© 2024 Foundation for Good Politics ISSN 2227-6068

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. IN THE BLACK SEA REGION: THE CASES OF TÜRKIYE, BULGARIA, AND ROMANIA

Maryna Bessonova
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
ORCid: 0000-0003-1533-775X

Myroslava Lisovska
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
ORCid: 0000-0002-3534-9945

Olena Pistrakevych
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
ORCid: 0000-0003-0457-1954

DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00011

Abstract. *The article attempts to make a general overview of the current attitudes towards the United States of America among the Black Sea states, in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania in particular. They focused on finding out what kind of sentiments towards America are present among the representatives of the political circles and within the societies in the Black Sea states; are there any anti-American narratives while taking into account the fact that all countries of the region except Russia are considered as American partners; what factors influenced these attitudes. The evolution of anti-Americanism in the Black Sea region, particularly in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania, reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, geopolitical dynamics, and internal political factors. While Türkiye grapples with mixed sentiments and a balancing act between the U.S. and Russia, Bulgaria's public opinion reflects a complex interplay of pro-European aspirations and historical ties to Russia. Romania, on the other hand, showcases a predominantly favorable attitude towards the U.S., driven by security concerns and a commitment to NATO, despite some critical voices. The ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine has further influenced these dynamics, highlighting the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in U.S. foreign policy*

Keywords: *Black Sea region, anti-Americanism, attitudes, Russian-Ukrainian war, Türkiye, Bulgaria, Romania*

Submitted*: 15 July 2024;* ***accepted****: 9 November 2024*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the United States of America still plays a leading role in the international relations system. This country is the focus of enormous attention of both practitioners and theorists because of the U.S.'s direct or indirect influence on many current political, economic, security, and other issues around the world. Reaction to American policy and politics, government, society, culture, etc., became a specific feature of current political life both on the international and national levels. On the one hand, America (in this article, the word "America" will be used as a synonym of the name of the United States of America) was and still is the embodiment of the land of possibilities and success, a place where dreams come true, a reliable partner and the one who supports. On the other hand, America's active involvement and sometimes outright interference in many international and domestic affairs in the different parts of the world, direct and indirect pressure, and neglect of the opinion of others formed another image of the U.S. — the country with the "big stick policy", "imperialist", "world policeman" etc.

Nowadays, attitudes towards the U.S. have already formed around the globe. In various societies, they have their own origin, reasons, traditions, and peculiarities. One can find regions with the dominant positive or negative sentiments towards America; also, some countries with mixed feelings towards the U.S. evolve depending on circumstances, internal and international political, economic, and security situations, America's activities, and its reaction to specific events. One can find regional, national, religious, geographical, and other diversities in the sentiments towards the U.S. These specific features can help better understand the bilateral and multinational relations, consequences, and results of the U.S. foreign policy and characteristics of particular societies, their political life, and political culture.

The Black Sea has been one of the critical regions for U.S. foreign policy since the middle of the 20th century. During the Cold War for America, it was a region under the dominance of Soviet influence and a potential threat to Turkey, the only American ally in the Black Sea at that time, as all other littoral states were or within the structure of the USSR, or in the orbit of Soviet foreign policy. Soviet influence was also crucial in the ideological sphere, significantly impacting attitudes towards the U.S., the West, and NATO in the Black Sea countries. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union caused deep transformations in regional and global international relations, which influenced the configuration of the powers in the region: Turkey and Russia became the leading players as it was centuries before. The end of the Cold War also pushed changes in the attitudes towards the U.S., whose involvement in the region is closely associated with NATO.

After the Cold War, Russia's renewed imperial ambitions to control the Black Sea as a key to the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea actualized American interest in the region. We should consider Russian aggression towards Georgia in 2008 and support of creating Abkhazia as a quasi-state on the Black Sea, Russian occupation, and annexation in 2014 of Ukrainian Crimea not only as regional events but also as more broad and deep attempts to reconstruct the world order. Finally, the Russian full-scale

invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally destabilized the region and produced more insecurity among the Black Sea littoral states (Melvin & Seskuria 2022: 1)

As many observers concluded, such a situation directly threatens peace and prosperity not only for the Black Sea states but also for the North Atlantic community, which was "a bedrock of U.S. foreign policy since 1945" (Hooker Jr. 2023). The U.S., as well as European and even global concerns about the region, were connected not only with the military actions but also with the issues of food security, economic stability, violation of human rights, and international law. American vital interests in the region are closely tied with the necessity to strengthen transatlantic security architecture based on NATO, stabilize the Black Sea situation, and consolidate the Euro-Atlantic community (Hooker Jr. 2023).

America's current involvement in the Black Sea region is mirrored in the discussions of the Black Sea Security Strategy introduced in the U.S. Congress in March 2023 as the Black Sea Security Act of 2023. This Act was incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, signed by the President, and became Public Law 118-31 on December 22, 2023 (*Congress.gov* 2023b). American interest was expressed in support of the efforts to prevent the spread of further armed conflict in Europe by recognizing the Black Sea region as an arena of Russian aggression (*Congress.gov* 2023a). In general, the U.S. new strategy towards the Black Sea region focuses on the work "within NATO and with NATO Allies, and it is aimed to develop a long-term strategy to enhance security, establish a permanent, sustainable presence along NATO's eastern flank, and bolster the democratic resilience of its allies and partners in the region" (*Congress.gov* 2023a). Section 1247 of the Public Law 118-31 outlines five main ways of the United States policy towards the region: increase coordination with NATO and the European Union; deepening the economic ties; strengthening energy security; support efforts to bolster the Black Sea states to democratic resilience; and enhancement of security assistance with regional partners under the values and interests of the United States. This document name as "Black Sea states" Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, and special attention in this document is paid to Türkiye, and China is also mentioned.

All these developments in the region had a determinative impact not only on the political establishment on national and international levels but also on public opinion about Russia, Ukraine, and also about NATO, and the U.S., as half of the Black Sea countries are already NATO members. The Black Sea is no longer a silently accepted sphere of Russian dominance but the area of increasing Western presence (Domaradzki 2024: 15). The main reason for Russia's aggression towards such littoral states as Georgia and Ukraine was their desire to join NATO.

The proposed paper attempts to make a general overview of the current attitudes towards the United States of America among the Black Sea states that are not former Soviet republics: Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania. Of course, the comprehensive analysis should present the study of all the littoral states, including Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, and Moldova (even though it has no direct access to the sea). The review of the anti-American attitudes of the last-mentioned states will be the subject of the following research.

The study within this paper aims to find out what kind of sentiments towards America are present among the representatives of the political circles and within the societies in the Black Sea states; are there any anti-American narratives while taking into account the fact that all countries of the region except Russia are considered as American partners; what factors influenced these attitudes. The paper will start with a brief retrospective of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Black Sea states. Following this, we will present descriptions and analyses of the region's current developments and attitudes toward America.

2. TÜRKIYE

Relations between the United States and Türkiye (that time the Ottoman Empire) were first established in 1831. Almost a century later, in 1927, diplomatic relations were established with the Republic of Türkiye (United States Department of State. Türkiye). Further bilateral relations developed within the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (1947), which de facto was implementing the Truman Doctrine and the United States' Containment policy during the Cold War. Türkiye joined the West and the U.S. in deterring communist influence. It was caused by the threat of the potential Soviet invasion and attempts to control the Straits of the Dardanelles (Tuba 2015: 254).

As seen from the Western point of view, during the early Cold War, the support for the West was practically unanimous across the country and went beyond military and security considerations (NATO n.d.). From NATO's point of view, Türkiye was a cornerstone of Western security on its southern flank. Türkiye was and still is the only Muslim-majority state in the NATO (Yahya 2014). That is why it was and still is a unique and vital ally of the United States in the region. While Türkiye and the U.S. have some contradictions in their approaches towards the Middle East, in the Black Sea region, Türkiye is a critical regional partner, and the U.S. has a great interest in keeping Türkiye connected to the Euro-Atlantic community. The U.S.'s most interest in the Republic of Türkiye lies in security issues: since Türkiye entered NATO in 1952 and controls the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, which link the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. Turkey joined the U.S. in their efforts to defeat terrorist organizations, and in 2015, opened its military basis for the partners of the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State.

Turkish professor Ozan Örmeci pointed out two visible peaks of anti-Americanism in Türkiye: the late 1960s – 1970s and the early 2000s (Örmeci 2024: 39). In the opinion of other Turkish researchers, the first manifestations of anti-Americanism in Türkiye appeared in the middle of the twentieth century. As Ünlü Bilgiç Tuba underlines, criticism was focused on the fact that Türkiye did not become an equal ally but "was downgraded to a U.S. colony" and that American but not Turkish interests determined their bilateral relations (Tuba 2015: 251). Güney Aylin named among the first reasons for the rising of anti-American sentiments in Türkiye such events as the removal of Jupiter missiles from Türkiye in the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis without prior consultation with Ankara, the Cyprus crisis, reaction to the American financial assistance as compensation on the opium production ban which was interpreted in Türkiye as interference in Türkiye's domestic politics (Güney 2008: 472–473). Additionally to those who were critical of the

U.S. for the above reasons, some Turks were negative towards the United States within the frame of leftist views for whom American foreign policy was imperialistic (Tuba 2015: 262). Anti-American complaints exaggerated by left propaganda were aimed at American military presence and espionage activities, accusations that the Turkish nation was being poisoned by American wheat and that archaeological treasures were being smuggled out of Türkiye (Güney 2008: 474).

Besides leftist concerns, anti-American sentiments spread in a more influential elite minority among the press, universities, and students. Ünlü Bilgiç Tuba defines that negative and critical sentiments towards American policy and citizens appeared already in the 1950s-1960s and also spread among rightists and conservatives (Tuba 2015: 267). Researchers also singled out cultural and economic negative sentiments toward the U.S., but in general, anti-Americanists were a minority in Türkiye.

In the last decade of the Cold War, Türkiye lost its confidence in the United States because Türkiye's security was perceived as a hostage of American policy (Güney 2008: 475). This caused the re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy and led to the distancing from the U.S. and improving relations with non-Western states. The cut of American military aid to Türkiye in the 1990s and conflicting views on the war in Iraq initiated by the U.S. at the beginning of the 2000s led to the rise of negative attitudes toward American foreign policy not only among elites but also among Turkish people.

In 2001, after the terrorist attack on the United States, Türkiye, as well as almost all states around the world, showed solidarity with this country. Türkiye joined the International Security Assistance Force and officially supported the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. However, the American war in Iraq under the slogan of the “global war on terrorism” and the U.S. cooperation with Peshmerga forces in Iraqi Kurdistan led to the further distancing of two historical allies and resulted in lowering support for the United States in Türkiye. James Kapsis stated that differences over Iraq weakened U.S.-Turkish relations (Kapsis 2005: 389). The Kurdish issue supplemented criticism toward the U.S. Ozan Örmeci named two main reasons which led to the rise of anti-American sentiments in Turkish society at that time: the first reason was American growing cooperation with Kurdish Peshmerga forces caused by the non-adoption of a motion in the Turkish parliament to deploy U.S. troops in Türkiye on March 1, 2003; and the second one it was a conflict between U.S. and Turkish soldiers in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, July 4, 2003, known as the “hood incident” (Örmeci 2024: 42). As Kapsis noted according to public opinion polls, 82 percent of Turkish respondents had an unapproving view of the U.S. and believed the United States threatens world peace (Kapsis 2005: 380). In 2003, 53.6 percent of the respondents believed that a U.S. intervention without a Turkish military occupation of northern Iraq would result in the establishment of a Kurdish state, and 60.5 percent were sure that the United States favored the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq (Uslu et al. 2005: 77). Polls confirm that growing numbers of Turks perceive their NATO ally more as a national security threat, rather than a strategic partner (Taşpınar 2005: 2). According to Pew Research Center poll 71 percent of Turkish respondents worried about potential U.S. military threat (Kohut 2003). The peak of negative attitudes toward the United States occurred in the spring of 2003 when such views as “very unfavorable” (67%

in March, 68% in May) and "somewhat unfavorable" (17% in March, 15% in May) dominated Turkish public opinion (Erdoğan 2005: 6). At the same time, the two countries were still trying to work together on the Iraq issue, and there was no serious crisis between Türkiye and the United States.

As Örmeci argued, the U.S. seemed to have lost the support of such categories of Turkish society as the far-left, Islamists, the mainstream left and right, as well as the Armed Forces and security bureaucracy. Örmeci predicated that this created a comfortable ground for the further development of Turkish anti-Americanism and even led to more positive perceptions of the Turkish traditional enemy — Russia, which started to transform into a more trusted ally (Örmeci 2024: 42).

Many researchers agreed that the main reasons for the rise of anti-Americanism in Türkiye in the early 2000s were the Iraq War and foreign policy conducted by the Bush-junior administration (Erdoğan 2005: 15-16). The United States was seen as acting in its own interests, without consideration for other states, the same as it was perceived in Türkiye in the 1960s – 1970s. There is also an opinion that the disappearance of the shared common enemy (the Soviet Union) was one more reason why anti-American sentiments started to dominate in Türkiye in the early 2000s (Taşpınar 2005: 3).

The current-day anti-Americanism in Türkiye takes its roots from the anti-Americanism of the early 2000s. Pew Research Center's surveys confirm this tendency in their polls. Before the 2003 Iraq War, Turkish opinions of the U.S. were less negative. According to the results of the Global Attitudes Surveying 2002-2014, the culmination of the unfavorable views on the U.S. was in 2003 and 2007 (83%), in 2008 and 2011 (77%) (Poushter 2014). Opinions toward the U.S. have been relatively steady over the decade, 2004-2014, with the dominance of negative attitudes. This was also visible in the attitudes toward NATO. In 2014, a negative opinion toward NATO prevailed: 53% had a "very unfavorable," 17% had a "somewhat unfavorable" opinion, and only 19% had a favorable view of the alliance (*Pew Research Center* 2014: 11).

The main reasons for the contradictions between Türkiye and the U.S. were not only the refU.S.l for the passage of American troops to Iraq in 2003 but also breaking up Türkiye with Israel and destroying the U.S.–Israel–Turkey triangle in 2010, Turkish policy in Syria out of line with U.S. interests in 2011. The final distancing occurred in 2016 when Türkiye blamed the United States for the July coup.

Negative attitudes toward the U.S. further progressed after the failed military coup in 2016. Several surveys were conducted by the Kadir Has University (Istanbul) to determine public perceptions of Turkish foreign policy. According to these public opinion polls, the peak of negative attitudes toward the U.S. was in the years after 2016. For example, in 2015 – 35.3%, in 2016 – 44.1%, in 2017 – 66.5%, in 2018 – 60.2%, in 2019 – 81.3%, in 2020 – 70%, in 2021 – 54%, in 2022 – 42.7% of the respondents perceive the United States as a threat to Türkiye. It also was combined with the minimum percentage of attitudes to the U.S. as Türkiye's friend/ally: in 2015 – 5.9%, in 2016 – 2.6%, in 2017 and 2018 – 0.6%, in 2019 – 5.4%, in 2020 – 7.3%, in 2021 – 16.7% (Örmeci 2024: 43-44).

The tendency of strengthening negative attitudes toward the U.S. remains in the following years. Under the full-scale Russian aggression on Ukraine, nearly 90% of Turkish respondents perceived the United States as a hostile country (poll conducted in December 2022 by the Turkish company Gezici (Aydınlık 2023). Surveys also showed negative attitudes toward NATO. The opinion that the U.S. and NATO are the real cause of the war is more prevalent in Türkiye than other reasons: Metropoll's 2022 mid-April survey showed that 46 percent of Turks blame the U.S. and NATO for the war; 30 percent blame Russia (Makovsky 2022). At the same time, 62.6% of Turkish respondents believed that Russia is a friendly country, and 72.8% favored good relations with Russia (Aydınlık 2023).

Türkiye's policy toward the war is a balance between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, it aims to strengthen the Turkish position in the Black Sea, in NATO, and in the international arena in general (the important role of Türkiye in the grain export agreement and cease-fire initiatives). On the one hand, Türkiye closed the Straits to Russian military vessels, limiting Russia's ability to reinforce its Black Sea fleet. On the other hand, many Russians relocated their owned businesses to Türkiye; Türkiye did not join sanctions against Russia for economic reasons (import and export of each other's commodities, cooperation on natural gas and oil pipelines, Russian technical assistance in constructing nuclear plants, mutual interests in Central Asia). All this is a sign of the attraction between these two countries and further distancing in the relationship with the U.S. And, as Mehmet Yegin and Salim Çevik noted, Türkiye managed to pursue a pro-Ukrainian policy without being anti-Russian (Yegin & Çevik 2024).

There are still issues that negatively influence Turkish-American relations and attitudes toward the U.S.: American position on Türkiye's contradictions with Greece, Türkiye's blocking NATO candidacies of Sweden and Finland, Turkish application to purchase the F-16 and the U.S. secondary sanctions on Türkiye in October 2024 (Psaledakis & Lewis 2024). These caused reasons for the rise of critical attitudes towards the U.S. Biden's administration was also too strict on the issues of democracy and human rights, so there are expectations that with the next Trump administration in Washington, improvement of Turkish-American relations is possible. At the same time, some of the most significant problems in Türkiye–U.S. relations occurred during Trump's first presidency. A public opinion poll conducted in January – March 2024 by Pew Research Center shows that 80% of Turks have unfavorable opinions on the U.S. The majority of the respondents have little or no confidence in American presidents (that time, President Biden (87%) and former President Trump (86%)) (Clancy et al. 2024).

Generally, we can note that in Türkiye, people have mixed attitudes toward the U.S., which evolved from favorable sentiments at the beginning of the Cold War to unfavorable in the 2000-2020s. In addition to geopolitical, security, and economic roots of the critical or openly negative outlook on the U.S., Turkish official anti-Western narratives, which can be beneficial for national politicians, fueled anti-American discourse (Tokdemir et al. 2024: 103).

3. BULGARIA

The United States of America and the Republic of Bulgaria established their relations in 1903. They were suspended twice: from 1941 to 1947 and 1950 to 1959. The first time was because of World War II: Bulgaria declared war on the United States on December 13, 1941, and the U.S. did the same on June 5, 1942. At the war's end, the Soviet Army occupied Bulgaria and was proclaimed a People's Republic on September 15, 1946. However, the United States, for a while, still recognized the representatives of the Bulgarian pre-war government within the framework of the activities of the Allied Control Commission, which dealt with the defeated Axis countries. Finally, the U.S. and Bulgaria restored diplomatic relations in 1947. Bulgaria severed second-time diplomatic relations with the United States in 1950, when the U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria, Donald Read Heath, was blamed for espionage and support of the plot to overthrow the Bulgarian communist government. In 1959, Bulgaria dropped all charges against the American ambassador and restored diplomatic relations with the U.S. (U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria n.d.). During the Cold War, Bulgaria was considered one of the most loyal satellites of the U.S.SR. There were even rumors of making Bulgaria the 16th republic of the U.S.SR. Russian influence in Bulgaria originated from history (e.g., the Russian-Turkish wars of the 19th century and the perception of Russia as a liberator from the Ottoman Empire and protector of Slavs) and Orthodox religion, and nowadays, Russia has a significant effect on today's Bulgarian politics and society.

After the collapse of communism in the region, the intensity of bilateral contacts increased sharply. The U.S. included Bulgaria in the financial and technical assistance according to the Support for East European Democracies Act 1989 (SEED Act), which aimed to facilitate the development of democratic institutions, political pluralism, and free market economies. Bulgaria graduated from the SEED program in 2007 following its EU accession, having received over $600 million in U.S. assistance since 1990 (U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria n.d.). During the first post-communist years, Bulgaria closely cooperated with the U.S. in economic and military spheres, considering them as areas of mutual interest (Грушецький 2016: 72–73).

American national interests in Bulgaria lay in the field of logistical support for American contingents in South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003). The United States has consistently supported Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the European Union (САЩ 2024). But at the same time, there was a specific discussion within the Bulgarian political circles about whether to join NATO or not (Грушецький 2015: 21–22), and the Bulgarian society demonstrated traditional Russophile views, as well as the attitude towards NATO as an enemy (Грушецький 2015: 20). While Bulgaria was on its way to joining NATO, and Bulgarian authorities were negotiating whether to support the U.S. military actions in Iraq, in Bulgarian society, there were still strong critical or negative attitudes towards the U.S. As Vassilev notes, in 2003, over 64% of the Bulgarian respondents feared terrorist attacks if Bulgaria backed the U.S. invasion of Iraq. (Vassilev 2006).

In 2004, Bulgaria became a member of NATO; in 2006, the United States and Bulgaria signed the U.S.-Bulgarian Defense Cooperation Agreement, which allows the

United States to have shared use and access to several Bulgarian military facilities (Domaradzki 2024: 10). The access facilitates joint training between the U.S. military and Bulgarian militaries. In 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. These developments influenced the intensification of the interaction between the two countries both on a bilateral basis and within the framework of NATO and EU–US cooperation.

However, at the same time, there were apparent anti-NATO attitudes in Bulgarian society. One of the openly anti-NATO parties is the ultranationalist party *Атака* (*Ataka*/Attack), which positions it as "neither left nor right, but Bulgarian". It was formed in 2005 and has won seats in parliament a few times, but since 2021, it has been an extra-parliamentary political force. From the very beginning of its activity, this party opposes Bulgarian membership in NATO, and its program demands Bulgaria leave NATO, complete neutrality, and no foreign military bases on Bulgarian territory. The leader of *Ataka*, Volen Siderov, is known as being respectful of Putin and Hugo Chávez, presidents of Russia and Venezuela famous for their anti-American rhetoric.

Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev noted that before the formation of this political party in Bulgaria, there was

> the political elite's consensus on key issues: they all agreed on EU and NATO memberships being prime goals, no matter the cost; they also seemed to agree on Bulgaria having to play the good student role before Western Europe and the United States. (Serre & Tashev 2011: 3)

The reflection of such attitudes Bulgarian journalist Ivan Bakalov mentioned in his interview to Maria Guineva:

> Many people get irritated seeing the servility of some Bulgarian politicians when it comes to America; as they were irritated before by the servility towards the Soviet Union. Many Bulgarians have this notion that the former ally and big brother - the Soviet Union (Russia) is now replaced by the U.S. This is, however, not quite true. There are just some particular reasons to believe so. And they are sometimes fueled by statements of American Ambassadors to Sofia, who publically criticize Bulgarian authorities – often rightfully so, but not very tactfully. And people say to themselves – look at these Americans how they issue orders to us. (Guineva 2010)

Negative attitudes toward the United States in Bulgaria are based not only on the legacy of the Cold War and traditional perceptions of American foreign policy but also on the rejection of the politics and behavior of national political establishment and American diplomats.

Such political parties as *Ataka* used problems caused by the economic crisis and unsuccessful reforms to attract voters and to earn popularity by criticizing the West and the U.S. Already in 2005, the U.S. embassy in Sofia warned of the increasing anti-American stance of the nationalist *Ataka* party. The embassy noted in one of its cables that new political party maintained strong and public ties with Russian diplomats. The U.S. embassy was very concerned about the *Ataka* daily newspaper, launched not long after the party itself was officially founded in 2005, remarking that the paper's

> slick format, professional editing, and provocative anti-American headlines have caused circulation to surge to the level of some of the smaller mainstream dailies. (BIRN 2011)

The anti-American sentiment from the party focused on U.S. military facilities on Bulgarian soil and the country's participation in the Iraq coalition. Among the traditional narratives of the *Ataka* daily were blames on the U.S. and its allies for the plight of Bulgarians and the establishment of U.S. bases "without paying a penny for them". Leader of *Ataka* Siderov warned that shared military bases would turn the country into a terrorist target and might be used as U.S. nuclear bases. He underlined in his dailies that

> the Americans will be allowed to pollute the bases and transform them into drug trafficking centers,

and that Bulgaria have to

> "follow foreign orders" and "send troops wherever Washington tells us to, and give all possible bases to the American assassins of children and women. (*BIRN* 2011)

Ataka's daily newspaper depicted the party's cooperation with Russia (e.g., the article headlined "Russia Will React to U.S. Basing", meeting with the Russian ambassador, where Siderov discussed U.S. military presence in Bulgaria (*BIRN* 2011).

The issue of the U.S. military presence in Bulgaria remained the main in anti-NATO and anti-American narratives. For example, in 2007, during the visit of then-president George W. Bush to Bulgaria, a protest of 200-300 people came out to express their grievance toward the United States because of the war and Washington's policies in Iraq. It was very opposite to the joyful crowd of thousands in the center of Sofia, as it was in 1999 during Bill Clinton's visit. The Bulgarians were seriously concerned that American training bases in Bulgaria could become a springboard for possible military action against Iran. That one day, they might find themselves on the front lines of a military conflict (Deutsche Welle 2007).

Events of 2014, when Russia started its aggression on Ukraine, impacted the further rise of the anti-Western and pro-Russian attitudes in Bulgaria. In March 2014, the main Bulgarian political parties were divided on how to react to the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia because of the country's energy dependence on Russia and obligations to join Western partners within the EU and NATO. Finally, Bulgaria announced its commitment to all sanctions on Russia, but soon it caused social-economic security challenges and critiques in Bulgarian society.

Pro-Russian politicians' narratives combined support of Russia and blame on the EU and the U.S. *Ataka* recognized Crimea, annexed in 2014 by Russia, as part of the Russian Federation. The party was invited to observe the 'referendum' in March 2014. In 2015, it sent its representatives to Crimea to assure both Russian and Russian-installed Crimean officials of the party's support. (Coynash 2015). During this visit in February 2015 *Ataka* delegation met the Russian President's representative in Crimea, Oleg Belaventsev, who thanked the delegation for their moral support:

> We know well what Europe and the U.S. have done to Bulgaria. You were a thriving country, and see what's happened now. Therefore, a huge thank you for your support. (Coynash 2015)

So, anti-Western and anti-American sentiments were additional touch points in relations with Russia.

The public opinion poll in May 2014 showed that 60% of Bulgarian respondents attributed the responsibility of the 'Ukrainian crisis' (first stage of the Russian aggression to Ukraine) to the West, 38% supported the annexation of Crimea while 35% approved the decision of not recognizing it and 24% expressed no opinion on the topic. 40% expressed their support of EU membership and 22% for a hypothetical Bulgarian membership of the Eurasian Economic Community launched by Russia (Crombois 2021). Polish expert Jakub Pieńkowski notes that Bulgarian society remains hostile to the U.S. and sympathetic towards Russia: according to Gallup survey from 2016 only 17% of Bulgarians described the U.S. as an ally, while 42% preferred Russia (Pieńkowski 2019). For such parties as *Ataka*, the issue of lifting sanctions against Russia became one more slogan they used together with anti-Western/anti-NATO slogans.

When Russia started the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, official Sofia supported all the sanctions. It declared that Bulgaria would become a very predictable and strong supporter of NATO and EU decisions (Bayer 2022). As of the beginning of 2024, Bulgaria supports all twelve EU packages of sanctions imposed on Russia. In February 2024 Parliament Chair Rosen Zhelyazkov noted Bulgarian concerns:

> the continued designation by Russia of a temporary warning zone in the Black Sea, which includes parts of the Bulgarian exclusive economic zone, is perceived as a serious threat to Bulgaria's national security and economic interests and freedom of navigation. (Vodenova 2024)

At the same time, we can find the opposite interpretations from openly anti-Western and pro-Russian parties in Bulgaria, who traditionally accused the U.S. of interference in national domestic affairs.

E.g., political party *Rusofili za vazrazhdane na Otechestvoto* ("Russophiles for the Revival of the Fatherland"), established in 2008, first and the only one successful election campaign in 2014, now – extra-parliamentary, cooperated in different election coalitions with left-wing nationalists, *Ataka* party and communists. In 2021 *Rusofili za vazrazhdane na Otechestvoto* signed a memorandum of cooperation with Putin's *United Russia* party. When signing the agreement of future cooperation the following issues were discussed: the increase in military tension in the Black Sea and the initiative for Bulgaria to become a zone of peace and refuse to participate in the NATO Defender military exercises scheduled for the spring-summer of 2021 (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2021). The same issues are mentioned in the constitution of this political party: "transforming the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Black Sea waters into a "Zone of Peace"; preventing the presence of foreign military forces in our country" (Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството 2022a), in its program "the existence of foreign military formations and foreign military bases in Bulgaria. It is unacceptable for our country to be turned into a frontline state, a target of foreign missiles (*Русофили за*

възраждане на Отечеството 2024a). On their website, one can find materials repeating Russian narratives (e.g., about American biolaboratories in Ukraine (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2022b).

The program of this party on the parliamentary elections 2024 contained items, which combined anti-NATO and pro-Russian vectors:

> 3. We are for leaving NATO. Membership in this military organization is a threat to Bulgarian national security. 4. We are for leaving the European Union and Bulgaria's orientation towards BRICS. 5. The Bulgarian people must preserve and enrich their centuries-old civilizational ties with Russia. Bulgaria must restore its economic relations with Russia by accelerating the import of much cheaper Russian gas and electricity. (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2024b)

In March 2024, the leader of the party, Nikolay Malinov, published the overview of the results of the survey "Russia and the Bulgarians 2023" conducted by G Consulting in December 2023, commissioned by PH Media Group and distributed by other opposition media. The results of the survey claim that despite the rampant propaganda hatred of Russia, about 60% of Bulgarians have a positive attitude towards it, and only about 20% have a negative one. Only 29% of Bulgarians believe that Bulgaria will be more successful in defending its interests in the EU and NATO; 61% do not accept this. 65% of respondents are convinced that Washington and Brussels dictate Bulgaria's foreign policy and serve foreign interests; 47% of respondents believe that good relations with Russia would protect Bulgaria from excessive dependence on the U.S. and the West, while 34% disagree with such a statement; 48% of Bulgarians believe that U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia should be lifted; 64% of those interviewed tend to agree, while 20% disagree with the statement, "Despite being a member of the EU and NATO, Bulgaria must assert its right to maintain close ties with Russia, as Hungary and Turkey do, for example". In addition to highlighting pro-Russian sentiments, the report also contains anti-American narratives alleging the United States Bulgarian media funding and interference in Bulgarian politics by supporting NGOs accusing those "who take money from the U.S. to 'develop democracy' and denigrate Russia" (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2024c).

Another example is one of the openly anti-American political forces in today's Bulgaria: the far-right ultra-nationalist *Vazrazhdane* (*Revival* Party). The views of its followers combine anti-NATO rhetoric, populism, and xenophobia. The party was established in 2014 and independently ran in elections for the first time in 2017, where they received 1.11% of the vote. In the 2023 elections, the party achieved 14.16%, becoming the third political party in the Bulgarian parliament. In the October 2024 elections, *Vazrazhdane* repeated its success, again securing third place. Th*e* party claims to be the only patriotic party in Bulgaria. A key issue in *Vazrazhdane*'s agenda is closing American bases on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and holding a referendum on NATO membership. The party has declared these slogans in the Defense section of its program (*Възраждане* 2024).

This party is active in organizing protests with anti-Western, anti-NATO and anti-American slogans. For example, in September 2023 *Vazrazhdane* organized a massive

meeting against the policies of the pro-Western government, calling for the government to resign and for the closure of NATO military bases. Hundreds of protestors waved Bulgarian and Russian national flags and carried placards reading "American bases out! Bulgaria is a zone of peace"; they walked from the building of parliament to the monument to the Soviet army. Such manifestations give arguments for the opinion that this party receives support from Putin (Vassileva 2024). The leader of *Vazrazhdane,* Kostadin Kostadinov told the crowd:

> The last instruction that came from the masters of Bulgaria, from the U.S., is for Bulgaria to make a new military base. NATO Out! (Nenov 2023)

When the Black Sea Security Strategy was discussed in the U.S. Congress in March 2023, and the main aim was announced as to prevent the spread of further armed conflict in Europe by recognizing the Black Sea region as an arena of Russian aggression, *Vazrazhdane* reacted to it as follows:

> They are dragging Bulgaria into a military conflict and limiting it to the Black Sea region. It is becoming increasingly clear that NATO is not protecting us but is preparing to turn us into another scorched-earth territory. It is becoming increasingly clear that behind NATO is the intention of a dying empire to destroy Bulgaria…
>
> We at Vazrazhdan were the first to signal that the Americans wanted to build their base in Burgas Bay. We remind you that this base will be foreign territory, like all other American bases in our country, for which the U.S. does not pay rent, and the Bulgarian government has neither free access nor control. That is, we already have occupied territories.. The U.S. does not want the war to spread to Europe but to be limited here, that is, to include us…
>
> …Obviously, the U.S. wants to be present in the Black Sea and is prioritizing systems for monitoring and intelligence on Russia's operations in the Black Sea region (*Възраждане* 2023).

Manifestations of anti-Americanism in Bulgaria intensified during the election of the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the summer of 2024. The Patriarch elected became Daniel (then Metropolitan of Vidin), who has openly supported the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and is an ardent opponent of the autonomy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (in December 2018, he condemned the Unification Council in Kyiv, calling it uncanonical). The presence of other candidates accused of serving together with Ukrainian “schismatics” in the election list caused considerable discussion. The media discussed that the U.S. would install (take) a patriarch under American control. The most active was the leader of the Bulgarian far-right *Vazrazhdane* (Revival party), Kostadin Kostadinov, who claimed his address to the Bulgarian President to convene the Advisory Council on National Security. Kostadinov ‘s rhetoric was about external intervention, directly from the U.S., which aims to place a patriarch subordinate to itself at the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Костадинов 2024). He saw the main danger for Bulgaria and Bulgarian state security in possible schism with the Russian Church as the largest Orthodox Church.

We have to mention that these anti-American voices are loud but not dominant in Bulgaria. Russian aggression to Ukraine and destabilization of the security situation in the Black Sea region influenced Bulgarian public opinion. GLOBSEC survey in February 2024 shows that while the Bulgarian audience is divided in their attitudes toward the question of who is primarily responsible for the war in Ukraine: Russia (43.9%) or the West (34.4%), but in general support for NATO membership and the perception of the U.S. as Sofia's crucial strategic partner rise (Filipova 2024).

According to the to the "NATO Audience Research: pre-Summit polling results" conducted in April–May 2024, pro-NATO attitudes increased in Bulgaria: 66% of Bulgarians consider Russia's war against Ukraine may have affected the safety and security of their country (in 2022, it was 61%); 66% agree their country to remain a member of NATO (excluding 'don't know' responses, 62% in 2022); 69% consider the Alliance to be necessary for the future security of their country (63% in 2022), 56% think their country is more safe as a result of cooperation between North American and European NATO nations (52% in 2022) (NATO 2024).

Other research confirms this tendency, e.g., similar pro-Western trends shows findings from a nationally representative poll by the Alpha Research Agency for the Humanitarian and Social Research Foundation conducted in May 2024. In Bulgaria, support for NATO membership has soared since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with approval rising from 28% to 40% over the past seven years, taking into account all the positives and negatives of this (Nikolov 2024). The recent survey also points to growing support for the EU, declining support for Russia, and increasing disapproval of Vladimir Putin. In 2024, 33.7% of Bulgarians have a negative view of Russia, compared to just 8.2% in 2018. Putin's image in Bulgaria has also suffered considerably. It has fallen from 45.2% in 2018 to 22.1% in 2024. Currently, 49.5% of Bulgarians have a negative view of Putin. He is no longer seen as a "peacemaker" but as "an unimaginable entity that can take any arbitrary action without respecting the human rights and national sovereignty of other countries" (ALPHA Research 2024).

The data for 2024 show 61% support for Bulgaria's European belonging and EU membership, while only 16% disapprove. Experts comment that the increase of these indicators appeared due to the war in Ukraine, which has helped many Bulgarian citizens realize the possible damage of leaving the EU.

Therefore, as positive sentiment towards Bulgaria's membership in NATO and the EU increases, the basis for anti-Western, anti-NATO, and anti-American views decreases. Bulgarian respondents remain firmly committed to EU membership, while pro-Russian attitudes are also entrenched as ambivalence in assessing responsibility for the Kremlin's war against Ukraine continues unabated (Filipova 2024).

4. ROMANIA

Relations between the United States and Romania started in 1881 when the United States recognized the Kingdom of Romania as an independent state. Diplomatic relations were severed on December 12, 1941, when Romania declared war on the United States, and

were reestablished on October 1, 1946 (United States Department of State, Romania). During the Cold War, communist authorities led Romania, and they had a strained relationship with the United States. They vacillated from warm to cold. In the 1960s, with Romania's distancing from the Soviets after the invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), U.S.-Romanian relations improved. Still, in the 1980s, the violence of human rights in Romania caused criticisms from the U.S., and this had an impact on the strained character of bilateral relations. (U.S. Embassy in Romania).

Relations improved and strengthened since December 1989 when Romanians unseated the Communist regime, and Romania's policies became pro-Western. Romania was the first country to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in January 1994. In 1997, a strategic partnership between the U.S. and Romania was initiated, and it became a start for further western orientation of Romanian foreign policy and Romania's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Partnership with the U.S. and cooperation with the European Union (EU) and NATO are considered a "strategic conceptual triad" of Romania's foreign policy. (Președintele României). So, two of the three pillars are closely connected with the United States. Romania joined the U.S. in the fight against terrorism, contributed to multinational forces in Afghanistan.

Official Romanian policy is very pro-American. Close cooperation with the U.S. within Strategic Partnership and NATO (for example, the Agreement on the deployment of the U.S. ballistic missile defense system in Romania) is interpreted as bolstering of defense and deterrence posture on NATO's Eastern Flank, where the Black Sea is considered as strategically crucial for transatlantic security (*Joint Statement* 2019).

Romanian researcher Gabriel C. Gherasim notes that the majority of Romanian citizens are much more favorable to the United States than the majority in other European countries. It is hardly possible to find a comprehensive study exclusively or thematically dedicated to anti-Americanism in Romania (Gherasim 2015: 172). However, we can still find critical attitudes toward the U.S. In his analysis, Gabriel C. Gherasim singles out four main dimensions of anti-Americanism in Romania: (1) cultural and ideological (prejudices about the United States and its people); (2) economic (the economic impact of the United States' interests in worldwide affairs and on the Romanian economy); (3) psychological (misconceptions about liberal mentalities and practices); (4) religious (mainstream Orthodox religious tradition which instills a set of beliefs and behaviors at odds with the United States' religious and secular traditions of thought).

The age criteria can make a primary division of the supporters or critics of America in Romania: more or less conscious anti-Americanism is much more widespread in the attitudes of Romanian citizens over 40 years of age, so anti-American attitudes divide middle-aged and elderly citizens from their young counterparts who usually favorable, seduced and/or positive in their perceptions of the United States. Gherasim assessed the nature of Romanian anti-Americanism as fundamentally ambivalent and affective which he explained as follows:

> culturally and politically, Romanians are caught between a relatively intuitive admiration for the American enthusiasm for success and their commitment to self-

> fulfillment and a certain kind of contempt regarding their naivety and shallowness. (Gherasim 2015: 181)

Factors that can cause critical or negative attitudes towards the U.S. in Romania can include the following: discrepancy between the attractiveness of the "American dream" ideology and its effectiveness in the real world; reverent attitudes towards the military capabilities of the United States and considering it as a potentially harmful source of global insecurity. Nevertheless, the Romanian need for security evacuates criticism and resentment about the destructive potential of American 'militarism'.

The Romanians' commitment to NATO is primarily influenced by their fear of Russia and the weak capabilities of the Romanian armed forces in confronting present-day challenges. The greatest danger to Romania is the prospect of a second Belarus, i.e., a Russian dominated neighbor, in Moldova wedged between Ukraine and Romania, with a Russian-sponsored enclave Transnistria, and war in Ukraine (when the Black Sea and territories on the border are on the potential attacks. That is why there is a consensus in Romanian society towards NATO, which in other post-Soviet states can be one of the debate factors.

Let's look through the results of some surveys — to find out the presence or absence of any anti-American sentiments.

The 2018 survey presented the following (*AVANGARDE* 2018): on the question "Please tell us which of these countries you would like us to have the closest relations with?" the U.S. occupied the first place (with 37%), second was Germany (25%), third France (11%). At the same time, attitudes towards then-president Trump were not so favorable. He was third with 29% positive opinion after Emmanuel Macron (38%) and Angela Merkel (37%). Trump also got the top place in the opinion "Neither good nor bad" 33%. In 2018, Romanians considered Russia the biggest enemy of Romania's interests (such an answer on the open question gave 31% of the respondents, Hungary was second (9%), and the U.S. was third with 5%.

Attitudes towards a certain American president can also influence the rise or fall of negative perceptions of the U.S. E.g., during the first Trump presidency, inaccurate statements from the U.S. president and his general messages of distrust in the traditional media negatively contributed to Romania's already unstable informational environment (Ioan 2020).

The majority of Romanians (53%) supported the opinion that NATO military presence in Romania "should remain the same as now", 33% even support a possible increase in the number of military personnel, and only 14% consider the variant to reduce the number of soldiers. 74% approve that the U.S. should continue to be Romania's leading strategic partner (in the questionnaire, such a question was only about the United States). Romanians also support American influence on Romanian domestic policy: 87% consider that American ambassadors have to continue supporting the fight against political corruption launched by the DNA (while in other countries with a higher level of anti-Americanism, such activities for sure would be qualified for interference into the domestic policy) (*AVANGARDE* 2018).

The potential threat from Russia (as Romania shares a border with both Ukraine and Moldova, states that have experienced Russia's military threat in practical terms) caused the location of the largest NATO military base in Europe in Romania. This country is significant for the EU and NATO strategically, but the West can only benefit from it if the local population believes their country's membership in the Western institutional system and the respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights is beneficial to them.

Romanian support for NATO membership significantly exceeded, likely as a result of Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine: in 2021, 77% of Romanians supported staying in NATO; in 2022 – 80%; in 2023 – 89%; in 2024 – 88% (Szicherle 2024: 9). This increasing support also translated to an increase in the proportion of Romanians who agree that their NATO membership lowers the chance that a foreign nation would attack them. In 2022, 62% agreed with such an assertion; in 2022, 73%, and in 2024 – 78% (Szicherle 2024: 10).

When it comes to strategic partners for Romanians, the U.S. is rated on the top: in 2021, 47% of Romanians consider the U.S. as the most important strategic partner (Germany was second with 42%); in 2022 – 75% (the same year the United Kingdom was second with 23%, Germany and France got 19% each), in 2023 and 2024 the percentage come a little bit down – 53%, but still, the U.S. was considered as the most important partner (Szicherle 2024: 11). The biggest security threat was Russia (in 2020 – 30%, 2022 – 58%, 2023 – 64%, and 2024 – 73%). But at the exact moment, certain percentages of Romanians view the U.S. as a threat: in 2020 – 15%; in 2022 – 14%; in 2023 – 11%; in 2024, once more, 14% (Szicherle 2024: 12).

Main Romanian political parties support the growth of Romania's authority at the NATO level and the development of a strategic partnership with the United States, including the increase in the American military presence in Romania. Parties of the center-left (Social Democrats) and center-right (National Liberals) have swapped control peacefully and even governed together for a time. That is why Romania is considered America's and the EU's indispensable ally in Eastern Europe.

There are no openly anti-American or anti-European/anti-Western parties in Romania. The far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) formed in 2019, which, in the elections of 2024, unexpectedly took second place, does not call for withdrawal from NATO. AUR declares that it would like Romania to be a leader in Central and Eastern Europe within the European Union and to integrate the Republic of Moldova into Romania. The party describes itself as pro-NATO and views the integration of Moldova into Romania as strengthening NATO's eastern flank. AUR also is criticizing NATO and EU's help to Ukraine with narratives that are very close to the Russian ones. That is why the central question of the Romanian elections 2024 was the alternative to switch the vector of the development from the West to the East, Putin's Russia (Bran 2024).

Frustration with the EU, NATO, or democracy already exists in Romania. It was caused by the long process of becoming a full member of the border-free Schengen area, concerns about inflation, economic problems, the war in Ukraine, and the effects of EU green policies. Such frustration creates a danger of establishing authoritarian-minded authorities, which can fuel the rise of local extremist Eurosceptic political forces. In

Romania, the emerging far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) is not pro-Kremlin because they consider Russia a threat to Romania. However, they disseminate anti-West, illiberal, and anti-EU narratives that could alienate Romania from its allies. Some of its members did take pro-Kremlin positions, for instance, when they called for the "return" of some Ukrainian regions to Romania (Szicherle 2024).

The manifestations of anti-American sentiment in recent years have been linked to Russian propaganda and disinformation in the Romanian information space. Russia's primary goals are to weaken trust in NATO and to incite anti-Western, particularly anti-American and Eurosceptic sentiments (Linden 2024). An example of such disinformation is the article by the well-known Romanian journalist Claudia Marcu, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the strategic partnership between the United States and Romania, "Strategic Partnership with the U.S. 25 years of NOTHING" in the "National Newspaper". In this article she speaks of the complete helplessness of Romania's Strategic Partnership with the U.S. and, as a result, only the transformation of Romania into an importer of American weapons (Marcu 2022). This article caused a negative resonance in Romanian society. Although it was recognized as disinformation and its author was openly pro-Russian, it received support from a particular group of citizens. The negative resonance in Romanian society shows that most citizens reject such information. However, even a tiny audience supporting such views can contribute to spreading disinformation and destabilization (Necșuțu 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

As the Black Sea region is regarded in the U.S. as a barrier against Russian expansionism, and the region is an important trade and export route for American partners' food commodities and energy, the issue of the perceptions of the U.S. in the littoral states is an essential factor of (in)stability in the region.

Türkiye has experienced a significant evolution in its attitudes towards the United States, marked by distinct peaks of anti-American sentiment. Initially, during the Cold War, Türkiye was a staunch ally of the U.S., primarily due to the shared goal of containing Soviet influence. However, the late 1960s and early 2000s saw notable anti-Americanism emerge, driven by events such as the Iraq War and perceived U.S. disregard for Turkish interests. The failed military coup in 2016 further exacerbated negative sentiments, with a substantial portion of the Turkish population viewing the U.S. as a threat. Despite these challenges, Türkiye continues to navigate a complex relationship with the U.S., balancing its NATO commitments with growing ties to Russia, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Bulgaria presents a hybrid landscape of attitudes towards the U.S., characterized by historical and religious ties to Russia and a complex relationship with NATO. Following the end of communism, Bulgaria sought closer ties with the West, joining NATO in 2004 and receiving significant U.S. assistance. However, anti-American sentiments persisted, particularly among nationalist groups like the Ataka party, which capitalized on economic grievances and historical Russophile sentiments. The Russian aggression against Ukraine

in 2014 further complicated Bulgaria's stance, leading to increased anti-Western narratives while simultaneously fostering a pro-NATO consensus among the broader population. Before the full-scale invasion to Ukraine, Bulgarian society remain hostile to the U.S. and sympathetic towards Russia. But surveys of 2022–2024 indicate a growing support for NATO and a decline in pro-Russian attitudes, suggesting a shift in public opinion influenced by regional security concerns.

Romania has maintained a generally favorable view of the United States, particularly after the fall of communism, which led to a strategic partnership with the U.S. and NATO membership. Romanian society largely supports American influence, viewing the U.S. as a crucial ally in the face of Russian aggression. However, critical attitudes do exist, often linked to perceptions of American foreign policy and military presence. The ongoing war in Ukraine has reinforced Romania's commitment to NATO, with public support for membership rising significantly in recent years. Despite some anti-American sentiments fueled by disinformation and dissatisfaction with domestic issues, Romania's political landscape remains predominantly pro-American, reflecting a consensus among major political parties to strengthen ties with the U.S. and enhance national security.

In summary, the evolution of anti-Americanism in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania is shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical dynamics, and internal political factors. While Türkiye grapples with mixed sentiments and a balancing act between the U.S. and Russia, Bulgaria's public opinion reflects a complex interplay of pro-European aspirations and historical ties to Russia. Romania, on the other hand, showcases a predominantly favorable attitude towards the U.S., driven by security concerns and a commitment to NATO, despite some critical voices. The ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine has further influenced these dynamics, highlighting the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in U.S. foreign policy.

Bibliography:

ALPHA Research. (2024). Социална уязвимост и пропаганда. Резюме на основните резултати от количествено и качествено социологическо проучване 2024г. *ALPHA Research hssfoundation.org* https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/0524_Hybrid_Propaganda_KeyFindings_Final.pdf (accessed 06 May 2024).

AVANGARDE. (2018). Sondaj la nivel national, Octombrie. *AVANGARDE*: Grupul de studii socio comportementale. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/df7685_b76a76b6f7f84ce4a79fa98389a7501d.pdf (accessed 06 May 2024).

Aydınlık. (2023). 62% Rusya dost, 90% ABD düşman. *Aydınlık*. 07 Ocak. https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/haber/62-rusya-dost-90-abd-dusman-359862 (accessed 6 May 2024).

Bayer, Lili. (2022). Bulgarian PM: We're no longer 'soft' on Russia. *Politico*. 4 March, https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-not-soft-russia-prime-minister-kiril-petkov/ (accessed 6 May 2024).

BIRN. (2011). Wikileaks: Bulgaria's Ataka Shows Anti-US Sentiment. *BIRN*. *BalkanInsight*. 18 May, https://balkanins BIRN ight.com/2011/05/18/wikileaks-cable-covers-anti-american-nationalist/ (accessed 3 June 2024).

Bran, Mirel. (2024). Far right makes spectacular breakthrough in Romania. *Le Monde*. 1 December, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/12/02/far-right-makes-spectacular-breakthrough-in-romania_6734918_4.html (accessed 6 May 2024).

Clancy, Laura, Poushter, Jacob & Ramones, Sofia Hernandez. (2024). Turks Lean Negative on Erdoğan, Give National Government Mixed Ratings. 8 in 10 Turkish adults see the U.S. negatively. *Pew Research Center*. 16 October https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/10/16/turks-lean-negative-on-erdogan-give-national-government-mixed-ratings/ (accessed 6 May 2024).

Congress.gov. (2023a) Black Sea Security Act of 2023. *The official website for U.S. federal legislative information Congress.gov,* 15 March, https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/804/text (accessed 11 May 2024)

Congress.gov. (2023b). National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024. *The official website for U.S. federal legislative information Congress.gov*, 22 December, https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/2670/text (accessed 11 May 2024)

Coynash, Halya. (2015). Bulgaria's Far-Right Ataka Party 'recognizes' Crimea as Russia. *Human rights in Ukraine*. 16 February, https://khpg.org/en/1423879542 (accessed 6 May 2024).

Crombois, Jean F. (2021). Small country and European security. The case of Bulgaria-Russia relations since 2014. In *Small States and Security in Europe: Between National and International Policymaking* (1st ed.). Weiss, T., & Edwards, G. (Eds.). Routledge https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003082453 (accessed 6 May 2024).

Deutsche Welle. (2007). Има ли промяна в отношението на българите към САЩ? *Deutsche Welle*, 11 June, https://p.dw.com/p/B3v6 (accessed 05 May 2024).

Domaradzki, Spasimir. (2024). Geopolitics in Eastern Europe. In: Cope, Z. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Geopolitics*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.: 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25399-7_25-2 (accessed 6 May 2024).

Erdoğan, Emre. (2005). The Missing Element: Turkish Public Opinion Towards the U.S. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.4, No.l (2005), p.201. http://turkishpolicy.com/article/136/the-missing-element-turkish-public-opinion-towards-the-u-s-spring-2005 (accessed 6 May 2024).

Filipova, Rumena. (2024). Bulgarian Public Opinion, 2024: Increasing Commitment to Allies and Improving Perceptions of Media Freedom amid Continuous East-West Ambivalence. Briefing paper No 6, April. GLOBSEC, https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/GLOBSEC%20Trends%202024%20Bulgaria.pdf (accessed 1 June 2024).

Gamkrelidze, Natia. (2024). Is the United States Losing Ground in the Black Sea Region? Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 14 August, https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/united-states-losing-ground-black-sea-region (accessed 20 August 2024)

Gherasim, Gabriel C. (2015). The cognitive dissonance of Romanian anti-americanism: ambivalence and/or "slough of resentful despond". *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Studia Europaea*, 60 (1): 171–186, https://studia.reviste.ubbcluj.ro/index.php/subbeuropaea/article/view/5067 (accessed 2 May 2024).

Guineva, Maria. (2010). Bulgarian Journalist Ivan Bakalov: Anti-Americanism Is Cold War Legacy and Big Brother Fear. *Sofia News Agency Novinite.com.* 22 November, https://www.novinite.com/articles/122419/Bulgarian+Journalist+Ivan+Bakalov%3A+Anti-Americanism+Is+Cold+War+Legacy+and+Big+Brother+Fear (accessed 2 May 2024).

Güney, Aylin. (2008). Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44(3): 471-487, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200802021632 (accessed 2 May 2024).

Hooker, Richard D. Jr. (2023). A security strategy for the Black Sea. Atlantic Council Task Force on Black Sea Security. Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. *Atlantic Council*. 15 December.

https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/a-security-strategy-for-the-black-sea/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Ioan, Alexandra. (2020). Romania Is a Strong U.S. Ally Either Way, but its Democracy Would Benefit from a Biden Win. *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*. https://www.gmfus.org/news/romania-strong-us-ally-either-way-its-democracy-would-benefit-biden-win (accessed 02 May 2024).

Joint Statement. (2019). Joint Statement from President of the United States Donald J. Trump and President of Romania Klaus Iohannis. *President of Romania*. 20 August, 2019. https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/joint-statement-from-president-of-the-united-states-donald-j-trump-and-president-of-romania-klaus-iohannis (accessed 2 May 2024).

Kapsis, James. (2005). From Desert Storm to Metal Storm: How Iraq Has Spoiled U.S.-Turkish Relations. *Current History*. 104. 380-389. DOI: 10.1525/curh.2005.104.685.380 (accessed 02 May 2024).

Kohut, Andrew. (2003). Anti-Americanism: Causes and Characteristics. *Pew Research Center*, 2003, December 10. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2003/12/10/anti-americanism-causes-and-characteristics-2/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Linden, Ronald H. (2024). Romania is America's new indispensable ally in Eastern Europe. *The Hill*. 31 July. https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4801359-romania-is-americas-new-indispensable-ally-in-eastern-europe/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Makovsky, Alan. (2022).Turkey and the Ukraine War: Ankara Charts its Own Course. *Turkey Analyst*. 12 May. https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/687-turkey-and-the-ukraine-war-ankara-charts-its-own-course.html (accessed 02 May 2024).

Marcu, Claudia. (2022). Parteneriatul strategic cu SUA. 25 de ani de NIMIC. *National*. 11 July, https://www.national.ro/politica/parteneriatul-strategic-cu-sua-25-de-ani-de-nimic-768588.html/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Melvin, Neil, Seskuria, Natia. (2022). A New Security Order in the Black Sea: The Role of Georgia. *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*. November (1) https://static.rusi.org/355-EI-Georgia-Black-Sea-web-final1.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

NATO. (2024). NATO Audience Research: pre-Summit polling results 2024. *NATO*. 5 July, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/7/pdf/240705-pre-summit-polling-results-en.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

NATO. (n.d.) Türkiye and NATO. *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_191048.htm (accessed 2 May 2024).

Necșuțu, Mădălin. (2022). Disinformation: The Romania – U.S. strategic partnership brings no advantages. *Veridica*. 25 July, https://www.veridica.ro/en/fake-news-disinformation-propaganda/disinformation-the-romania-us-strategic-partnership-brings-no-advantages (accessed 02 May 2024).

Nenov, Stoyan. (2023). Bulgarian nationalists protest against NATO bases, want government out. *Reuters*. 22 September, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bulgarian-nationalists-protest-against-nato-bases-want-government-out-2023-09-21/ (accessed 12 June 2024).

Nikolov, Krassen. (2024) Bulgarians increasingly pro-NATO, EU as support for Russia wanes. *Euractiv.com*. 22 August, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/bulgarians-increasingly-pro-nato-eu-as-support-for-russia-wanes/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Örmeci, Ozan. (2024). "Decoding anti-Americanism in Türkiye", in Turkish-American Relations in the 21st Century (eds. by Ozan Örmeci & Herbert Reginbogin), New York: Lexington Books: 37–53.

Pew Research Center. (2014). Turks Divided on Erdogan and the Country's Direction. *Pew Research Center*. July, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/Pew-Research-Center-Turkey-Report-FINAL-July-30-2014.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Pieńkowski, Jakub. (2019). Relations between Bulgaria and the U.S.: Fields of Cooperation and Disagreement. *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych*. 1 August, https://pism.pl/publications/Relations_Between_Bulgaria_and_the_US_Fields_of_Cooperation_and_Disagreement (accessed 2 May 2024).

Poushter, Jacob. (2014). The Turkish people don't look favorably upon the U.S., or any other country, really. *Pew Research Center*. 31 October, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2014/10/31/the-turkish-people-dont-look-favorably-upon-the-u-s-or-any-other-country-really/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Președintele României. (n.d.). Politică externă: Angajamente. *Președintele României*. https://www.presidency.ro/ro/angajamente/politica-externa (accessed 2 May 2024).

Psaledakis, Daphne & Simon, Lewis. (2024). U.S. cracks down on Russia sanctions evasion in fresh action. *Reuters*. 30 October, https://www.reuters.com/world/us-cracks-down-russia-sanctions-evasion-fresh-action-2024-10-30/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Serre, Adrien & Tashev, Georgi. (2011). Bulgarian extremist party ATAKA. Paper. *Coesionet. European cohesion and territories research network*. 16 May, https://www.sciencespo.fr/coesionet/sites/default/files/Bulgaria%20ATAKA.pdf (accessed 23 May 2024).

Szicherle, Patrik. (2024). Public attitudes in Romania. Staying in the West with some doubts. GLOBSEC. https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/Public%20Attitudes%20in%20Romania.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Taşpınar, Ömer. (2005). The Anatomy of Anti-Americanism in Turkey. Commentary. *Brookings*. November 16, 2005. 15 p. URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/taspinar20051116.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Tokdemir, Efe, Metintaş, Melike & Köstem, Seçkin. (2024). A Multi-Dimensional Evaluation of Turkish Public Opinion towards the United States. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*. 16 September (online first) 14(1): 83-106. https://www.allazimuth.com/2024/09/16/a-multi-dimensional-evaluation-of-turkish-public-opinion-towards-the-united-states/ (accessed 18 September 2024).

Tuba, Ünlü Bilgiç. (2015.) The Roots of Anti-Americanism in Turkey 1945-1960. *BILIG*. Vol.72: 251-280. https://bilig.yesevi.edu.tr/yonetim/icerik/makaleler/161-published.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria. (n.d.). History of the U.S. and Bulgaria. *U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria*. https://bg.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/ (accessed 13 June 2024).

U.S. Embassy in Romania. (n.d.). History of the U.S. and Romania. *The U.S. Embassy in Romania*. https://ro.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

U.S. Relations With Turkey. (2024). Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet Bureau of European And Eurasian Affairs. January 9, 2023. https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-turkey/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

United States Department of State. (n.d.). A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Romania. Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute. *United States Department of State*. https://history.state.gov/countries/romania (accessed 2 May 2024).

United States Department of State. (n.d.). A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Turkey. Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute. *United States Department of State*. https://history.state.gov/countries/turkey (accessed 2 May 2024).

Uslu, Nasuh, Toprak, Metin, Dalmis, Ibrahim, Aydin, Ertan. (2005). Turkish Public Opinion toward the United States In the Context Of The Iraq Question. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2005). 75-107.

https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria_sep05/meria05_usn01.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Vassilev, Rossen. (2006). Public Opinion and Bulgaria's Involvement in the Iraq War. *East European Quarterly*, Winter 2006. 40(4):467-487.

Vassileva, Radosveta. (2024). The rise of the pro-Putin Revival party in Bulgaria. *New Eastern Europe*. 11 April, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/04/11/the-rise-of-the-pro-putin-revival-party-in-bulgaria/ (accessed 24 May 2024). (accessed 2 May 2024).

Vodenova, Yoanna. (2024). Parliament Chair: Bulgaria Supports EU Sanctions Against Russia, They Are Powerful Response to Russian Aggression in Ukraine. *Bulgarian News Agency*, 07 February, https://www.bta.bg/en/news/bulgaria/614247-parliament-chair-bulgaria-supports-eu-sanctions-against-russia-they-are-powerf (accessed 6 May 2024).

Yahya, Harun. (2014). Turkey – a unique member of NATO. *Arab news*. 7 September, https://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/636206 (accessed 2 May 2024).

Yegin, Mehmet, Çevik, Salim. (2024). From Biden to Trump: Waning Turkish-American Relationship Demands Greater European Engagement. SWP Comments. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* 54 December https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/from-biden-to-trump-waning-turkish-american-relationship-demands-greater-european-engagement (accesed 9 December 2024).

Възраждане. (2023). "Възраждане": В сената на САЩ е внесен законопроект, с който искат да превърнат Черно море в зона за военни действия. *Възраждане*. 7 August, https://vazrazhdane.bg/възраждане-в-сената-на-сащ-е-внесен/ (accessed 3 June 2024).

Възраждане. (2024). Предизборна програма на "Възраждане". *Възраждане*, https://vazrazhdane.bg/otbrana/ (accessed 24 May 2024).

Грушецький, Богдан. (2015). Становлення євроатлантичного вектору зовнішньої політики Болгарії у контексті забезпечення національної безпеки країни. *Трансатлантична безпека та роль України*: Мат-ли Всеукр. наук.-практ. конф. Дніпропетровськ: Інновація: 20-23. https://www.academia.edu/30601332/Становлення_євроатлантичного_вектору_зовнішньої_політики_Болгарії_у_контексті_забезпечення_національної_безпеки_країни (accessed 10 May 2024).

Грушецький, Богдан. (2016). Сучасний стан і перспективи американсько-болгарських відносин. *European historical studies: scientific journal* 4: 71–84. http://eustudies.history.knu.ua/current-state-and-perspectives-of-the-american-bulgarian-relationship/ (accessed 15 May 2024).

Костадинов, Костадин. (2024). Брифинг на Възраждане във връзка с избора на патриарх на България. *Костадинов Костадин*. [Facebook] 20 June, https://www.facebook.com/kostadin.eu/videos/991254812501090 (accessed 12 July 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2021). Николай Малинов подписа в Москва "Пътна карта" с "Единна Русия". *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството*, 30 March, https://ppvo.bg/2021/03/30/николай-малинов-подписа-в-москва-път/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2022a). Устав на политическа партия. *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството*. 12 November, https://ppvo.bg/документи/устав/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2022b). Пентагонът признава, че е ръководил биологични лаборатории в Украйна в продължение на десетилетия. *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството. 10 June,* https://ppvo.bg/2022/06/10/пентагонът-признава-че-е-ръководил-би/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2024a). Програмни позиции на ПП "Възраждане на Отечеството". *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството*. https://ppvo.bg/документи/програма/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2024b). Програмни позиции на ПК "Русофили за България". *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството*. 27 October, https://ppvo.bg/2024/10/27/програмни-позиции/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството (2024c). Русия и българите 2023 – социологическо изследване. *Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството*, 2 March, https://ppvo.bg/2024/03/02/русия-и-българите-2023-социологическо-и/ (accessed 02 May 2024).

САЩ. (2024). Република България. Съединени американски щати. *Министерство на външните работи*. https://www.mfa.bg/bg/3165 (accessed 15 May 2024).