and Bulgaria. On the one hand, these arrangements facilitate access to resources and cooperation with a diverse range of regional partners. On the other hand, they risk creating inefficiencies and institutional paralysis due to the need to align national priorities with multiple overlapping frameworks. The overlap between various initiatives can also generate inconsistencies at both the policy and institutional levels.

To mitigate these risks, active and centralised monitoring, whether at the national or bilateral level, is essential. Such a mechanism would provide a comprehensive overview of ongoing initiatives, identify opportunities for synergy and ensure the coherent coordination of activities across the different regional frameworks. Without such an approach, there is a significant risk

that participation in these initiatives will remain largely performative and, ultimately, ineffective.

4. Recommendation: a regional security community

Romania and Bulgaria share a long history of cooperation, providing a solid foundation for the further deepening of bilateral relations. However, the relationship between the two countries is rooted not only in decades of cooperation but also in a series of shared socio-political and economic experiences. These include the post-communist transition, challenges related to poverty, exclusion, and migration, efforts aimed at democratic consolidation and anti-corruption reforms, and the broader geopolitical reorientation from East to West that accompanied their accession to the European Union and NATO.

The societies on both banks of the Danube therefore share not only common Euro-Atlantic values but also a sense of identity shaped by similar experiences over the past three decades. These shared values and experiences constitute the foundation upon which a security community between Romania and Bulgaria in the Lower Danube region can be further developed and consolidated. At the same time, the two countries face similar defence and security challenges, particularly in areas such as maritime security, energy security, military mobility along NATO's eastern flank, cybersecurity, and so on.

The response of both countries to an increasingly unstable geopolitical and security environment should reflect these shared values, experiences and interests. Through the initiatives already undertaken, Romania and Bulgaria have effectively laid the foundations of a regional security community. What remains missing, however, is a long-term strategic dimension, namely a broader, more inclusive vision that is not limited exclusively to the traditional aspects of security and defence.

The model proposed here is an integrated, multi-layered and modular framework that is fully compatible with NATO and European Union standards. Anchored first in the two countries, it could gradually expand through soft-power instruments and the dissemination of best practices across the region, incorporating not only like-minded actors such as Greece but also countries that currently are not formally part of the Euro-Atlantic community, including the Republic of Moldova and Serbia.

The rationale behind this framework is based on mutual benefit. Its objective would be to transform a vulnerable border region into a cooperative security space centred on deterrence, resilience, mobility and crisis management. At the same time, policymakers should recognise that the dividends of such a framework extend well beyond the security sphere. They include stronger economic growth, increased societal prosperity, and the potential to generate broader positive socio-economic effects throughout the region.

A secondary objective would be to strengthen the region's capacity to influence and shape agendas within NATO, the European Union, and other regional and international organizations.

Much like the Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria could pursue greater strategic alignment on key regional issues, thereby maximizing their collective influence and securing long-term benefits for the region.

The primary mission of such a security community could include, among other objectives, deterring hybrid threats, protecting critical transport and energy infrastructure, improving military mobility along the Danube–Black Sea axis, developing a common operational picture and shared early-warning capabilities, and establishing a permanent mechanism for consultation and coordination during crises.

From an institutional perspective, the creation of a Lower Danube Security Council (LDSC) could provide an appropriate framework for cooperation. This body would bring together the relevant ministries and agencies responsible for defence, internal affairs, foreign policy, transport, energy, and other related sectors, with the purpose of coordinating, implementing, and monitoring common policies and initiatives. The LDSC could be complemented by a political-level body responsible for setting the strategic agenda and meeting annually to review progress and define future priorities.