

## Chapter 2

# Geopolitics and Security by the Black Sea: The Strategic Options of Romania and Republic of Moldova

**Dan Dungaciu**

**Abstract** In this paper, the author analyzes the ideals, motivations, circumstances and challenges of establishing and of properly running the so-called “wider Black Sea region,” a multi-state project in the Black Sea inspired by similar models in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea, as well as by geopolitical necessities, one which is yet barely in its framework-setting stages. In focus is Romania and the part it should be able to—and ought to—play, as a Member State of both the EU and of NATO, in taking steps and cooperating with other EU and non-EU states bordering the Black Sea, in the interest of stabilizing, securing and developing the region given the complex geopolitical situation created between the dissolution of the USSR (together with the “frozen conflicts” left behind) and the subsequent expansion waves of NATO and the EU.

**Keywords** Border space · Black sea region · EU · NATO · NDI · NEI · Republic of Moldova · Romania · Security dimensions

The below analysis attempts to shed light on the security equation of what is referred to as the wider Black Sea region. The point of this work is that, though interest in this area has massively grown over time, so far only the preliminaries are in place for the shaping and the implementing of a strategy in this area. The below text should also read as aiming to outline the premises and the framework of such a strategy.

The arguments will unfold across several tiers. The first regards the geopolitical decryption of the considered area, respectively setting the framework for a *geopolitical analysis* that would allow the understanding of the developments and the dynamics having impacted this space. We then move to the evaluation of the area from the *security* dimensions viewpoint, while indicating the wide significance that the concept has gained after 1990, a concept that must, naturally, also be pursued vis-a-vis the considered area. Following these steps, we shall conclude that the need to delineate the Black Sea area as a security region is necessarily in place.

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In recent years, to these favorable premises connected to the area's geopolitics and security was added another one, of equal importance and of such potential that it is impossible to overlook. Namely, we are referring to the *European political context*, which causes the interest in the Black Sea area to increase at present, but particularly in the near future—furthermore, it renders the need for a regional strategy even more pressing. We shall review these political developments heralding significant strategic shifts on continental scale directly impacting the concerned region.

In part two of the material herewith, we specifically outline the elements able to generate a Black Sea strategy, beginning with the premises and the potential similarities we may detect across the continent. Our focus will be on Romania and the part it plays in the area given its double membership—of the North Atlantic Alliance and, post-2007, of the European Union. The model carries over from two older Euro-Atlantic initiatives—the NEI and the NDI—which proved effective with regard to the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic border towards the North Sea and the Baltic States. The major actors and the frameworks of such a strategy by the Black Sea shall be prominent in this section. In this context, we will also investigate strategic options against the backdrop of the Euro-Atlantic border's expansion in the wider Black Sea region. One particular section shall be devoted to NATO, whose importance we deem crucial given the current strategic conjuncture by the Black Sea.

## **Geopolitical Context. The Black Sea—Euro-Atlantic Border Space**

All significant (geo)political events—whether evolutions or stagnations—carried out around the Black Sea bear, more or less, the mark of a global geopolitical development. Specifically, they are determined by the *expansion of the Euro-Atlantic border towards Central Asia*, by the institutions' indecisiveness to set the border wide enough so as to include peoples and nations that would like to be part of this area<sup>1</sup>.

Above, we are referring to the Euro-Atlantic space, while hinting, within the subtext, to an institutionalized definition of Europe. That is in fact the definition identifying, both explicitly and implicitly, European membership with membership of the western institutions, particularly the EU and NATO. The emphasis lies here not with cultural or geographical Europe, but institutional Europe. As an aside, the American officials' rhetoric concerning “the return to Europe” has methodically pointed out these elements after 1990. America's idea to create a “whole free Europe” meant, in practice, expanding eastward the western institutional framework showcased by NATO or the EU. For instance, in April 1997, State Secretary Madeline Albright saw a core reason for the expansion of NATO to be “the righting of past mistakes. Not expanding NATO would mean validating the Stalin line imposed

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<sup>1</sup> The conceptual framework used in this analysis is developed elsewhere. See Bădescu and Dungaciu 1995.

in 1945, which two generations of Europeans and Americans fought to do away with” (cf. Browning 2002, p. 6). Similarly, President Bush, while addressing the students at the University of Warsaw on June 15 2001, underscored the idea that all new democracies of Europe needed to have the opportunity to join the European institutions, and stated that, as for the expansion of NATO, “we must be interested in how much we advance on the way of freedom.” Hence, the clear idea: the desire to remove the inner European borders became synonymous to the expansion of NATO (George 2001).

Returning to the “technical” aspects of the approach, it must be said that the *frontier*, within the theoretical framework used here, signifies the dynamic aspect of a geopolitical evolution, namely the totality of processes by which a historical expansion is manifested, or that of a people, a civilisation, an empire, etc. As a dynamic aspect, the frontier triggers and sustains a wide array of spiritual or institutional processes, which we shall term frontier processes. The *border* is the static, stable (established) aspect of a frontier’s expansion.

A frontier’s expansion is fixed somewhere, on a border. But that does not automatically mean that, once the border is fixed, the dynamics of the frontier’s expansion process vanishes or is otherwise suspended. Quite on the contrary. When we consider the artificial (political, geo-strategic) setting of a border, we witness the perpetuation of frontier manifestations, and the space in which such developments occur shall be termed *frontier space*<sup>2</sup>.

These frontier spaces, respectively those areas raising claims—whether justified or not—over, or of belonging to, a clearly defined area and to an inclusion within a certain border to which they do not, as of yet, have access are often, geopolitically speaking, crisis spaces, spaces of geopolitical turbulence, which cannot be decrypted or comprehended without considering these aspects.

*Such a frontier space is nowadays the Black Sea area.* Little can be understood there if one ignores the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic frontier and the consequences triggered by this expansion, and particularly by the setting of the artificial border on the river Prut.

The Black Sea is nowadays, geopolitically speaking, *a Euro-Atlantic frontier space*.

## Two Geopolitical Axes: East-West and North-South

For this section we shall provide a second geopolitical interpretation framework. Much has been discussed, at times too much, about “axes” relative to the Black Sea area, and beyond. The abundance of that discourse, however, only had the effect

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<sup>2</sup> Only when the setting of a frontier process’ expansion border is natural, therefore organic, does the frontier space cease to exist. The typical case here is, for instance, the expansion of the Protestant frontier across Europe, which organically stopped at the edge of the Orthodox space, hence the setting of the Protestant border occurred on its own (here is not the place to detail why this was so).

of leaving the question unsettled, and the reader, confused, or convinced it is all merely political rhetoric, lacking substance or real-world relevance<sup>3</sup>.

But the term of “axis” does carry both importance and significance, and two explanations ought to have been given when it was released to the public. On one hand, that its significance is firstly *geopolitical*, and only secondly *political*; on the other, that the “axis” is by no means pointing *West*—as it was abundantly and erroneously captioned—but *East*.

The geopolitical significance of the axis follows from what we have described in the previous section, namely the expansion due East of the Euro-Atlantic frontier, which has structured geopolitical space along two major geopolitical (strategic, economic, etc.) axes, i.e. the **North-South Axis** (Russia—Armenia—Iran) and the **East-West Axis**, including, via the Caucasus and the Black Sea, the essential energy resources in the Caspian Sea intended for use by the western states.

The mentioned axes enclose by their intersection—in a point that may well be Azerbaijan—a fundamental security region on the agenda of all the great powers bearing interest and influence in the area<sup>4</sup>. We need not delve herein into the description of what was called “the wider Black Sea region,” as that was covered elsewhere. This area should include all three Caucasus states—Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan—, the Eurasian energy corridor linking the Euro-Atlantic system with the energy reserves in the Caspian Sea area and with the Central Asian states. Moreover, it also involves a stable system by the Black Sea north of Trans-Dniester, Odesa and Sukhumi, as a stable system requires having solved the “frozen conflicts” running the length of the north-eastern arc and access to the great commercial rivers flowing into the Black Sea: the Danube, the Dniester and the Dnieper. At that point, the concept of a wider Black Sea region will be as vast and as diverse as the Northern German Plain area or the Baltic Sea/North Sea area (see Asmus et al. 2004).

These political axes became visible especially after 2000, when President Putin rises to power in Moscow. Finally, the geopolitical context and area began to increasingly often sport orange or flower-scented flags. The result of this geopolitical confrontation is what we are currently witnessing around the Black Sea.

Let us now establish the framework in which the question of area security must be perceived and evaluated.

## The Analytical Framework of Regional Security

Walker Connor, one of the most significant American historians, once commented the main deficiency of the field called “international relations”: these specialists tell us, tautologically, that states make war out of “state reasons”, but do not bother

<sup>3</sup> The manner in which those tasked with explaining the meaning of the presidential statement did so only increased the sense of confusion and undermined the topic’s prestige.

<sup>4</sup> For a general presentation in terms of the security context, see Herzig 2000; for a presentation of the external policy and of the conflicts in the region, see Bertsch et al. 2000; for a geopolitical space analysis, see Thual 2004.

explaining to us what those *raisons d'etat* are, nor who, in what way, legitimizes them. He was right, at least regarding approaching international relations or the up-until-recently prevalent security. Yet to understand the significant developments in this field, to the extent that the question of identity becomes, e.g. for the Copenhagen School, a crucial item on its security agenda, we must rewind, if succinctly, the film reel depicting the evolution of our field of interest<sup>5</sup>.

In the wake of the Second World War, the dominating doctrine was that of *realism/neo-realism*—emphasizing the system's bipolar nature. One of the characteristics of this doctrine, from the viewpoint of our immediate interest, is the distinction between “*high politics*” and “*low politics*”. The issue of security connected to the first aspect—“security” particularly pursuing the “political-military” issue. Environmental, economic, social and “internal” issues belonged to the second aspect. “*Low politics*” only became interesting when it directly impacted the military or diplomatic fields.

This dichotomy would fall into crisis after 1990, as did the definition of “security”. USSR collapsing led not only to a crisis of the worldwide political system, but to a crisis of its underlying theory as well. As Edward Kolodziej pointed out, the Soviet Union's security was fully compromised not by the lack of military capabilities—enormous at the time—but by socio-economic causes. This observation carries decisive consequences particularly for the difference between “high politics” and “low politics”, whose relevance progressively dwindles. The failure of the “traditional” definition of security opened up the perspective for a new debate, soon to take place, and which in fact takes on several of the trends already detectable before 1990.

Barry Buzan is a fundamental author in this regard. His 1983 work, *People, States, and Fear*, marks the most poignant rethinking of the security question. The concept that security should be reduced to “the study of threats, of using and controlling military forces” (Stephen Walt)—the classic definition—, has entered an irremediable crisis. The aim of Buzan's work—whose 1991 edition was to have a more significant impact than that of 1983—is to redefine the concept of “threat” and achieve a workable connection between “*threats*” and “*vulnerabilities*”. The crucial questions now become, “*What exactly must be secured?*”, referring to the *object* of security, and “*Against which threats must the reference object be secured?*”. To a great extent, these questions were those around which security debates would thenceforth be centered. To Buzan, “the security of human communities is affected by various factors in four major sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. *Military security* concerns states operating on the two levels of offensive and defensive capabilities, and the states' perception relative to the perceptions of each state. *Political security* refers to the organizational stability of states, systems of government and legitimizing ideologies. *Economic security* relates to access to the resources, markets and capitals necessary to support acceptable levels

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<sup>5</sup> Here, we make use of McSweeney 1996, 1999; Bird and Croft 2001. Also see Dungaciu 2004. For an excellent analysis of the evolution of the security question in the twentieth century, see Hough 2004.

of welfare and state power. *Societal security* refers to the sustainability, under acceptable development conditions, of traditional language, culture and religion patterns, as well as of national traditions and identity. *Environmental security* concerns the preservation of the local and global biosphere as an essential support on which all other human activities depend. These five sectors do not operate independently from one another. Each of them defines a focal aspect of the security question and a way of prioritizing, but they are all interconnected through a strong network of links” (Buzan 1991, pp. 19–20).

Buzan goes on to delineate the “international system”, “states” and “individuals” as “reference objects” and the military, political, economic, societal and environmental spectra as potential sources of threat against the corresponding reference objects. However, to Buzan, at least in this work, the main reference object of any security analysis must remain *the state*<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond the stirred criticisms and disputes—or perhaps precisely due to them!—the book became referential for the study of international relations. One commentator, Ken Booth, wrote about the book in 1991, “... it remains the most complete and complex theoretical analysis of the concept of security in the literature of international relations to the present day and, since its publication, we the others keep writing footnotes to it” (cf. Bird and Croft 2001).

The 1990s mark the emergence of a genuine school of thought, wherein Buzan is joined by researchers willing to take on and continue his model. This group will bear the name of “The Copenhagen School”. Their efforts culminate in the 1998 work, *Security: A new Framework for Analysis*, in which the authors restart analyzing security in terms of the military, societal, economic, environmental and political dimensions. These dimensions operate on various levels: states, groups of individuals (ethnic groups), regions or global contexts. The model is supple and sufficiently fine to include issues ignored for too long: poverty, migration, human trafficking, environmental hazards, economic or political threats. Conceptualizing security went even further within the school. For example, Ole Wæver opens the question of security in 1995, approaching it as “a discourse” of “the state”, hence the ambiguous relationship between the two. Wæver refers to the “existential” threats against states and individuals, thence the concept of “securization”—to involve the *object* and *strategies* of security—, crucial in the analyzes of this otherwise polymorphic school reuniting scholars from neo-realism, such as Buzan, and post-structuralists such as Wæver.

The importance of the school, despite the criticisms against it across the years, is enormous, and not just on a theoretical level (see McSweeney 1999). Fundamental to our purpose is the fact that its impact was felt even with the most powerful military alliance of all time.

In 1991, during the Rome summit, NATO decreed—in a language strikingly reminiscent of the one used by the Copenhagen School—that security now had four dimensions: military, societal, political and environmental. This is the most

<sup>6</sup> Naturally, there was no shortage of criticisms—why not “the individual”?—, and this option of Buzan’s was attributed to his “neo-realist” background.

lasting and concrete performance of this perspective, by having made its mark at the highest level of world politics. This is one of the additional reasons to adopt it on its true scale<sup>7</sup>.

## Political Context

The political context seems to become favorable to a more substantial and effective approach of the Black Sea agenda, namely the shifting of emphases in European politics, from what was named “Euro-continentalism” (*Neo-Gaullism*) to “Euro-Atlanticism”.

As noted in unison by all area commentators, “in recent years, German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, together with French President Jacques Chirac, opted for a *Neo-Gaullist* concept regarding Europe, which would like to build its own political and geostrategic identity, as opposed to the United States of America” (Vieregger 2005).

But the electoral changes shaping up in Berlin suggest changes in the *German foreign policy strategy*. This is what interests us the most. Angela Merkel is the first German chancellor of East-German descent in post-Nazi history. This detail is hardly negligible when we consider that Christian-Democrats in the east of Germany see the USA much more positively than the German average, while sharing at least reluctance towards the Russian Federation—in some opinions, the Russian Federation may be the main threat against Germany’s security. Moreover, Angela Merkel is the exponent of a new type of politics in Berlin—a new form of “right,” admiring the Anglo-Saxon world, particularly the British model. The likeness to the French Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, in this regard is of significance (Bordonaro 2005).

Indicators of that were numerous. Regarding Germany’s presence in Iraq, Merkel was unhappy with the fact that Germany was missing from the area—moreover, there have been comments in both Berlin and Washington about the positive opinion Merkel had expressed towards American President George Bush and his policy in Iraq. Before the ballots, there were multiple voices commenting that “a potential victory by Merkel would restore Germany to the Kohl age, when it was the main USA partner in Europe”. Secondly, the interests of Germany regarding the EU’s new member states will be aligned with those of Great Britain, particularly in the wider Black Sea region. Although the energy partnership between Berlin and

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<sup>7</sup> Romania is nowadays, in turn, a NATO member state, obliged to configure its security forces according to the requirements applicable to it after joining. We are referring to the elaboration of the *national security doctrine* and, consequently, to the defining and elaborating, based on this doctrine, of all logistic assets—military forces, special services, legislation, intellectual and academic centers, research institutes, conferences, publications, encyclopedias, etc.—in order to implement the doctrine in all its components. Furthermore, it is precisely the complexity of the security question that constitutes an element rendering the Black Sea, and implicitly, the Republic of Moldova, a target of maximal interest for Romania.

Moscow will continue, Merkel will pay much closer attention that this partnership should not fall in opposition to Washington's targets in the Middle East or Central Asia (Bordonaro 2005).

This is the reason why, in Washington, "everyone is focused on what comes after Schroeder," claimed Stephen Szabo, expert in European issues at the Johns Hopkins University (cf. *ibid.*). If "what comes after" is Angela Merkel with her vision of Germany as the "honest broker" between the various players of a conflict-ridden Atlantic community, she would have to work hard to improve relations with America. Angela Merkel knows it and she may very well try to do so, too,—even though she hesitates to unambiguously include this point in her party's platform.

These developments would influence Germany's relations to Russia, on one hand, and those of Europe to Russia. Germany had, as it was said, "a complex foreign policy," wherein they tried to balance the eastward expansion of the EU with its own privileged relations to Russia (Russia as its strategic commercial and energy partner). Nevertheless, the complexity of this policy, of which there has been lots of recent talk, cannot ignore the relationship between Paris and Berlin, as a crucial axis concerning foreign policy. Yet the most important aspect here is the diminishing of the future role played by the Paris-Berlin alliance. If Schroeder's or Chirac's foreign policy was one of distance from the USA's foreign policy, this time, together with changes in Paris and Berlin, the *complementarity principle* may well pervade. Indeed, while Schroeder was busy proclaiming his firm trust in this reliable vehicle, Nicolas Sarkozy, French Minister of the Interior and potential successor of Jacques Chirac in 2007, had already expressed his sentiment that this Franco-German cooperation was old-fashioned. On June 27, he told the French press that "an expanded Europe cannot continue being only fueled by the power of a two-stroke engine" (cf. *ibid.*).

Therefore, the premises exist that the major changes in Paris and Berlin should recalibrate the foreign policy of these two countries and redefine them, if not radically, at least substantially. The shift in European foreign policy—if it occurs—from "Neo-Gaullism" to "Euro-Atlanticism" will be beneficial for a Black Sea strategy, and, implicitly, for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the states in the area.

## **The Ground Zero of the EU Earthquake's Aftershocks is the East—or, the Need for a Black Sea Strategy**

Beyond such favorable images, we must also tackle the elements rendering the Black Sea strategy an irrefutable necessity.

Failures of the referenda for the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands felt as a genuine "earthquake" for several European commentators. Yet its aftershocks will most acutely be felt around the Black Sea, with Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia being the most affected states (Emerson 2005). Still, its effect will also be felt in Belgrade, throughout the Southern Caucasus or in Moscow. Not all virtual or current EU partners felt the shock to the same extent. *The effect of the shock was directly proportional to the respective states or*

*regions' desire to eventually be integrated in the EU.* Hence the idea that the partner states included in the so-called Barcelona Process do not sharply feel this shock since the Arab states have never truly had any expectations or desires to join the EU (*ibid.*, p. 1).

Yet things are different by the Black Sea or in the Balkans. This issue arisen in Western Europe has short- and medium-term effects, which must necessarily be identified. As we already implied, we are dealing with a gradual effect of the European earthquake. Romania and Bulgaria, for instance, having already signed their Accession Treaties, must undergo the process of being ratified in the Parliaments of the EU member states. Given that the process occurs through Parliament votes, there are high success rates for them. However, as some commentators indicate, there may yet be some unease, particularly if the joining of Romania and Bulgaria should be delayed till 2008, and the ratification takes place during the campaign for France's presidential elections. Turkey comes in second, scheduled to begin accession negotiations for October 3 Pro-and-con debates have restarted, and things might not look well for Turkey, especially if elections favor the couple of Sarkozy and Merkel in France and Germany, respectively. Then there are the Balkan states, members of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), including Albania and Serbia-Montenegro, with Macedonia having applicant status. The Council of Europe, in its June 16–17 2005 meeting, encouraged these states towards a future accession to the EU, with some substantial European groups suggesting 2014 as a target year (*ibid.*, p 2).

Then follow those states included in the EU's "Neighborhood Policy", i.e. Ukraine, Moldova and the three states in the Southern Caucasus, most affected by the EU "earthquake" and which now see their integration chances as dwindling. The shock is even greater as, meanwhile, new regional initiatives had emerged, some of the most significant ones being the so-called "Baltic-Black Sea Axis" and "Georgia's Friends Club", having received four new EU members (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland) alongside Romania and Bulgaria (February 2005), the resurrection of GUUAM (the May 2005 summit in Chişinău having constituted an important element) or the special interest exhibited toward the Black Sea area by Romania, through President Băsescu.

Under these circumstances, the poignant emerging question nowadays concerns the state-of-play moment regarding the relations between these countries and the western institutional space: *what are the arising risks relative to the democratization of this area in the context of a block in the Euro-Atlantic integration process?* More to the point: has the region reached the "critical mass" of democratization such that a block/reduction in integrationist processes should not affect the already triggered democratization? (*ibid.*, p. 4)

Our answer is no, it has not. Furthermore, we believe that a slowing down of integrationist processes will trigger a massive backlash of area democratization and, thus, a crisis which the EU will manage with great difficulty, medium- and long-term. There is certainly a crucial need to update the European policies and give reassuring signals that the area was not abandoned. Beyond those, the need for a genuine Black Sea strategy can nowadays be felt more than ever before.

Before tackling this matter head-on, we shall linger a little more on its premises: which are the precedents such a strategy may rely upon?

## Elements for a Black Sea Strategy. The Case of the Baltic Sea

For the time being, despite the initiative launched by the German Marshall Fund in 2004, or the institutional networks or the debates had together with this vector (Asmus et al. 2004), a genuine Black Sea strategy is still missing. Political and geopolitical realities in the field are, as well as are not, the most favorable premises for such an undertaking already on the horizon of expectations of at least several states bordering the Black Sea. Diverging interests and occasionally contradictory affiliations render this region with few collaborative historical traditions difficult to place under a single efficient institutional dome.

In 2003–2004, the years of shaping frameworks for a future strategy, the Black Sea was, institutionally speaking, in the following eclectic form (Aydin 2004, p. 21) (Table 2.1):

Integrating these states with such diverse—and some contradictory—affiliations requires imagination, commitment and project persistence. There are no standardized formulas, nor guaranteed solutions. Among the projects circulated and implemented across the mainland that bear relevance to the Black Sea region, we feel two are most deserving of particular attention, precisely because they can provide suggestions for what a Black Sea Euro-Atlantic strategy should be. Their acronyms are NEI and, respectively, NDI<sup>8</sup>.

*The Northern European Initiative* (NEI) is a political strategy launched by the USA in September 1997, during President Clinton's second administration. The fact that so little is written about it, and that it was so relatively rarely debated, makes it one of the most interesting political initiatives of the USA, especially for the wider Black Sea region. Its origins can be traced back to an article by RAND analysts Ronald Asmus and Robert Nurick (the former would go on to become deputy to the US Secretary of State), published in 1996 in *Survival* (Asmus and Nurick 1996). The stake of the article was finding a solution to the Baltic states' problem and to their relationship to NATO in view of the upcoming expansion. In this case, the link between NATO and the USA was obvious. The USA-Baltics Charter was signed in 1998, and NEI became a legitimate option for the future.

The NATO accession of 1999 did not include the Baltic states, only Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The exclusions occurred firstly due to Moscow's

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<sup>8</sup> Our analysis will rely on the current most substantial work on the topic, that of Fabrizio Tessarini: see Tessarini 2004. Moreover, for the question of the Baltic states and of security in the area, see: Lieven 1993; Bildt 1994; Brundtland 1994; Asmus and Nurick 1996; *Quo Vadis? NATO and the Baltic States* 1996; Lejins and Ozolina 1997; Puheloinen 1997; Jopp and Arnswald 1998; Brzezinski and Larrabee 1999; Browning 2002.



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