

## Security vacuum in the Black Sea region

Western non-resistance to Russian aggression in 2014 only deepened the security vacuum in Europe, which led to February 2022. This stimulated the Kremlin to take more and more bold actions against both the EU and NATO, especially in its weak regions, which include the Black Sea region.

Repeated violations of international maritime law by Russia – firing and seizure of Ukrainian Navy's ships by the Russian Armed Forces near the Kerch Strait in November 2018, obstruction of international exercises "Sea Breeze" near the Ukrainian shores and Agile Spirit near the Georgian coast in 2019-2021, the blockade of Ukrainian ports, the destruction of the American MQ-9 Reaper UAV over the Black Sea in international airspace, are examples of Russia's arbitrariness. It openly demonstrates that the Black Sea is a "Russian lake", and NATO has no place here.

This requires systemic measures and countermeasures by Western alliances – NATO, the EU and leading member states. So far, only the diplomacy of the Ukrainian "Neptune" and "Harpoon" has restrained Russia somewhat in the northwestern sector of the Black Sea. But Russia has enough money to continue war during 2023-2024 years **(Slide 2)**.

Head of European diplomacy Josep Borrell expressed the perfectly valid intention of the EU: "At a time of growing geopolitical tensions, the EU must learn to speak the language of strength even at sea... We fulfill our commitment to strengthen the role of the EU as a global provider of maritime security." However, this is inconsistent with EU maritime security documents adopted in March, in which little attention is paid to threats in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. The most daring can be considered the expressed intention to strengthen EU cooperation with NATO, based on the achieved results and in accordance with the three joint declarations on EU-NATO cooperation of 2016, 2018 and 2023. It is clear that the impetus for the review of approaches was the unprecedented sabotage on the Nord Stream gas pipelines in the Baltic (a sea dominated by the EU and NATO) and the concern that arose in the context of the security vacuum of maritime infrastructure in the seas around Europe. Documents of this kind, although they are a step forward, do not significantly contribute to the improvement of the security environment, as they largely do not take into account that security in 2023 cannot be based on the ideas of 2014 (the first edition of the Strategy was adopted), because the security space has fundamentally changed and there are threats not only of a hybrid nature, but also of a military nature.

Unfortunately, in the part of the Black Sea EU Maritime Security Strategy do not correspond to the level of threats in it, which the Russian Federation has created in recent years and which Ukraine is under the influence of. The updated "EU Action Plan..." is inertial and seems to deliberately focus on less sensitive issues such as "analysis of the impact of the war in Ukraine on cetaceans", or "coordinated response to marine pollution of various origins...".

Although Vilnius Summit Communiqué contains a clause on the Black Sea declaring its strategic importance for the Alliance, it clearly looks weak, as do the EU formulations: «79. *The Black Sea region is of strategic importance for the Alliance. This is further highlighted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We underlined our continued support that Allied regional efforts aimed at upholding security, safety, stability and freedom of navigation in the Black Sea region including, as appropriate, through the 1936 Montreux Convention. We will further monitor and assess developments in the region and enhance our situational awareness, with a particular focus on the threats that our security and potential opportunities for closer cooperation with our partners in the region, as appropriate*».

Ukrainian diplomacy and the international expert community should encourage the US and the EU to adopt the Black Sea Declarations in support of the territorial integrity of the countries of the region in accordance with the principles of the OSCE of 1975, with the indication that the United States considers the Crimean Peninsula as an integral part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine, Abkhazia as an integral part of the sovereign territory of Georgia, Transnistria as an integral part of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Moldova.

It is important to continue to convince the US and NATO that Ukraine's membership in the Alliance is not a problem, but part of the solution to the security problem for Europe as a whole and for the Black Sea region in particular, in the conditions of permanent Russian aggression, which has been ongoing in the region since 1992, when the Russian proxies separated part of the Black Sea territory of Georgia – Abkhazia and de facto made it their protectorate.

In this context, the position recorded in the “Sustainable Peace Manifesto” by the representatives of Ukrainian civil society: “Ukraine will always be the first barrier to aggression from the east. And this is why Ukraine should be in NATO. We are not pursuing our future membership only in the context of security guarantees for Ukraine. Under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, our aim is to be, together with our NATO neighbors, the eastern shield of the Alliance against Russian aggression. Ukraine must be equipped with the best weapons and military equipment. NATO membership would be our contribution to common European security. Ukraine can become the cornerstone of NATO’s collective defense strategy”. And this is the way to overcome the security vacuum in Europe and in the Black Sea in particular.

Joint position of the prime ministers of the three Central European countries – Petr Fiala, Eduard Heger, and Mateusz Morawiecki, published in “Foreign Affairs” on April 24, can be considered a signpost for the West to reduce the security vacuum both in Europe and in the whole world: “...peace is possible only on Ukraine's terms. Frozen conflict will not bring stability or improve security... Gray areas create opportunities for authoritarian regimes to sow instability and increase tensions. ...resolute support for Ukraine will also help deter aggression in other parts of the world... This is a message

[to authoritarian regimes - author's note] will become especially clear when Ukraine wins and Russia is defeated."

Based on the above, it is important to persuade the US and NATO to change the formula of support from "as much as is necessary to strengthen the negotiating position of Ukraine" to the formula "everything for the victory of Ukraine."

Under the circumstances of Russian aggression in the Black Sea region, although Turkey did not side with Russia, it did not fully support the Western opposition to it. Turkey did not allow ships of the Russian Navy into the Black Sea in accordance with the Montreux Convention, but at the same time did not join the sanctions against the Russian Federation and allows civilian ships to transport military cargo to Syria and back through the Bosphorus.

Only one example in online mode. **(Slide 3)** The Ro-Ro ship "Sparta IV" is being loaded in the port of Novorossiysk. More than 50 artillery systems and anti-aircraft systems are loaded on board. It is likely that the specified weapons and military equipment will be delivered to Syria to the port of Tartus, departure from Novorossiysk is scheduled for July 19 of this year. The ship will go back with a load of 122-mm shells. Since April this year on the territory of Syria, the production of artillery shells for the needs of the Russian army was organized at factory No. 790 in the town of Safira near Aleppo. "Syrian Express" now also works in reverse mode. Selectivity in the interpretation of the Montreux Convention and its annexes by various parties - Russia, Ukraine and Turkey - allows such traffic in favor of the aggressor, strengthens the security vacuum in the region of the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Taking into account the importance for Ukraine of maritime security and protection of critical infrastructure, it is important to make diplomatic efforts to involve Ukraine in the EU-NATO cooperation format within the framework of the EU-NATO Task Force on Resilience of Critical Infrastructure, formed on March 16 in accordance with the joint statement of the heads of the EU and NATO, Ursula von der Leyen and Jens Stoltenberg, dated January 9.

The main goal for Ukraine at the current stage is to weaken the enemy as much as possible both at the front and through defeating it in strategic depth by the actions of the Armed Forces. In turn, the more successful Ukrainian diplomacy will be, speeding up the obtaining of the necessary weapons and equipment and strengthening of sanctions regimes against the Russian Federation, the faster the Armed Forces will be able to liberate the occupied territories from the enemy, and the sanctions will critically reduce Russia's income for waging war.

In June 2015, in the article by Volodymyr Horbulin, former Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine analyzed possible scenarios of the development of Russia's hybrid aggression and Ukraine's options for action. **(Slide 4)** The development of events according to the scenario of total war "will mean for

Ukraine [*among other things*] the complete militarization of society; ... orientation towards the uncompromising destruction of the enemy; strikes on the enemy's critical infrastructure facilities; active partisan and subversive activities... complete subordination of diplomacy to the Armed Forces...”

Recently, the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine’s Armed Forces V. Zaluzhny clearly stated that: “In war, you can and should kill the enemy on his territory. If our partners are afraid to use their weapons, we will kill with ours.” The defined approach of Horbulin-Zaluzhny corresponds not only to the interests of Ukraine, but also to the interests of NATO and the EU. **(Slide 5)** It is time for the designated Western alliances to stop being in the Black Sea only because of geography, and to start actively transforming it into a sea of NATO and the EU, as is happening in the case of the Baltic. Only under the circumstances of curbing the aggressor and forcing him to release the occupied territories in the Black Sea countries, the security vacuum will be overcome.