

Policy brief

October 2019

Tendencies of the Security Situation in the Black Sea

(III quarter 2019)¹

1. General assessment of security in the Black Sea region

By October 2019, the security situation in the Black Sea region remains unstable, with a tendency of further deterioration. Russia continues to use hybrid warfare technologies both in the Black Sea region and in the contiguous regions of the Caspian, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Balkans, where it is openly seeking dominance to counter the West.

In the international arena, the French authorities' position on rapprochement with the Putin regime, excessive obsession of Germany by corrupt Russian "gas flows", deepening of European-American and US-Chinese misunderstandings, Brexit, worsening of the situation in the Middle East, in particular, the military operation of Turkey in Syria, and the political crisis in the USA unleash the Kremlin's hands to continue its aggressive behavior. Russia's attempt to penetrate the "soft subsoil" of the United States through Venezuela is now turning to Moscow by an American-Greek alliance to deter Russian and Turkish ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

The Russian Federation continues to refuse recognizing the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali district) of Georgia, Transnistria of Moldova, and separate areas of Lugansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine, insisting on its propaganda cliché of the "civil war in Ukraine". Russia's goals of taking all Ukraine under its control remain unchanged. Continuing to build up its offensive forces at the borders of Ukraine to pressure the Ukrainian authorities and society to resolve the conflict on Russian terms, the Russian Federation has revived the Steinmeier formula and makes efforts to divide Ukraine under the guise of federalization. *"We need to be realistic. Ukraine will ultimately have symbolic rather than real sovereignty over the Donbas. It should not expect anything more. Ukraine will not get more from the Minsk agreements,"*- Russian political technologist Alexei Chesnakov², member of the team of Presidential Advisor Vladislav Surkov, wrote on October 7, 2019. Russia is trying to describe the Revolution of Dignity as a *coup d'etat* in Ukraine, shooting down the Malaysian MH17 aircraft as a result of Kyiv's inactivity, the Russian formations DPR / LPR as "new sovereign republics" and so on.

By using its energy levers, Russia has effectively neutralized two Black Sea NATO members, Turkey and Bulgaria, which are considered by it as advocates of its own policies within NATO and the EU.

¹ The policy brief is prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support from the Black Sea Trust Fund, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust Fund or its partners.

² <https://glavcom.ua/ru/think/v-rossii-pryamo-zayavili-chto-pozvolyat-ukraine-tolko-simvolicheski-kontrolirovat-donbass-631258.html>

Russia increases its military presence outside the Black Sea region, in particular in Syria, Libya, Venezuela and Central Africa, disguising it under the slogans of peace and stability and thereby discrediting real peacekeeping processes. It uses its military and economic presence in Venezuela to influence oil prices, counter the US in the region, get wide access to the country's mineral resources (gold, diamonds, coltan, uranium, etc.) and illegal profits from drug trafficking, money laundering and corruption schemes.

2. Challenges, threats and signs of deterioration of the security situation in the region

Military political domain

To overcome international isolation after the annexation of Crimea, Russia makes efforts to develop top-level relations with Black Sea leaders, giving priority to Turkey and Bulgaria.

Russia used Turkey's military operation in Syria to strengthen ties with Ankara and drive Washington out of the region. It becomes the most influential non-regional player. By yielding to Turkey in its right to secure its security in the south, Russia counts on Ankara's more flexible stance on other "sensitive" issues. An illustration of this was the meeting of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan with Natalia Poklonskaya and Ruslan Balbek, the so-called "deputies" of the Russian Federation from Crimea, on October 12, 2019 in Istanbul³.

With the tacit consent of Turkey, ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet continue to supply military equipment from the occupied Sevastopol and Novorossiysk to the Syrian regime - the so-called "Syrian express". Thus, the port of Tartus, the naval base of the Russian Federation in Syria, is constantly enlarging.

Military domain

The Annual International Exercises Sea Breeze 2019, held on July 1-12, 2019 in the three regions of Ukraine and in the Black Sea area with the participation of 19 countries, demonstrated a high level of cooperation between the US and regional allies and partners to ensure preparedness and interoperability in the Black Sea region. To prevent them, Russia closed an area of 8,000 square kilometers and sent there a group of ten ships, in particular: rocket launchers "Orekhovo-Zuevo", "Mirage", "Ivanovets", "Naberezhnye Chelny", "R-60" and the large amphibious ships "Azov" and "Caesar Kunikov ». On July 10, the Kashin-class guided missile destroyer of the Russian Black Sea Fleet Smetlivy entered the closed exercises area, provoking a dangerous situation. The demonstrative and provocative actions of Russia during the aforementioned exercises were aimed at demonstrating their dominance in the Black Sea.

Russia's provocation is repeated – starting from July 24, 2019, the Russian Federation blocked five areas in the Black Sea, including a significant area in the exclusive maritime economic zones of Bulgaria and Romania, and almost entirely the eastern part of the Black Sea from Sochi to Turkey, to make obstacles to the Georgian-American exercises Agile Spirit-2019. In the third decade of July, a number of navigation alerts were issued simultaneously for areas, where navigation was restricted or insecurity of sailing was declared. The total area of the Black Sea areas closed by the Russian Navy in July 2019 was more than 120,000 square kilometers, or more than 1/4 of the total area of the Black Sea. These areas covered most of the recommended maritime routes in the exclusive maritime economic zones of Ukraine and the countries of the region. The purpose of these actions of the Russian Federation is obvious - to form the "usual" perception that the entire Black Sea is a zone of influence of Russia. The formula for setting the A2 / AD zone due to navigation restrictions is worked out by Russia to act on the scenario of the blockade of the northwestern sector of the Black Sea directed against Ukraine and Romania in order to achieve its sole control over the region.

Russia intensified its activities in the artificially created A2 / AD-zone in the Sea of Azov. In August 2019, artificial delays of vessels sailing to and from Ukrainian ports were increased by 2 times for entrance to the Sea of Azov and 2.4 times for exit in comparison with July 2019. In September, the situation worsened: the indicator for the entrance increased 1.2 times, and for the exit - 1.4 times. On

³ <https://www.unian.ua/politics/10724175-posol-turechchini-rozpoviv-yak-krimski-deputati-zmogli-potrapiti-do-erdogana.html>

the whole, in August-September the waiting time for entering the Sea of Azov increased 2.4 times and for the exit - 3.2 times. The key reason was that Russia was not punished by “Azov sanctions” of the West, the danger of which existed in November 2018 after the incident in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait⁴. Feeling impunity, on October 17, 2019, the Russian Ministry of Transport prepared an order for the extension of the restricted areas for navigation near the Kerch Bridge on the request of the Russian National Guard⁵.

To continue the militarization of Crimea, the current plans of the Russian Defense Ministry stipulate that up to 24 surface and underwater carriers of cruise missiles Caliber with a total number of up to 168 missiles should be on the peninsula by 2020. And although there are doubts about the ability of the Russian Military Industry to fulfill the plans of the Russian Defense Ministry to double the number of naval carriers of cruise missiles in the Black Sea Fleet in one or two years (now there are eleven carriers - three frigates of project 11356, two small rocket ships of project 21631, six submarines 36.3 equipped with 64 launchers of cruise missiles Caliber), and such intentions seem quite real in the 5-7 years perspective. During this period, the Russian Black Sea Fleet may include up to three small rocket ships of project 21631 ("Buyan-M") and up to five small rocket ships of project 22800 ("Karakurt"). In the summer of 2019, the formation of a UAV squadron as part of the 318th mixed aviation regiment of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, equipped with UAVs Forpost (UAVs Searcher II, which are made of Israeli components in Russia). Its main tasks will be conducting intelligence, providing targeting for anti-ship missiles and cruise missiles Caliber. In fact, the UAV squadron will complete the formation of a reconnaissance-strike complex in the Black Sea Fleet on the basis of the integration of intelligence, control and defeat facilities.

In the Black Sea area, there is a potential danger of an armed clash between Russia and the states of the region - the structure, deployment and nature of the exercises of the troops of the Southeastern Military District of the Russian Federation show that they are preparing for massive quick offensive operations, in order to defeat an enemy troops and dictate Russian conditions of peace by blitzkrieg before the world community can stop the Kremlin.

Economic and energy domain

The Black Sea region is predominantly energy dependent. The economic security of the Black Sea region, in particular, the security of natural gas, oil and other energy supplies, is directly influenced by Russia. Most countries in the region are 80% dependent on gas imports, primarily from the Russian Federation. Only Ukraine and Romania, which produce large volumes of gas, depend on 1/3 of gas import. In 2018, most countries in the region were also heavily dependent on oil imports. Ukraine and Turkey also imported coal.

The bulk of total import of goods from the Russian Federation to Ukraine was energy resources. Although, Ukraine discontinued natural gas purchases from the Russian Federation in 2015, it remains dependent on Russian oil, liquefied petroleum gas, coal, fuel cells and equipment for NPPs. In 2015–2018, the share of oil products import from the Russian Federation ranged from 17% in 2016 to 41.3% in 2018. The total share of deliveries of oil products from the Russian Federation and Belarus, which receives Russian oil on preferential terms, reaches 75%. In 2018, 93% of diesel import to Ukraine was from Russia. The bulk of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was also imported from Russia and Belarus. The danger of such a situation was clearly confirmed by the Government of the Russian Federation, when in April 2019 it strengthened the regime of manual management of exports to Ukraine. This special export regime defines a monthly (instead of annual) coordination of volumes of export and the need for obtaining permits of the Ministry of Economy of the Russian Federation and the Federal Service for Technical and Export Control (a structure within the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation). In June 2019, the quota for diesel was 30% and for LPG - 60% of the monthly previous average. They were received by Russia's Lukoil (25%) and Rosneft (75%). Imports of petroleum products from Russia can be stopped at any time.

Moldova is 100% dependent on gas supplies from Russia. If Gazprom discontinues gas supply to the Ukrainian GTS, Moldova may face significant losses. Taking into account that the Iassy-Chisinau gas

⁴ <https://www.blackseanews.net/read/156342>

⁵ <https://regulation.gov.ru/projects#searchType=1&npa=96019>

pipeline will not be quickly built, Naftogaz of Ukraine has offered Chisinau to use its technical capabilities to supply gas to Moldova that would be purchased on the EU market.

There is a growing tendency in Europe to regard gas, crude oil and petroleum as ordinary commodities, and that is why the Russian Nord Stream and TurkStream are sometimes called as "simply commercial projects" in the Western press. At the same time, the Russian Federation continues its ongoing efforts to exclude Ukraine from the gas supply chain to the EU. To this end, it resorts to build geopolitically motivated gas transport infrastructure, ignoring European energy legislation, and provoke "gas crises" with shifting responsibility for them to the victims. In Gazprom's arsenal, there many tools: stopping gas flows, blackmailing, imposing high prices with the following political demands to reduce them, sabotaging the implementation of the Stockholm Arbitration decision, requiring victims to pay for the gas, which Russia supplies to the occupied by it territories, without their consent.

Human rights and rights of national minorities

Since the very beginning of the occupation of Crimea, the Russian Federation has been pursuing a purposeful, long-term policy of repression and intimidation of the local population in the occupied territories, which has been intensified since 2016. The targets of the Russian special services are conscious Crimeans, patriots, civil society activists, journalists, former officers of the Naval Forces of Ukraine and Crimean Tatars, who did not accept the annexation and are persecuted on national grounds and religious views.

Following the "big exchange" on September 7, 2019 (35 to 35, 24 of which were Ukrainian POWs), by the beginning of October 2019, according to the Crimean Human Rights Group, the number of Kremlin prisoners in the occupied peninsula and Russia is 87⁶. According to other data, 113 political prisoners of the Kremlin remain in Russian prisons now. Many of them are representatives of Crimean indigenous people - Crimean Tatars. They are unjustifiably accused of "extremism" and "calls for violations of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation", "creation of terrorist organizations" etc.

The repression machine of the Russian occupation is gaining momentum. On October 9, the list of "Ukrainian saboteurs" was replenished with a new prisoner as pro-Ukrainian activist Oleg Prykhodko was detained and taken in an unknown direction in annexed Crimea. The next day, his wife Liubov Prykhodko was detained. FSB charged Prykhodko with a "terrorist act" and "illegal manufacturing of explosives". On October 16, the Russian Supreme Court left unchanged the decision of the so-called Supreme Court of Crimea, which sentenced two other victims of Russian repression Volodymyr Dudka and Oleksiy Bessarabov for 14 years in prison for allegedly preparing sabotage.

The readiness of the Putin regime to end the war against Ukraine should be demonstrated through the unconditional release of Ukrainian citizens from the "list of Sentsov", who, in fact, became the subject of political blackmail of the new Ukrainian authorities by the Kremlin. Against the backdrop of a new wave of persecution in Crimea against dissidents, it becomes apparent that the release of Ukrainian Kremlin prisoners, including hostages in the ORDLO, is possible only if there is increased international pressure on the Russian leadership, deepening of international sanctions for brutal violations of human rights, repression and falsification of cases.

3. Proposals for enhancing security and regional security cooperation

Russia will continue to pursue its intentions and actions to push NATO out of the regions where it sees possible. Russia's creeping expansion into the Black Sea and its strengthening in the Baltic are ongoing and should not be left without proper NATO response. By today, the Alliance has not yet found a definitively effective mechanism to deter Russia in the Black Sea region. Ukraine can make a significant contribution to developing this mechanism.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is finalizing the preparation of the Annual National Program under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission for 2020, and on October 31, a delegation of

⁶ https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/crimean-human-rights-group_sep_2019_ua.pdf

the North Atlantic Council and the Secretary General of NATO are going to Kyiv. In this context, it is proposed to encourage and involve NATO countries in the following activities:

In the diplomatic sphere:

- Establishment of a system of international monitoring of the situation in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait;
- Introducing additional sanctions against Russia for violations of international law in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait;
- Strengthening of existing sanctions against Russia for annexation of Crimea and the occupation of Donbas and, in particular, for human rights violations there;
- Pressure on Russia to implement the decision of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on the immediate return of Ukrainian ships to Ukraine;
- Imposing sanctions on ships entering Crimea and banning them from entering EU / NATO ports;
- Introduction of restrictions on the entry of Russian ships into the ports of NATO member countries;

In the information sphere:

- Constant updating of the narratives regarding the annexation of Crimea by Russia, its aggression in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait in the international information space;
- Dissemination of up-to-date information on violations of the international law by Russia in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait;
- Dissemination of the OSCE mission reports on violations of the Minsk agreements in Donbas by Russia in the international information space;

In the military strategic sphere:

- Ensuring the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov Seas and the Kerch Strait;
- Promoting the naval presence and activities of NATO countries in the Black Sea (including through the establishment of the Headquarters of the NATO flotilla in the Black Sea);
- Increasing NATO military presence in the region by deploying air defense / anti-missiles systems, aviation, missile systems, ships, and conducting exercises to build NATO A2 / AD in the Black Sea;
- Strengthening the Alliance's support for the Navy of the Black Sea countries of NATO (Romania and Bulgaria), as well as Ukraine and Georgia;
- Intensification of Ukraine's cooperation with Turkey in the naval sphere.

Russia should be stopped in all regions - the Black Sea, the Baltic, and the Mediterranean. If we stop Nord Stream 2 and the second line of TurkStream by imposing sanctions on contracting companies, the US will be able to avert a negative scenario of transforming the Baltic and Black Seas into domination areas of Russia. A permanent US presence in the Eastern Mediterranean will create a security umbrella for the Balkans. Missile systems from the northeast sector of the Aegean Sea are capable to control the Black Sea. If Greek Alexandroupolis becomes the US Navy base, Russia will find it more difficult to block Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, as its maritime trade and "Syrian express" from the Black Sea ports risk to be blocked in return.

One of the options to counteract the militarization of the Black Sea by Russia is the transfer of modern warships, which are in the reserve of the NATO country states, and which are suitable for work in the NATO Command and Control System, to the Naval Forces of Romania and Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine's and Georgia's accession to NATO should be accelerated.