

SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA AREA

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Introduction

Security and stability is a necessary precondition for steady development, successful integration into the global political and economic systems and sustainable economic growth in the Black Sea area and Black Sea states, including Georgia.

During the cold war era the Black Sea was “divided” between the Republic of Turkey, as a NATO member from one side and the Former Soviet Union and its Allies from the Warsaw Pact - the People’s Republic of Bulgaria and the Social Republic of Romania from the other side. Hence, security in the Black Sea was based on the balance of power and interests between the NATO and the Soviet led Warsaw Pact.

After the end of the cold war the strategic balance in the Black Sea area was remarkably changed. Through the several waves of the enlargements of NATO and European Union, in the Black Sea along with the Republic of Turkey appeared 2 more NATO members, which at the same time are European Union members: the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania. After joining NATO their security *inter-alia* is guaranteed by the “Washington Treaty” and the NATO capabilities.

As a result of these historic events the role and the geo-political economic significance of the Black Sea was remarkably increased. The Black Sea costal states, including Georgia and Ukraine got a new geo-political role, new opportunities and new challenges.

This narrative aims at analyzing the process of evolving of the balance of power and the security mechanisms in the Black Sea.

The Russian challenge to the security in Black Sea area

The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the Russian Federation challenged security and safety in the Black Sea area and endangered the existing world order. This act of war carried out using to the full extent the strategy of the “hybrid wars”, which is based on the tactics of large-scale deception and intimidation, combined with the aggressive use of military and para-military forces. Due to this strategy, it took some time, before the leading democratic states openly acknowledged the fact of the unlawful aggression and introduced appropriate sanctions against the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation continues to apply the strategy of hybrid wars against Ukraine and Georgia, using the propaganda, economic, energy, military and other types of pressure. Therefore, even though the international community does not recognize the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and actively is engaged in the “Normandy Process”, aimed at the conflict settlement through the peaceful means, the Russian backed separatist forces continue to target the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There is also credible information regarding the alleged regular participation of the official Russian forces in this campaign carried out against the Dombas region of Ukraine.

After the annexation of Crimea, the Russian Federation turned this territory into a military fortress, unlawfully deploying substantial military capabilities there including fighter jets, bombers, military fleet, submarines, anti-aircraft, anti-missile and anti-navy systems, attempting to change the military balance in the area in its favour.

The Russian unlawful aggression against Ukraine was not an isolated case or event. It obviously made part of the strategy, aimed at restoring Russian influence over the post-soviet space. The aggression against Ukraine was preceded by the Russian unlawful military aggression against Georgia in 2008, when the Russian Federation first used the “hybrid war” strategy and carried out a full-scale military intervention against a sovereign state. While targeting the territory of Georgia, the Russian military and paramilitary forces used all types of weapons and military capabilities, including the Black Sea fleet, fighter jets, ballistic missiles, heavy armored units and ground troops.

Through this act of the unlawful aggression the Russian Federation has arbitrarily occupied 20% of the territory of Georgia and carried out another step of ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population. The Russian Federation unlawfully established military bases and deployed a high number of military manpower and weaponry there. Furthermore, the Russian Federation still subjects the occupied territories of Georgia to the attempts of gradual annexation, turning them into the military strongholds.

The military aggression against Georgia revealed remarkable flaws in the technological, strategic and practical preparedness of the Russian armed forces. The Russian officials have acknowledged these deficiencies and after the end of the active phase of the military hostilities in the territory of Georgia started to massively reform and modernize its armed forces, inter-alia copying the experience of its western rivals. This created a new balance of power in the international relations that was especially noticed in war-torn Syria, where the Russian military involvement led to significant changes on the ground.

The Russian occupation forces continuously subject the territory across the administrative boundaries of the occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia to the process of the unlawful borderization, leading to serious human rights violations and concerns for the local population. This process of the illegal borderization still is ongoing, despite the protests of the international community.

It is to be noted that the efforts of the international community, which are aimed at preventing or containing the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation, so far did not manage to prevent and/or solve the problem of the Russian unlawful occupation. As a result of the Russian unlawful aggression in the territories of Georgia, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova appeared some territories, which are effectively controlled by the Russian forces but lack any legitimacy. Therefore, in these territories there is no effective governance and no rule of law. Gaining from this reality the organized crime is actively using these territories for engaging in serious criminal offences, such as unlawful trade of weapons, radioactive materials, drugs and trafficking in human beings. The Russian occupation forces prevent the authoritative international organizations to enter the occupied territories and carry out effective monitoring of security and human rights situations.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned, Georgia continues to pursue a balanced and pragmatic policy towards the Russian Federation, trying to solve all the problems through peaceful means, engaging the international community and partner countries through the “Geneva Process”. The humanitarian and economic issues are discussed between Georgian and Russian representatives within the bilateral “Abashidze-Karasin” bilateral format.

The Georgian competent authorities also allocate remarkable resources and undertake significant efforts to reach out to the population, which remains in the occupied territories and provides them with the benefits available to the rest of the population.

The NATO role in the Black Sea security

Two Black Sea coastal states: Georgia and Ukraine are NATO aspirant countries and based on the NATO “Bucharest Summit Declaration” from 2008 will become NATO members, once achieved appropriate conditions. Until then the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine

Commissions meet regularly and define the joint steps and measures, necessary to further enhance the Euro-Atlantic integration of these countries.

With the active endeavors of Georgia, Ukraine and NATO structures and member states, NATO continues to keep the issue of security of the Black Sea region high on its agenda.

On 4 April 2019, the NATO Foreign Ministers at the meeting in Washington have agreed on a set of measures aimed at improving the NATO's situational awareness in the Black Sea area and strengthening support for Georgia and Ukraine. These measures include regular joint military maneuvers and joint exercises on the territory of Georgia and Ukraine and regular visits of NATO military ships and vessels to the Georgian and Ukrainian maritime ports.

NATO provides Ukraine and Georgia with continuous assistance and support in strengthening their national defense and deterrence capabilities. These efforts have a positive impact on the entire security situation in the Black Sea region.

The NATO-Ukraine Commission in its statement from 31 October emphasized that: "there can be no "business as usual" until there is a clear, constructive change in Russia's actions that demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities".

On 7 December 2011, at a Foreign Ministers' meeting Georgia was formally referred to as the NATO aspirant country together with Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

At the 2014 NATO Wales Summit the Allies recognized Georgia as one of the most interoperable partners and invited to the "Enhanced Opportunities Partners" (EOP) group together with four other nations (Australia, Jordan, Finland, and Sweden). The abovementioned format grants the country enhanced opportunities of cooperation with NATO.

On 31 October, within the framework of the NATO-Ukraine Commission the President of Ukraine Wolodymyr Selenskyj has requested the NATO leadership to consider a possibility of inviting Ukraine to the "Enhanced Opportunities Partners" (EOP) group.

The status of the Black Sea and the rules applicable to it are mainly defined by the Montreux Convention from 1936, which introduces strict restrictions for the "foreign" ships and vessels regarding their size and the length of their possible presence in the Black Sea. Despite of these restrictions, during the year 2018 the NATO navy units spent in the territorial waters and maritime ports around 120 hours that shows the NATO active engagement in the security of the Black Sea and specifically that of Georgia.

The EU role in the Black Sea

Three other Black Sea states Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are following an active path of the European integration. The legal foundations and the legal framework of this process are established in the complex and comprehensive “Association Treaties” with European Union, which include the “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreements”. These treaties and agreements are concluded following the implementation of the European Union “Neighborhood Policy” and they greatly contribute to the institutional and economic development of these countries, enabling them to have access to the European Union market free of taxes, duties and complicated custom’s procedures. These documents *inter-alia* set various standards that these countries should achieve for further deepening the process of their European integration.

The European Commission carries out the “Blue Economy Strategy” in the Black Sea region, which aims at fostering synergies and coordination among the European Union Black Sea costal states. Within this strategy the EU implements the Marine and maritime-related projects, financed through the various EU funds.

As the European experience shows an active EU engagement and European integration along with the enhanced opportunities for the economic development and growth also bring sustainable security and stability to the respective regions that is so necessary and important for the Black Sea area in this turbulent times. Taking into account the above-mentioned, a renewed EU policy is needed for the Black Sea that would be enriched by the experience of the EU Strategy towards the Mediterranean region and bring the EU engagement in the Black Sea area to a higher qualitative level.

The role of leading states in the Black Sea Security

The United States is the closest strategic partner of Georgia. This partnership is based on the US – Georgia Charter on “Strategic Partnership”, which covers many aspects of the Georgia-US cooperation in the security field.

On 11 June 2019, the two countries celebrated the 10th anniversary of this Charter. At this event the United States and Georgia reaffirmed their commitment to the U.S. – Georgia strategic partnership and the core principles of their friendship. The event ended with the “Joint Declaration on the U.S. – Georgia Strategic Partnership”, which stipulates that:

“Since 2009, the United States and Georgia have worked together to support Georgia’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We have fought together, and our armed forces have sacrificed together in Iraq and

Afghanistan. The United States has supported Georgia's integration into the global economy to our mutual benefit. The United States continues to welcome and support Georgia's reforms".

Taking into account its strategic location, the NATO membership and its military and economic capabilities, the Republic of Turkey is an important regional player and its contribution to the security of the Black Sea area is of utmost importance. It plays an important role in the fight against international terrorism and is an important partner of the European Union in the management of migration flows.

There is a lengthy process of the accession talks between the EU and the Republic of Turkey.

Security and stability of the Republic of Turkey *inter-alia* is affected by the processes, which take place in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. Hence, the peace and stability in these regions would have a positive impact on the security in the Black Sea area.

The Republic of Turkey as a NATO member state actively supports the NATO membership bid of Georgia. On 3 April 2018, Georgia, the Republic of Turkey and Azerbaijan have signed a military agreement that stipulates further enhancement of cooperation among these states in the field of defense that includes regular contacts between their high representatives and joint military exercises. Such cooperation has the vital importance for the stability and security of the region, necessary for the effective and secure functioning of the existing transport corridors and Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Gas Pipeline. In addition, successful and rapid completion of the Trance –Anatolian gaz pipeline (TANAP) and Trance – Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) projects should bring to the Black Sea area as an energy transit corridor more stability and security and hence should attract more investments and business initiatives to the region.

Despite the continued Russian occupation, Georgia continues its democratic development and rapid integration in the western structures. It closely cooperates with all world leading powers and is increasingly assuming the role of the regional economic and transport hub. The Free Trade Agreements with the European Union, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Turkey and the most of the Commonwealth of Independent States make Georgia an attractive destination for foreign investments that creates good foundations for the economic development and integration in the region and reduces the risk of appearance of the conflicting situations.

Even though Armenia is not a Black Sea coastal state, it plays an important role in the economic life of the Black Sea area. It makes part of the Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Custom's Union. Despite some divergence in the foreign policy issues, Armenia and Georgia continue close cooperation in various fields for achieving common goals and purposes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Deriving from all the above-mentioned a logical conclusion could be made that with time the Black Sea area will become more and more dynamic and more important for the regional and international security and for further economic growth and development in the region.

Georgia should continue to contribute to the security and stability of the Black Sea Area following a balance and pragmatic approach. However, in today's inter-dependent world, for a small and vulnerable country like Georgia would be increasingly difficult to defend its lawful interests without getting engaged in strong partnerships or alliances. Therefore, the path of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration together with the peaceful de-occupation and conflict settlement with the active involvement of the international community has no alternative for Georgia. Hence, the full NATO and EU membership would be the most appropriate response to the political, security and economic challenges of the country.