# BLACK SEA SECURITY

IN FOCUS:

WAR IN THE CAUCASUS

TURKEY'S POLICY

THREE SEAS INITIATIVE

On December 5, 2020, Oleksiy Bessarabov, member of the Black Sea Security Journal's editorial board, turned 44 years old. For the last 4 years, he has been detained in Russian colonies on falsified charges in the "saboteurs" case. The 14-year sentence would be held in a penal colony in the Stavropol Krai.

Volodymyr Dudka, 56, is also serving a 14-year sentence in another high-security penal colony in Stavropol.
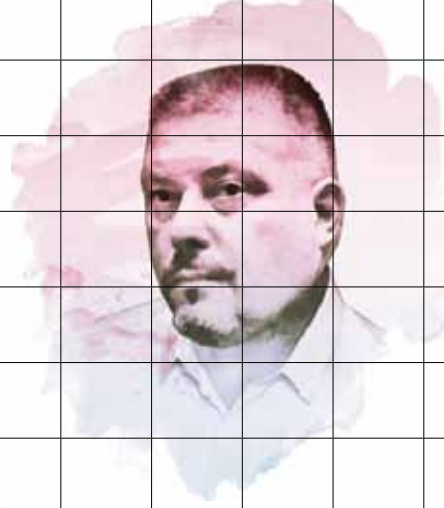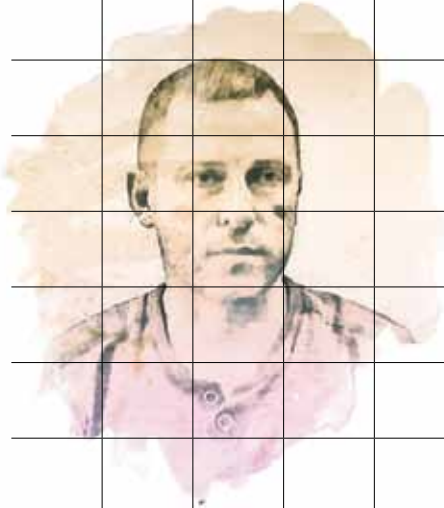
On November 8, 2020, Dmytro Shtyblykov, another of our colleagues, met his 50th birthday in the Lefortovo pre-trial detention center in Moscow, where he was transferred from a maximum security colony in Omsk. Dmytro's 5-year prison term was due to end in the fall of 2021. However, the FSB is now conducting new investigative actions. According to TASS on December 28, 2020, Dmytro Shtyblikov faces a new term - up to 20 years.

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Dear readers!

The trends of the past 2020 promise only intensification of turbulence in world politics in 2021. Russia has felt that it can act arbitrarily, using the windows of vulnerability of the West as a whole and the United States as the world superpower. Inflating the conflict potential, stimulating the pain points of American society, creating a network of influence agencies, interfering in the election process in 2016 - all this together led to the events of January 6, 2021 in the US Capitol. The storming of the citadel of legislation became a harbinger of future tectonic upheavals not only in American but also in world politics. Unpunished evil generates new atrocities.

2021 was immediately marked by Russia's militaristic rhetoric. The concentration of its armed forces along the eastern border of Ukraine, in the occupied Crimea, the rapid de-sovereignization of Belarus, a large-scale propaganda campaign in the media aimed at demonizing Ukraine, NATO, the EU, humiliating the head of European diplomacy during his visit to Moscow are all signs of confrontation with the West. The Kremlin needs it to keep Russia in check. The war against Ukraine has been going on for 8 years. Fighting against Ukraine, the Kremlin is at war with the United States, so they think.

Even after Putin's famous Munich speech in 2007, Russia took on the role of a generator of chaos and began to destroy the world order that had been established in Europe on the principles of Helsinki since 1975. And the West, unfortunately, allowed her to do so almost with impunity. In 1990, the aggressor was punished militarily and forced to make peace. Saddam Hussein's Iraq paid a heavy price for its occupation of Kuwait. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and did not receive even symbolic punitive sanctions in return. In 2014, Russia carried out aggression against Ukraine, occupying the Crimean peninsula and part of Donbas. In response, it received sanctions packages from the United States and the European Union, but this did not stop Moscow, because, despite all the discomfort, these sanctions did not affect the Russian engine of aggression - energy trade.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said at the end of 2020 that Russia would not make any unilateral concessions. Therefore, new sanctions are needed, and not only… Syria, Venezuela, Central Africa, Libya - this is a non-exhaustive list of countries where Russia has acted and is using its armed forces or private military companies. Much larger is the list of countries where Moscow operates by means of subversive activities from within, using the mechanisms of cryptocurrency. A clear example is the United States and Europe, where Russia uses an arsenal of tools from the "propaganda-corruption-secret agents-cyber-intervention" package.

At the end of 2020, Russia struck a powerful cyber attack on the United States, which came as a surprise to many. In fact, everything is quite expected, given one of the main lines of the current Kremlin, formulated by one of the founders of Putinism, Sergei Karaganov: "It is worth showing the United States that it will not be able to regain a strategic advantage." That's what Russia is demonstrating, traditionally denying its involvement in the cyber-attack. It is the fault of the West, especially Europe, that the mechanism for the peaceful settlement of conflicts through the UN and the OSCE has discredited itself. The fruitless 6-year activity of the Minsk negotiating platform on eastern Ukraine, 28 years of negotiations in the format of the OSCE Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh are a clear confirmation of that. Instead, the force-based mechanism for resolving conflicts based on international law has demonstrated effectiveness. Azerbaijan, acting under the strategic patronage of Turkey, is successfully restoring its territorial integrity and sovereignty within the country's internationally recognized borders.

It is no coincidence that in this issue we paid special attention to the Third Karabakh War, presenting columns to authors from the South Caucasus and presenting our Ukrainian view. Also important is the review of Turkey's policy in the Mediterranean, where a new zone of tension is being formed. We could not ignore the political processes and elections in Georgia (parliamentary), Moldova (presidential), Ukraine (local). Russia continues its subversive activities in these countries, trying to chaotic the situation in each of them in order to "argue" their definition as failed states. This issue also includes the full version of the article by our Polish author, one of the leading inspirers of the

FOREWORD

Three Seas Initiative on the prospects of the Initiative's partnership with Ukraine and Georgia. No wonder the ideologues of the Putin regime have recently re-actualized the thesis of democracy as an outwardly comfortable but incapable way of governing in crisis conditions (S. Karaganov). It is noteworthy that in addition to the problems in Belarus, Russia is provoking problems in relations with Kazakhstan - in December 2020, Russian parliamentarians "suddenly" reminded Kazakhstan that its northern territories are not its own, but donated by Russia.

Probably, chaoticizing the post-Soviet space, the ideologues of the Kremlin regime later intend to propose the "idea" of reunion - the restoration in one form or another of the USSR, the 100th anniversary of the formation of which will be celebrated in Russia in 2022 to recreate the "lost paradise"! Russia has also not been ignored by us given the growth of its internal problems: both economic and social, and tensions in regions where the slogans "Stop feeding Moscow!" are increasingly being heard. This is a very significant trend against the background of falling revenues of the "energy superpower" due to the oil collapse of March 2020. Against this background, it is not accidental to extremize Russia's foreign policy, to search for new external enemies. By ostensibly offering the West to continue its partnership in the fight against international terrorism, Russia itself is acting as a terrorist state. Its special services organize special operations with the use of combat poisons both abroad and inside the Russian Federation, and pay rewards to the Taliban for the destroyed US servicemen.

That is why it is not for nothing that bills have appeared in the US Senate and House of Representatives recognizing Russia as a state that sponsors terrorism. It is high time that US lawmakers and the new administration revived this issue. It took eight long years before the West resorted to radical action against the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, during which time it terrorized the newly independent states of the former Yugoslavia. Can we be sure that Europe's awakening and enlightenment about the Putin regime took place in 2020? On the one hand, yes, and this was facilitated by the selective use of chemical weapons by the Russian FSB (Navalny's poisoning), on the other hand, no, because Germany and Austria stubbornly continue to defend and promote Putin's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Russia continues to militarize the occupied Crimea and strengthens its dominance in the Black Sea region. The 2021 agenda is likely to be supplemented by a new attempt at a creeping occupation of the Sea of Azov under the pretext of drilling exploratory wells for fresh water for the occupied Crimean Peninsula. "Suddenly" in Russia "discovered" that under the bottom of Azov there are large reserves of fresh water. This is likely to be used for Russia's further expansion in Azov, like Beijing's expansion in the South China Sea.

It is possible that the Kremlin will resort to a naval blockade of Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea and Azov. The goal is then to exchange the lifting of the blockade for Kyiv to launch Dnipro water into the occupied peninsula.

2021 will be a year of upheaval for the Putin regime. Russia's current policy is not only a path to a new package of "hell" sanctions, but also a reason for active action by the Russian opposition with the support of the West from within Russia to launch mechanisms to destroy the authoritarian regime. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

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The Second Karabakh War: What the old Ethnic and Territorial Conflict Turned Into

The first proposals for a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict arose during the Soviet period, and in practice, they were reduced to two concept statements. On the one hand, given the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijan SSR was a small area of 4200 square meters with a population of 185-190 thousand inhabitants, for the socio-economic development of the region was additionally allocated about 300 million rubles, which was quite a significant amount by Soviet standards. This was a very generous program, especially when the USSR was experiencing quite serious financial problems in the second half of the 1980s. The second proposal was to get rid of the problem by raising the level of the autonomous region to the level of an autonomous republic.

The first proposals for conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) arose during the USSR existence and were practically reduced to two things. On the one hand, considering that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) of the Azerbaijan SSR was a small territory of 4,200 square metres with a population of 185-190 thousand citizens, about 300 million roubles were additionally allocated for the social and economic development of the region. The amount was quite significant by the Soviet standards. It was a very generous programme, especially considering the

USSR's quite severe financial issues in the second half of the 80s. The second proposal was to resolve the problem by upgrading the Autonomous Region to the Autonomous Republic.

Unfortunately, the Armenians were not content with the generous financial support and even the possibility of raising the regional status subject to Baku's consent. These opportunities remained unfulfilled. In other words, the money allocated remained practically unused. In the conditions of an openly demonstrated disloyalty of the local Armenian Communist elite and the intelligentsia in Nagorno-Karabakh, the offer to increase the autonomous status was also not brought to life.

Clashes between the representatives of the two nations started quite soon. They were localized both in the NK and in various cities and districts of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The two murdered Azerbaijanis moving from Aghdam to Askeran were the first deceased in the NK. It was an angry crowd. They were shot.

In Azerbaijan, in response to calls to annex the NK to Armenia, the counterclaims were put forward stating the need to grant autonomy to Azerbaijanis who lived compactly in at least two Armenian districts - Krasnoselsky and Vardenishsky. And then, the Armenians started to oust Azerbaijanis from Armenia. The first refugees came to Azerbaijan from there. There were many beaten, tortured and robbed people. In general, this was the detonator of a further outbreak of ethnic tension, clashes in Sumgait, Baku, Ganja, and subsequently in other places of Azerbaijan.

The conflict has already broken out. At first, violence and murders were supported by improvised means; later, the weapons were delivered to the NK - first of all, by Dashnaktsutyun. (O*ne of the oldest Armenian national movements, "Dashnaktsutyun", translates as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, was created in 1890 and operated on the Russian and Ottoman Empires' territory. Persia, The United States and in Europe - Ed.)* During the Spitak earthquake at the end of 1988, the border was opened, and Armenia received generous humanitarian aid. These were the flights from different parts of the world. Various Armenian terrorist organizations, which were quite numerous in France, Lebanon, Syria, and many other countries, Dashnaktsutyun, taking advantage of the fact that the customs allowed humanitarian supplies without proper care, started small arms supplied to Armenia. Soon these weapons appeared on NK territory. And already there, the Armenians began to terrorize the local Azerbaijani population.

I just want to note that for about 140 thousand Armenians in the NK, there were 42-43 thousand Azerbaijanis.

And the question raised on exclusive privileges for Armenians, up to separation from Azerbaijan, was a proper one. At that time, however, 140 thousand Armenians made up no more than 2% of the entire AzSSR population, and the number of Azerbaijanis made up a quarter of the NKAR population. In other words, 2% disregarded the will of the majority - 7 million residents of AzSSR and insisted on ignoring the opinion of a quarter of the NK population. Azerbaijanis unalterably opposed the annexation of the Armenian SSR against their will. And the conflict outbroke.

The first displacements and armed terror against the locals were perpetrated by the Dashnaktsutyun and the Karabakh Krunk (*Crane in Armenian – Ed.*) A state of emergency was declared to stop this, and internal troops were involved. Unfortunately, the situation could not be brought under control.

In Soviet times, after the Soviet coup d'état attempt in 1991, the idea of a peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict arose – the so-called Yeltsin-Nazarbayev initiative. These two Republican leaders flew to the region in August and in September organized a meeting of the parties in Zheleznovodsk. I was a member of the AzSSR delegation and formulated most of the Azerbaijani proposals for the occasion. Just 7-10 days later, I was appointed an adviser on interethnic relations under the Presidential Administration of Ayaz Mutalibov.

IN FOCUS: NAGORNO-KARABAKH

The Nagorno-Karabakh (1926)

	All	Armenians	Turks	Russians
Nagorno-Karabakh	125.300 (100%)	111.694 (89,1%)	12.592 (10,0%)	596 (0,5%)

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1939)

	All	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Ukrainians
Nagorno-Karabakh	150.837 (100%)	132.800 (88%)	14.053 (9,3%)	3.174 (2,1%)	436 (0,3%)

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1959)

	All	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Ukrainians
Nagorno-Karabakh	130.406 (100%)	110.053 (84,4%)	17.995 (13.8%)	1.790 (1,6%)	

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1970)

	All	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Ukrainians
Nagorno-Karabakh	150.313 (100%)	121.068 (80.5%)	27.179 (18.1%)	1.310 (0,9%)	193 (0,1%)

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1979)

	All	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Ukrainians
Nagorno-Karabakh	162.181 (100%)	123.076 (75,9%)	37.264 (23%)	1.265 (0.8%)	140 (0.1%)

Fig.1 Dynamics of changes in the ethnic composition of the NKAR population, 1926-1979

A mutually acceptable balanced document was developed. If not fully resolve this conflict, it could help at least localize it to prevent transformation into almost warfare. Let us recall that back then, the communist parties, in fact, were dissolved. In Armenia, the President was the former leader of the Armenian opposition national movement Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and in Azerbaijan, the Soviet appointee Ayaz Mutalibov. I want to stress that those changes led to the fact that the Republican leaders were forced to take over the settlement without looking back at the exhausted Union Center.

The meeting in Zheleznovodsk resulted in establishing the Special Task Force of intermediaries, meetings of the Deputies of the two parliaments and Ministers of Internal Affairs. As an adviser to the Presidential Administration, I prepared these meetings. They were held in Moscow, Gazakh, and Ijevan. We looked for some options; however, the USSR's dissolution followed, and the situation in both republics escalated.

After that, there was a terrorist attack - the destruction of a helicopter flying over the NK territory by Armenian terrorists. A group of high-ranking Azerbaijani politicians, employees of the Presidential Administration, Ministers, and high-level officials was on board. Everyone died. *[The author refers to the crash of USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs' helicopter Mi-8 with observers from Russia and Kazakhstan and Azerbaijanis (22 people in total), including crew members – on board near the*

Karakend village on November 20, 1991,– Ed.]. Immediately after that, the observation mission, carried out in the region by the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, was curtailed, and the negotiations - between communities, parliaments - also passed to oblivion. In such a way, the Zheleznovodsk process was annulled.

The further, the more Russia supported Armenia. The fact is that Yeltsin, although a former communist Bonza, associated himself more with the leaders of Democratic circles, considering himself a Democratic President. And Levon Ter-Petrosyan was closer to him as a winning non-communist leader. Ayaz Mutalibov, in the view of Yeltsin's entourage, was a man from the past. This support was both seen in political form and weapons supplied. By that time, the army was transferred to the Russian Federation's control, and public and non-public support with firearms for the Armenian armed groups that were formed began.

After the failure of the Zheleznovodsk agreements, there were attempts to find a peace formula. However, all Azerbaijanis already have been completely expelled from Armenia, from Baku, Sumgait, and Ganja. From many other places, Armenians were also mostly ousted. There were cases when the entire villages exchanged houses on the two republics' territories and moved entirely. Such cases were welcomed, and the authorities on both sides helped. Some Baku Armenians managed to exchange their apartments with Azerbaijanis who lived in other Soviet republics. Many refugees lost their property. It was especially tough for Azerbaijanis, expelled from Armenia in the roughest form – with no property and no support.

And at the same time, the consistent ousting of Azerbaijanis from the NK started. First from small villages, then large settlements. Then from Stepanakert. Violence grew. In the end, a barbaric action - the mass murder of civilians in Khojaly - followed. 613 people were killed, including fifty children, many women, and the elderly. Two hundred more people are still missing from there.

The war has already started and was initially localized only on the territory of the NK. Nevertheless, there were attempts for a peaceful settlement, for example, from Iran. At that time, Parliament Speaker Yagub Mammadov was an Acting President in the Republic of Azerbaijan (AR). He and the President of the Republic of Armenia L. Ter-Petrosyan were invited to Tehran by the then head of Iran, Hashemi Rafsanjani. There, an agreement establishing peace was made, and communications opened. But before the ink on this document had dried, the NK field commanders, who colluded with the command of the military units of the former Soviet Army remaining on the territory of Karabakh, attacked and captured the city of Shusha. The indigenous Azerbaijani population was immediately expelled, and Lachin was seized from two directions – this is how the NK's connection with Armenia was established. Instantly, the negotiations in Tehran became meaningless, and no peace was achieved.

After that, the National Democratic Forces came to power in the Autonomous Republic. A bit later, the leader of the opposition Popular Front Abulfaz Elchibey won presidential elections. The government has changed. And the struggle for the NK entered the stage of a full-scale war. At first, military operations developed in favour of Azerbaijan. The troops were practically ten kilometres away from Shusha and Lachin, and Armenians' position in the NK was quite tricky. But in Azerbaijan, the struggle between various groups, both inside and outside the government, did not stop. In the end, there was anarchy and chaos in the country. The individual adventurer-commanders removed their units from the front, moved to Baku and overthrew the power of A. Elchibey. Taking advantage of this chaos, the Armenians captured some Azerbaijani areas outside the NK – first Kelbajar, then – Aghdam, Fizulin, Dzhebrail, Zangilan, and Gubadlin. Thus, over 600 thousand Azerbaijanis were expelled from seven other districts around it in addition to the NK.

Fig. 2. The occupied territories of Azerbaijan in the first Karabakh War.
Source: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Bergkarabach-es.svg

So the war continued throughout 1993 and the first half of 1994. In the course, the OSCE took over the settlement, and the Minsk Group was formed. Back in 1992, I represented our country as an adviser to the AR President and the current AR Ambassador to the UN, Yashar Aliyev, at a meeting of the OSCE Committee Senior Officials. Now, this is the function of the countries' ambassadors to the OSCE. We decided to create the OSCE MG and convene the Minsk Conference to find a compromise for the NK. However, due to the war started, no conference took place.

During that period, the UN Security Council consistently adopted four resolutions, each of which demanded the Armenian Armed Forces' withdrawal from the Autonomous Republic of Armenia's territory. To allow the population to return there and ensure their safety. Instead, the Armenians continued to fight. Gradually, the parties became exhausted and came to a truce. One of its conditions was a full-fledged peace agreement, which should have been concluded within ten days. Under it, Armenia should have withdrawn its troops from all territories outside the former NKAR. Armenia refused to refer to such actions as worsening its security and the need to agree on the NK's status simultaneously. As a result, the truce did not transform into peace. There was no provision for any deployment of peacekeepers, and in general, the parties observed a ceasefire, despite some skirmishes.

At the same time, an OSCE MG mediation mission has already been deployed. Gradually, three countries were co-chairing the OSCE MG. The mediators were: the Russian Federation, France, and the United States. MG developed some proposals to resolve the conflict. There were three plans. First, they provided for the package settlement principle, high autonomous status for the NK within Azerbaijan. Baku agreed, Armenia and Karabakh rejected it.

Then there was a proposal for a phased settlement plan. At the first stage, Armenian troops had to withdraw from all areas around the NK, excluding Lachin, supposed to serve as a corridor to Armenia. And only in the conditions of peace the attempts to find a mutually acceptable status of the NK should have been made. Karabakh refused this, demanding a satisfactory status at the first stage of the settlement. They were ready for this plan subject to having the Kelbajar district, which was unacceptable for Azerbaijan.

Finally, there was a third plan - a common state. This proposal, however, was unacceptable for Azerbaijan, according to which only formally, on paper, the NK remained in its composition and de facto turned into a state utterly independent of Baku. And for further separation, they no longer had to do anything.

Thus, all three proposals were rejected, and finally, an American proposal to exchange territories appeared. Its author was Strobe Talbott, First Deputy Secretary of State of the United States. It was the Goble Plan that was borne before the end of the USSR's existence. The territorial exchange provided for Azerbaijan transfer of Lachin to Armenia for connection with the NK and Armenia transfer of Megrin corridor to Azerbaijan for connection with Nakhichevan. This plan proved acceptable to the parties. And then there was a shooting in the Armenian Parliament – the forces that found this plan unacceptable came on stage. Many people say that the then President Robert Kocharyan, driven a little into the Parliament's Speaker's shadows, the former First Secretary of TsK KPSS of the Armenian SSR Karen Demirchyan and the new Prime Minister Vazgen, was behind it. About 20 people were killed. After that, Talbott's plan passed to oblivion. Later, a similar program was discussed in Key West but was either rejected.

Finally, under the new President, Ilham Aliyev, the Madrid Principles were developed in November 2007. Then it was possible to bring the positions of the parties significantly closer to each other. The OSCE and the Presidents of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs supported these principles. However, the case did not move.

Finally, Russia took the initiative and arranged a meeting of the parties in Kazan in June 2011 with President Medvedev's mediation. It seemed an agreement was to be reached soon, but Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov (himself an ethnic Armenian; his real name is Kalantarov, Lavrov is his stepfather's last name) changed the text of the agreement. The text presented to Baku, which was a compromise, was suddenly supplemented with unacceptable things. It was the fact that Armenia had to retain control over the occupied Kelbajar region for an indefinite time. And the Kazan meeting was fruitless.

All subsequent meetings and attempts to bring the positions of the parties closer together also failed. And all this led to clashes in April 2016. They lasted five days, but it was a dress rehearsal for the large-scale war that began on September 27. It was combat reconnaissance, and in general, it demonstrated that the Azerbaijani armed forces are capable of breaking through the deeply layered defence system built by the Armenians.

Then Pashinyan came to power, and the illusion of a new compromise with the Republic of Armenia was created, which later proved to be unravelled. The second Karabakh War was inexorably underway. Armenia complacently decided that its army was superior to the Azerbaijani armed forces. They were based on the results of the 1992-94 war. They also counted on the inaccessibility of the mountains. Over the years, the Russian Federation has twice transferred huge shipments of weapons to Armenia for free. For the first time, it was $1 billion worth. The second time - when the Russian Federation withdrew its base from the Georgian Akhalkalaki - its cost was the same. Then the Russian Federation repeatedly provided military loans, and Armenia received modern Iskander missile systems, then modern Su-30 combat fighters.

Such a supply of weapons has created a feeling that there are few military risks for them among the Armenian leadership. Therefore it is possible to insist on the complete satisfaction of their demands. And if Baku refuses, why not keep the existing state, preserve it, and de facto ensure Yerevan's

control over the NK and all the surrounding areas two times larger than the territory of the NK.

It was unacceptable for Azerbaijan to put up with such a situation indefinitely. The mediators either tried to persuade Azerbaijan to give up its territorial integrity or continue to put up with the Armenian occupation.

Baku started preparations - many billions of dollars worth of Russian, Israeli, and Turkish weapons were purchased. The Army was trained, and the officer corps was completely updated. And, in general, when new military operations began, it turned out that the Azerbaijani army is much superior to the Armenian Armed Forces.

Yerevan very much hoped that the world's leading powers would not allow Baku to conduct military operations for more than a week. But it miscalculated. If in 2016 a rather harsh warning from Moscow worked, and Azerbaijan stopped fighting, in the new war, it was already about the new head of Armenia, who Russian President Putin did not very well perceive. On the other hand, the Kremlin could have believed that it was okay if they fought a little, spent some of their weapons, and come back to buy weapons from the Russian Federation again.

France believed that Armenia would be able to figure it out itself and had no risks of defeat. America was busy with its elections. And the threats of putting pressure on Azerbaijan became impossible as Turkey stood next to it. By the way, the outbreak of hostilities was preceded by large-scale manoeuvres of Azerbaijan and Turkey. After them, a Turkish squadron of F-16 aircraft and a particular military personnel group remained on our territory. And Turkey has warned that if a third party tries to interfere in this warfare, it will immediately become the fourth force.

The Russian military already knew from the experience in Syria and Libya that it is better not to get involved with this country's army - it is more

trouble than it is worth. Turkey's action neutralized possible military blackmail on the part of Moscow.

There was an attempt of the Russian Federation's Caspian flotilla, which allegedly went out for manoeuvers. Still, in the centre of the Caspian Sea, not far from our capital, shooting started. A Special Forces Brigade was deployed on the border of Azerbaijan with the Russian Federation in Dagestan. However, all these Russian Federation movements did not make a big impression on Baku and Ankara.

Arms supplies went from Russia to Armenia in a roundabout way – through Iran. About 500 tonnes of weapons were delivered to the region. Nevertheless, it was impossible to wage war this way. The Armenian army, rapidly firing rockets and shells, soon found itself in a difficult situation. Armenians fought with old Soviet weapons, Azerbaijani soldiers - with modern military technologies.

And the UN Security Council failed to make the required for Armenia decision. It was tacitly blocked by the states that did not want, even with French participation, Russia to commit arbitrariness in the South Caucasus. And when all this became clear, Armenia turned out to be suffering a catastrophic defeat. The entire southern part of the occupied lands was liberated, and then Gadrut and the heart of the NK - Shush - were stormed. For Azerbaijan, this city is a cultural centre, one of its sacred places. Azerbaijani special forces liberated Shusha in hand-to-hand combat, which was a shock to Armenia. Stepanakert was visible from there. There were no more forces left in Armenia to defend itself, and Yerevan accepted Putin's offer, a formalization of the defeat, the victory of Azerbaijan, and Armenia's surrender.

IN FOCUS: NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Fig. 3. Results of the second Karabakh War.
Source: https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-peacekeepers-deploy-to-nagorno-karabakh-after-truce-as-political-crisis-hits-armenia/30940268.html

Every year, 10 thousand conscripts from Armenia were sent to serve on Azerbaijan territory, but now this will not happen. The son of Prime Minister Pashinyan defiantly went to serve in the army on the NK territory - it was a bold challenge. The terms of the new agreement are known – all Armenian Armed Forces were withdrawn from Azerbaijan. And Russian peacekeepers with light weapons were introduced.

We were not completely satisfied with the experience of Russian peacekeeping in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Therefore it was announced that a monitoring centre with Turkey's participation would appear. The very process of peacekeeping

mission requires the placement of various posts, drone control and surveillance cameras. All information flows to the monitoring centre. In cases where Russian peacekeeping goes beyond the agreed conditions, Azerbaijan can, together with Turkey, claim and demand strict compliance with the rules.

The duration of the mission is also limited - six months before the end of the five-year presence of Russian peacekeepers, Azerbaijan has the opportunity to notify Moscow that their further stay is undesirable.

Fig. 4. Serviceman of the Russian peacekeeping contingent on the border with Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan, November 10, 2020 PHOTO: Reuters Photo.
Source: https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/azerbaijanis-protest-presence-of-russian-troops-in-nagorno-karabakh/news

The Lachin corridor, 6 km long and 5 km wide, will link Armenia and Karabakh. In parallel, onshore access will be laid to Azerbaijan from Nakhichevan. These corridors will also be symmetrical.

Armenia is now experiencing instability and attempts to overthrow the leadership, while Azerbaijan is celebrating its victory.

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Signing the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia and expected geopolitical changes in South Caucasus region

In the research, there are analyzed the main aspects of the cease-fire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the negative role of Russia in the conflict resolution process and possible pessimistic and optimistic scenarios of the geopolitical situation development in the South Caucasus Region.

Introduction

Considering the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as it is known, on September 27, 2020, the armed conflict between two countries over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed. The hostilities lasted for more than 40 days. Eventually an agreement was signed under which hostilities in the region were suspended. Let us briefly consider the agreement signed by Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. In particular, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement is an armistice agreement that ended the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. It was signed on 9 November by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, and ended all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region from 00:00, 10 November 2020 Moscow time (BBC, 2020).

Overview of the agreement

According to the agreement both parties had to exchange prisoners of war and the dead. Furthermore, the Armenia was obliged to withdraw its military forces from Armenian-controlled territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh by 1 December, 2020. A 2,000-strong Russian peacekeeping force from the Russian Land Forces had to be deployed to the region for a minimum of five years to protect the Lachin corridor, which is situated between Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region. According to Azerbaijan, Turkish forces would also take part in the peacekeeping process. Additionally, Azerbaijan could gain passage to its Nakhchivan exclave, which is detached from Azerbaijan, through a strip of land in Armenia's Syunik Province. Russian forces took the responsibility to oversee security for the roads connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan (GulfToday, 2020).

The agreement ("The Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation") stated the following:

"We, the President of Azerbaijan, I. Aliyev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia N.V. Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin, state the following:

1. A complete ceasefire and end to all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 00:00 Moscow time on 10 November 2020. The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, hereinafter referred to as the parties stop at the current territorial positions they occupy.

2. Agdam District returns to the Republic of Azerbaijan by 20 November 2020.

3. Along the frontline in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor there will be a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation with 1960 military personnel with small arms, 90 armoured personnel carriers, 380 military vehicles and other special equipment.

4. The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh. The duration of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is 5 years with automatic renewal for the next 5-year period if none of the parties state otherwise 6 months in advance.

5. In order to improve the effectiveness of control over the implementation by the Parties to the conflict agreements, a peacekeeping command post is being installed in order to enforce the ceasefire.

6. The Republic of Armenia will return to Azerbaijan the Kalbajar District by 15 of November 2020, (this was later extended to 25 November), and the Lachin District by 1 December. The Lachin corridor (5 km (3.1 mi) wide) which will provide access from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia remains under the control of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation. The town of Shusha located within the corridor will remain in Azeri possession. By agreement of the Parties, a construction plan will be determined in the next three years for a new route of movement along the Lachin corridor, providing a link between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent to guard this route. The Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees the safety of traffic along the Lachin corridor of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions.

7. Internally displaced persons and refugees return to the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas under the control of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

8. The exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detainees is to be made, as well as the remains of casualties.

All economic activity and transport links in the region are to be unrestricted. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to organise the unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo in both directions.

Transport control is carried out by the bodies of the Border Service of the FSB of Russia. By agreement of the Parties, the construction of new infrastructure linking the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with regions of Azerbaijan is to take place (Kramerf, 2020).

Who is the winner from the signing the ceasefire agreement?

As it was mentioned, as a result of the agreement signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia on November 10, Azerbaijan regained a significant part of the territories, about 2/3 of the territories, which were lost by 1994, but it should also be noted that Russia benefited significantly from the agreement, thus gaining much more leverage (Ward, 2020).

Taking into account various factors, it can be said that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not over yet and the international community should take full account of the terms of the agreement, given the fact that a new geopolitical picture has been established in the South Caucasus region, namely:

Russia has perfectly matched under the mantle of peace. What actually happened was that the Russian armed forces returned to Azerbaijan. In particular, Russian troops left Azerbaijan in 1993, and in 2012 an agreement was signed to close a Russian radar station in Gabala, and since then Russian military facilities in Azerbaijan have ceased to exist (APA, 2012). Today Russian forces have received the right to be deployed in Azerbaijan. The entry of "peacekeepers" into the conflict zone within hours of the signing of the agreement means that Russia has been preparing for this event for a long time. It goes without saying that Russia received significant benefits, getting what it needed. In particular, the fact is that the current government of Azerbaijan is indebted before Russia, firts of all because Moscow did not support its strategic partner, Armenia in the conflict. On the other hand, Kremlin showed to Armenia that attempts of Prime-Minister Pashinian to get out of Russia's sphere of influence had failed.

	Azerbaijan outside of the concerned area.		Part of Nagorno-Karabakh with no scheduled cession to Azerbaijani control.
	Armenia.		Lachin corridor, with Russian peacekeepers.
	Areas captured by Azerbaijan, to stay under its control.		The two access roads to Nagorno-Karabakh.
	Agdam District: to be evacuated by Armenia by 20 November.		New Azeri transport corridor to be established across Armenia.
	Kalbajar District: to be evacuated by Armenia by 25 November.		Line of Contact before the 2020 conflict.
	Lachin District: to be evacuated by Armenia by 1 December.		Other zones claimed by Artsakh.

Source: Interpressnews.ge. 2020

Azerbaijan has recaptured several regions, which is a big plus for President Aliyev. According the above-mentioned agreement, by the end of November and within December, additional districts would be under the control of Azerbaijan.

When we talk about Russia's role in the region, it should be noted that the Kremlin will have the opportunity to cause provocation at any time through its own military formations. Its ability to play this role has been well demonstrated in the Tskhinvali region, Abkhazia and Crimea, as well as in Karabakh in the early 1990s, but so far Russia has not been stationed in Karabakh. Moscow can play various provocations against either one country (Azerbaijan) or another country (Armenia).

When discussing the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, it is important to analyze one detail of the agreement signed between the three countries, which is the narrow corridor that should connect Azerbaijan with its part, Nakhichevan throught Armenia. This corridor will also be under control of Russia, but not the Armed Forces, but the armed units of the Russian Federal Security Service will be involved in the process.

Of course, it is also important to note that the signing of an agreement on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict does not automatically mean that this agreement will be fully implemented.

In general, the following factors can be considered as Russia's main achievement:

- In addition to Georgia and Armenia, Russia will deploy its armed forces on the territory of Azerbaijan for a period of at least 5 years (with the prospect of extension for another 5 years), thus increasing its influence in the whole region (BBC, 2020);

- Kremlin leaves open the issue of the status of Karabakh, which will always allow manipulation and influence on the parties;

- Its "peacekeepers" will control the situation on the Lachin road connecting Karabakh and Armenia, thus always having the leverage to influence on Armenia and Azerbaijan;

- The issue of functioning of the road connecting Turkey-Nakhchivan-the rest of Azerbaijan will depend on Moscow's "good will", which is another additional lever in Moscow`s hands;

- The Kremlin has sufficiently "punished" the Western-backed Pashinian (creating a real chance of ousting him from power) and threatened all pro-western leaders in the post-soviet space.

In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an order about establishing an interagency humanitarian response center on Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the official information, the function of the Humanitarian Center is to return the refugees, restore the infrastructure, promote cooperation between Baku and Yerevan with international humanitarian organizations. The center also implements the functions to coordinate the activities of Russian state and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance to residents of the Nagorno-Karabakh region affected by the war.

In this case, of course, it is necessary to mention that despite the "humanitarian" functions of the above-mentioned center, its main goal is to implenment so-called "soft power" policy by Russia toward Azerbaijand and Armenia.As for Armenia, Russia will use the content of the agreement signed on November 9, 2020 to change the government in Armenia and to form a government with a team that will be more loyal to the official Kremlin policy.

In addition, Russia will try to use its own propaganda and other methods to always remind to Armenia that it was Russia that saved Armenia from complete destruction and that it was with the assistance of the Kremlin that Armenia retained control over the part of Nagorno-Karabakh including the capital Stephanakert (Khankendi) and the Lachin corridor, which will connect with each other Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Position of Georgia after strengthening the military presence of Russia in South Caucasus

As for Georgia, it should be very thought-provoking for official Tbilisi the strengthening Russia's position in the region, which should be an additional motivation for Georgia to make more efforts

in relations with strategic partners, more efforts to gain international protection guarantees and more efforts to integrate Georgia into NATO. In this situation, the guarantee of Georgia's security is the successful cooperation of the country with the West, successful steps towards NATO and the European Union.

At present, there are no international agreements, international guarantees, which guarantee the protection of Georgia. Therefore, in addition to the above issues, more emphasis should be placed on Black Sea security programs and cooperation with the United States and other NATO member states. Of course, Georgia's strategy - the European and Euro-Atlantic course should not be revised under any circumstances, tactical steps should be strengthened and become more intensive, faster, more effective. Also, Georgia must analyze the fact that Russia has chosen a convenient time to be involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when the world's attention was shifted to the pandemic and the US elections and less attention from the international community side was paid toward Karabakh. That is why the activity of Georgian diplomacy is very important, so that the role and place of Georgia in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region should be represented as actively as possible in the agenda of the new American administration.

Conclusion

Possible scenarios of the situation development

During the discussing the further developments around Nagorno-Karabakh and throughout the South Caucasus as a whole, it is necessary to analyze both pessimistic and optimistic scenarios.

 When discussing a pessimistic scenario, the attention should be focused on the following aspects, namely:

 As a result of its involvement in the "peacekeeping" process, Russia may increase its pressure on both Azerbaijan and Armenia. In particular, the Kremlin will conduct political trade with Azerbaijan, based on the Kremlin's leverage that Russian federal forces will control the transport corridor between Azerbaijan and Turkey, which will cross the southern region of Armenia, and the autono-

mous republic of Nakhichevan, which is a part of Azerbaijan. Accordingly, Moscow will have the appropriate grounds to force the Azerbaijani authorities to refuse to implement other regional cooperation initiatives, including with the participation of Georgia, in exchange for providing official transport links between Turkey and Azerbaijan. In particular, it should be mentioned about energy projects TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline) and TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline). The TANAP project envisages the export of 16 to 32 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia, and its continuation is the TAP project, through which the further transportation of Azerbaijani gas from Turkey to southern Europe is planned. The project aims to transport about 10 billion cubic meters of gas to southern Europe (Chitadze, 2016). For information, according to the information released by the consortium TAP AG in November, 2020, Azerbaijan is ready to start commercial gas supplies to Europe through TAP. The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline will transport gas from the giant Shah Deniz II field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea to Europe (Report. Ge. 2020).

In addition, Russia will try to persuade Turkey that in exchange for providing direct transport links between Turkey and Azerbaijan, Turkey will increase the additional volume of import of natural gas from Russia by the agency of existed pipelines on the bottom of the Black Sea. As it is known, the export of Russian gas to Turkey is implemented in the framework of two projects: "Blue Stream" and "Turkish Stream". This process will provide the capacity growth of two pipeline between Russia and Turkey and can cause the decreasing the importance of Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and in general, the significance of TANAP and TAP projects.

In addition to the above, it is possible that Russia will offer to Azerbaijan to purchase additional volume of natural gas. Of course, rich by gas resources Russia does not need additional natural gas at all, but by "pumping" Azerbaijani gas from Georgia and Turkey to the Russian market, the TANAP and TAP projects could be faced with an additional problems.

In addition, Russia will do its best to influence to Azerbaijan and Turkey within the framework of the "divide and conquer" policy, so that the two

countries do not lift the economic and transport blockade against Armenia, especially on the background of growing dissatisfaction in the Armenian society toward official Moscow due to the Russia's passive position during the military operations in Karabakh. That is why Russia will be more interested in the fact that under the conditions of economic blockade of Armenia, this country will still be dependent on Russia by both - political and economic point of view. This ultimately will provide the Armenia's pro-Russian orientation and its presence in the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as Armenia's for 100% dependence on Russian natural gas.

As for optimistic scenarios, in this case there is a possibility that Azerbaijan and Turkey, together with the West, in particular in the framework of "Eastern Partnership Program", will lift the economic blockade on Armenia as a result of good will of both countries and EU involvement in the South Caucasus, which will create prospects for regional cooperation. Direct economic and transport links will be established between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as between Armenia and Turkey. In this case, it will be possible to implement various regional cooperation initiatives with the participation of Armenia, for example, the launch of the existing railway, Gyumri (Armenia) - Kars (Turkey). In addition, Armenia will be willing to get further rid itself of its dependence from Russia. To this end, for example, it is possible for official Yerevan to negotiate with Iran to import natural gas in the future from this country and not from Russia with the prospect that in the long run, natural gas will also be imported to Armenia by Azerbaijan.

In addition, in order to compensate the increasing military presence of Russia in the conflict zone, Azerbaijan and Turkey will have additional incentives to implement transport and energy projects that will reduce Russia's geopolitical and geo-economic influence in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region. For this purpose, the commissioning of the above-mentioned TANAP and TAP projects will be accelerated, as well as the issue of launching the Baku -Tbilisi - Akhalkalaki - Kars railway will be one of the main priorities too. This railway will provide the transportation of different kind of goods from China to Europe and vice versa from Europe to China via the territories of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. Capacity of this railway will be from 5 to 17 million tons of cargo per year (Chitadze, 2016).

Besides, it is expected that the West will intensify efforts to further resolve the situation in the conflict region, for example, the EU has already expressed readiness to allocate an additional three million euros to help civilians affected by the conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh (European Commission, 2020).

In addition, it is possible that due to the deployment of Russian "peacekeepers" on the territory of Azerbaijan, the United States may be motivated to activate its military presence in Georgia, especially with the background, that the US has already withdrawn a significant part of its armed forces from Germany and intends to withdraw a significant contingent of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Besides, the important attention should be paid to the US General Ben Hodges (former Commanding General, United States Army Europe) announcement. According to Hodges, the US military infrastructure should be deployed in Georgia (Agenda. Ge. 2020).

Overall, as a result of the end of hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there are all preconditions for a significant change of the geopolitical situation and the balance of geopolitical forces in the South Caucasus region, which will largely depend on the policies pursued by leading geopolitical players and all three South Caucasus states.

IN FOCUS: NAGORNO-KARABAKH

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War for Karabakh: View from Georgia

The war over Karabakh is not over yet, it has been put on hold, perhaps even longer than the previous one, while the previous one lasted for almost twenty-six years. Each side in this war has its own truth. Therefore, this piece represents the author's own vision on the problem of the Karabakh. The hostilities ended as abruptly as they began. Moscow has drawn a red line: Azerbaijan wins the battle but should not win the war. The Armenians lost a lot, but not so much as to prevent the Kremlin from saving Armenia.

For more than ten years I have been honestly trying to understand this war, and after reading many books and memoirs of its immediate participants, talking to dozens of people who at different times dealt with this issue, on both sides at diplomatic, the expert and humane level, I came to the unequivocal conclusion that each side in this war, has its own truth. And under these truths it is extremely difficult to get to the real truth, and whether someone needs this truth. Therefore, what will be written below is my own truth about the Karabakh war, such what I saw it.

Conflict history

To speak of centuries of enmity between Armenians and Turks or Azerbaijanis would be a clear exaggeration. Since medieval history, it has been bloody, but it has been mostly wars between rulers that result in a change of citizenship. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the Armenian community (millet) had a very solid position in the Ottoman Empire. Ideology, which at that time has the meaning of religion, played a significant role for loyalty to the throne, however then the other mechanisms worked, as community leaders controlled the people in them, negotiating with the authorities and providing quite comfortable living conditions. The situation changed with the emergence of nationalism among both Armenians and Turks. The emergence of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, which clearly patronized Armenians, exacerbated this problem, which during the First World War led to the tragedy of the Armenian people in 1915. However, the first armed clashes between Armenians and Turks (Azerbaijanis) were not in the Ottoman Empire, but in the Russian Empire. During the first Russian unrest of the twentieth century, in 1905-1907, the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis acquired the character of bloody clashes largely due to the imperial policy of "divide and rule." The regions where Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived together for centuries have become a battleground between neighbors, and one of the main arenas of conflict was Karabakh. History repeated itself ten years later, in 1918-20, when Azerbaijan and Armenia were in the status of independent states.

The Bolsheviks solved the problem simply, delineated the borders between the republics, relocated the "excessive" population, and created an autonomous region for the Armenians living in Karabakh as part of the Azerbaijan SSR, delineating its borders so that most Armenians live there. Naturally, there was such an ethnic cross that it was impossible to carry out this operation, so to speak, in its pure form. It is often said that the Bolsheviks planted special-purpose mines to detonate them in the event of the collapse of the Red Empire. I do not think that such a version has grounds, as, firstly, the Bolsheviks were going to ruled forever, and secondly, no "red empire" was originally intended, it was the "World Republic of the Soviets", so the borders were a tribute to the backwardness of the cadres on the ground, rather than a long-term plan. Joseph Stalin, who was directly involved in the national question of the Bolsheviks, understood perfectly well the sensitivity of the subject. His task was to maintain the loyalty of both Armenian and Azerbaijani communists. And it was still a long way to the 1930s, when the same Stalin was given the opportunity to solve the problem of loyalty by other methods. So, then the solution of the question, from the point of view of the Bolshevik leadership, seemed quite fair.

IN FOCUS: NAGORNO-KARABAKH

The national idea

The concept of miatsum (Karabakh's accession to Armenia) was actualized earlier than the idea of Armenia's national independence. This idea was voiced with the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika in the USSR among the Armenian intelligentsia, both in Armenia and in Moscow. A special role was played by the Armenians of Moscow, many of whom were prominent representatives of the Soviet establishment. Already in 1987, the NKAO (the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast) organized a collection of signatures demanding the transfer of the NKAO to the Armenian SSR, and the signatures were transferred to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The ideological manifesto of the movement was Zori Balayan's book "The Hearth", published in 1981 (during the brutal Soviet censorship of Brezhnev's time), which proved that Karabakh and Nakhichevan are Armenian land, and Azerbaijanis and Turks are enemies of Russia and Armenia. The first calls for miatsum at rallies in Yerevan were made under the posters "Lenin. Party. Gorbachev", however, very soon the movement became anti-Soviet. The Red Empire went awry, and the KGB soon lost control of the Karabakh society and then of the entire situation in the republic. The Karabakh concept has become not only an integral part, but also the main driver of the national idea of Armenia. This was the foundation on which the new political elite of the new Armenia emerged.

Naturally, such processes could not fail to provoke a backlash in Azerbaijan, where the Soviet government was much stronger than in Armenia. However, the idea of protecting Karabakh and Azerbaijanis living there has also become a driver of intensification of political life in the republic. The first big blood was shed during the events in Sumgait in February 1988, in the suburbs of which refugees from Armenia arrived in freight cars in Baku. Organized by some "unknown force" (and this is in a city controlled by the Communists), they went to beat the Armenians in a depressed industrial city, located 25 kilometers from the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. As a result of the riots, 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis died then. The events were widely covered in the Soviet press and television. Soviet rule in Azerbaijan ended after the events of January 1990, known as "Black January". After the mass murder of civilians by the Soviet army, the regime could only hold on to bayonets, and quite formally. On October 18, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan adopted the act "On Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan". Armenia declared its independence on September 21, 1991. The Soviet Union lived out its last days.

As a result of the first Karabakh war, not only the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, but also seven regions of Azerbaijan came under Armenian control. In his memoirs, former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan explains this configuration of the line of confrontation by saying that from a military point of view, it was the optimal solution for ensuring the security of Karabakh. The occupied areas were called the "Karabakh security belt."

Was there another way out?

In twenty-six years of "peace", the parties have not been able to find an acceptable solution. Despite numerous negotiations, the format of the OSCE Minsk Group with the co-chairs represented by Russia, France, and the United States, the real settlement process has not moved from the deadlock. Many pinned their hopes for a settlement of the conflict on the so-called Madrid Principles:

- return of the territories around Nagorno Karabakh under the control of Azerbaijan;

- granting Nagorno-Karabakh a temporary status guaranteeing its security and self-government;

- opening of the corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh;

- determination in the future of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh on the basis of legally binding expression of will;

- ensuring the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence with international security guarantees, including a peacekeeping operation.

The Madrid Principles were based on the principle of territorial integrity, the nation's right to self-determination and the peaceful resolution of the conflict. For anyone who is even slightly familiar

with the specifics of the Karabakh conflict, the initial non-viability of the data is obvious. Armenians strongly disagreed with the first point, Azerbaijanis disagreed with the second point when it came to independence, however, and all talks about the possibility of autonomy, given the nature of relations between nations, were also unrealistic. That is, there were significant contradictions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which meant that the third point of the Madrid principles was not real.

Certain hopes for a breakthrough in the peaceful settlement of the conflict arose after the Velvet revolution in Armenia and the coming to power of Nikola Pashinyan. However, those who were even slightly familiar with the situation in this country understood perfectly well that these hopes were illusory. In fact, Pashinyan had far less room for maneuver in the Karabakh conflict than his predecessors. Rallies were still raging in the streets of Yerevan, Serzh Sargsyan was sitting in the prime minister's office, and Pashinyan's political opponents had already accused him of rushing to power in order to hand over Karabakh. Any step by Pashinyan in the direction of peace would be regarded as betrayal. He was simply left with no choice. Pashinyan was under severe pressure from both his political opponents and society as a whole. That is why, despite the fact that he enjoyed a huge mandate of trust from the population, he was forced to tighten his position more and more. To which, in turn, Azerbaijan responded. Pashinyan's public debate with Aliyev at the Munich conference looked like a duel, not like a conversation between two people who are ready to agree. By 2020, it has finally become clear that Azerbaijan has no alternative to a military solution to the conflict and never will.

The third side of the conflict

Such an alternative could be, if the mediator in the conflict would be a world power, which would force the parties to compromise. There were only two options – the United States and Russia. The United States could have offered a solution to the conflict based on the model of the Dayton Accords, to which both sides were psychologically prepared. However, the United States did not want to intervene in the conflict, and Russia could become a mediator in the conflict because it was a

party to it. Throughout the whole time, the Russian Federation has been managing this conflict, not allowing any of the parties change the status quo, and using this conflict as the main instrument of influence for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. With Armenia becoming Russia's main stronghold in the South Caucasus precisely because of the Karabakh conflict, it is unlikely that anyone will argue. A country with a strong diaspora in France and the United States, not to mention other Armenian communities abroad that are more modest but also quite influential, it has been taken hostage by Moscow and forced to hand over virtually all major economic assets to Russia. Not to mention Russia's influence among Armenia's military and political elite. Serzh Sargsyan's attempts to pursue a foreign policy tentatively called "win-win", that is, both Russia and the West, despite some successes, such as signing a partnership agreement with the EU, seemed a pale shadow compared to membership in the EEU and CSTO. And even such a pro-Western politician as Nikol Pashinyan, who as an oppositionist called for getting rid of Russia's total influence and withdrawing from the EEU and the CSTO, became prime minister and was forced to constantly repeat the mantra about Russia as Armenia's main partner and ally.

Well, for Azerbaijan, Karabakh has always been used as a possible prize for good behavior. And not even Karabakh, but the possibility of returning at least some part of the occupied areas. The fact that Azerbaijan bought $ 9 billion worth of Russian weapons was a small bonus to Russia's efforts to manage the conflict. Of course, in the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia, the Karabakh conflict did not occupy a niche similar to that it held in Armenia's relations with Russia, but yet its importance is difficult to overestimate.

Something went wrong

Of course, Moscow had its own plan for "resolving" the Karabakh conflict, known as Lavrov's plan. It lacked the principles of territorial integrity and the nation's right to self-determination. This plan did not provide for a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict. On the contrary, this plan provided for a war in which Azerbaijan achieved some success, and Russian troops once again came to save the Armenians. This plan, despite the fact that Mos-

cow constantly denied its existence, was well known in both Baku and Yerevan. They knew and of course did not agree with it. In Baku, because it meant a permanent military presence of Russian troops on the territory of Azerbaijan, the plan itself provided for the return of only five of the seven occupied districts to Azerbaijan, as Kelbajar and Lachin districts remained behind Armenia. And in Yerevan, the disagreement with this plan was explained to me as follows - in the last hundred years, Russia has twice left the South Caucasus, and left unexpectedly. Trusting the Russians the fate of Armenia, in the conditions when Yerevan believed that they could fight off possible attacks by Azerbaijan on their own, seemed really reasonable. In twenty-six years, the Armenians have created a really powerful, highly echeloned defense system, which, even with the huge amount of weapons purchased by Azerbaijan, seemed very problematic.

The hostilities in April 2016 confirmed the rightness of the Armenian side. Very small territorial acquisitions and the cessation of hostilities on the call from Moscow, once again convinced the Armenians of their rightness. Moreover, since 2016, a thorough audit of all lines of defense has been conducted, and weaknesses have been strengthened. If after the Velvet revolution in Armenia and the coming to power of Nikola Pashinyan, something changed in terms of the country's defense capabilities, it changed only for the better. In 2018-19, Armenia's military spending exceeded 20% of the country's GDP, while in previous years it did not exceed 15%. At the end of 2019, Armenia signed a contract for the supply of Su-30SM multi-role fighters, the first four vehicles arrived in the country, and Armenia planned to purchase a total of 12 fighters. In August 2020, a ceremony of signing an agreement on the modernization of the aircraft fleet of the Armenian Armed Forces took place in Moscow, and it was a question of modernizing the Su-25 attack aircraft. It should also be noted the rates of Tor-M2 anti-aircraft missile systems, covering the sky from assault aircraft. This list could go on. In general, Armenia had every reason to believe that in the event of a resumption of hostilities, Azerbaijan would clearly fail in a blitzkrieg, and a few days later a telephone call would be made in Baku, as it was in April 2016. But something went wrong.

Large battalions are always right

To say that Azerbaijan was preparing for war is to say nothing. In Baku they waited, waited for a convenient moment, waited long and patiently. The events of the 1990s were a national humiliation and dealt a blow to the pride of every Azerbaijani. It was this, not the loss of territory or even the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees in their own country, that made war inevitable even after so many years. Were there other options? Rather no than yes. After all, for Armenians, the same events were the subject of national mountain, and to abandon the conquests of the 1990s would be to lose part of their identity. Therefore, Baku waited for the moment.

To decide on an operation against Armenia without the game going according to Moscow's rules, a number of factors had to coincide. The first factor is Russia. After occupation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas, the supply routes of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine were, in Moscow's view, not very reliable. The same applies to transport infrastructure. And the events in Belarus began. Yet, for the Kremlin, everything is going well there, but who knows how it can turn. Construction of

the Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream could to some extent solve problems. However, the Nord Stream 2 is not operational. So, participation in regional projects like the South Caucasus gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and even the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline for the Russian Federation become important, although the Kremlin resisted itself for many years to the realization of these projects. Add to this plans to build a railway from Iran to Russia, and the picture will be complete, well, or almost complete. Moscow saw the real benefits of cooperation with Azerbaijan, and this was a very serious reason not to call Baku until a certain point. In Moscow, several attempts were made to stop hostilities through official channels – through negotiations. However, the fact that these attempts were formal was obvious. The main question that really interested everyone – where is the red line of Moscow?

The second factor is Turkey. The times of "one nation - two peoples" have long and irrevocably passed, the mood prevailing in Azerbaijan under

the second president has been transferred to the archives of history. Azerbaijanis and Turks continued to be very close peoples, Turkey developed cooperation with Azerbaijan in all spheres from economic to military, while Azerbaijan, on the contrary, increased its influence in Turkey. But the Turks refrained from direct interference in the affairs of the region. In general, Ankara is very reluctant to undertake political projects, especially when it comes to a direct conflict of interest with Russia. However, in recent years, Turkey has gained experience of such clashes in Syria and Libya, and these clashes have not always ended in favor of the Russians. However, there have been no obvious successes in the foreign policy of the Turks lately either. Against the background of the crisis in the Mediterranean, the deteriorating economic situation and relations with the European Union, the defeats in the municipal elections in Ankara and Istanbul, Erdogan needed a success story, and the Karabakh case was the best fit. The matter remained "small" – to provide the Azerbaijani side with a decisive military advantage.

The spring battles in Idlib showed the capabilities of the Turkish drones, although these capabilities were greatly exaggerated in the press, against the heavy attacks of the infantry Fatimiyun drones were still not so omnipotent. However, the Turkish generals had an exceptionally good experience with the use of drones. Unlike the Assad coalition, the Armenians did not have the ability to concentrate such a large number of manpower and equipment on specific sections of the front. This was the case when the Turkish generals, together with their Azerbaijani colleagues, correctly calculated the efficiency of the use of drones, and their opponents did not take that probability into account. This element played an important role in the fighting. But it would be wrong to reduce Turkey's role to a technological advantage. Even in the military component, this role is not decisive. For many years, the Turkish military has been training the Azerbaijani army, and it doesn't really matter whether it is true that Turkish generals or even Turkish units were directly involved in hostilities. Turkey's role in Azerbaijan's military success cannot be overestimated. When, in late July, the now former Armenian Defense Minister said that "the tactical nature of the Azerbaijani-Turkish exercises is not a cause for concern," and called

for refraining from provocations, he could hardly have guessed that the Turkish military had come to the South Caucasus seriously. And this was a serious omission of Armenian intelligence.

However, the military component is just the tip of the iceberg, a much more important element was the political support of Turkey. Of course, it is possible to build conspiracy theories about secret agreements between Baku, Moscow and Ankara. Moscow was well aware of the pain points that could be pressed in Ankara in the event of Russia's gross intervention in the conflict. There are too many mutual interests and no less lines of confrontation. Therefore, thanks to the direct participation of Turkey, which, unlike the Russian Federation, did not have to hide its preferences, Moscow's policy became the art of the possible.

As for the reaction of Western countries, it was only at first glance unanimous and unambiguous. Everything is clear with France, the large Armenian community and the traditional support of Armenia have predetermined the position of this country. However, in this case, President Macron has surpassed himself in defending Armenia. Macron's reaction was very personal, he had a warm relationship with the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikola Pashinyan. Had it been his will, he would probably have sent Mirages and a foreign legion to Armenia. But Armenia is a CSTO member, so Macron had no possibility even to launch a military-humanitarian operation similar to the one launched by the Americans in August 2008 in Georgia. All he had to do was to scold Erdogan, Turkey, complain about the imperfections of international law, condemn the violence and express concern. Which was very important, but ineffective.

Even more interesting was the reaction of the United States, which reflected the administration's attitude to the region. One month after the start of active hostilities, the Americans, who are co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, invite the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan to Washington to hold talks and, of course, reach a ceasefire agreement. At the same time, then President Trump, who was under fierce criticism from then presidential candidate Biden for failing to react to the war in the Caucasus, said that it was easy enough to do so (at-

taining peace), calling the Armenians a heroic people. Needless to say, the Washington ceasefire had even less chance than the Moscow one. I will not write about Great Britain, not because they were not in this conflict, as they were, and they were on the side of Azerbaijan. But the British did not state anything publicly, and their participation can be judged only on indirect grounds.

Equally interesting was the reaction of Iran, which immediately declared its support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and the spiritual leader of Iran declared all those killed in Karabakh martyrs. With 20 to 30 million Azerbaijanis in the country, it is difficult to behave differently, but it is at the official level. In real politics, Iran's relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia are a complex set of interests, contradictions and risks. And given the very unusual position of this country in the world, Iran's offer to mediate in the conflict was even formal, and Tehran was well aware that no one would let them into the process. There's a bust of players anyway.

There is no point in analyzing military action, this is a matter for military experts, so let us limit ourselves to Napoleon's phrase – "Large battalions are always right."

The results are not exactly Lavrov's plan

For the uninitiated, the hostilities ended as abruptly as they began. Ended with the red line of Moscow – Azerbaijan won the battle, but did not win the war. Armenians lost a lot, but not so much as to prevent the Russians from saving themselves. Negotiations, signing of a ceasefire agreement, Russian "peacekeepers" in Karabakh…When applied to Russian troops, the word peacekeepers should always be written in quotation marks, otherwise it would be the meaning with mistake. By the way, the course of events described above, too, most likely, was different: "peacekeepers" - negotiations - signing.

And here is the question of the participation of the Turkish contingent in the "peacekeeping" mission. In this case it is the same in quotation marks as in the case of the Russians. Apparently, there was some agreement between Ankara and Moscow on this issue. However, during the struggle of the Kremlin towers, Ankara decided to leave the presence of troops in Azerbaijan as peacekeepers without a prize, limiting their status to observers at the peacekeeping center. It has no practical significance. The Turkish Parliament has already legalized the stay of Turkish troops in Azerbaijan. This means that although everything that happened is very similar to Lavrov's plan, it is not exactly Lavrov's plan, there is a nuance.

And this nuance is that the Russian Federation has lost the right to a monopoly on the use of force in the South Caucasus. The other results of the conflict – the political crisis in Armenia, opportunities to open communications, the changed architecture of relations between Russia, Turkey and Iran are preliminary. So, we have a lot of interesting in the region.

Volodymyr Zablotskyi,
Observer,
Defense Express

Liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh: military, technical, operational, and tactical aspects

The last Azerbaijani-Armenian (or third Karabakh) war was a landmark event that deserves the attention of observers. The Azerbaijani army has clearly demonstrated the victory in a qualitatively new war in the difficult mountainous conditions of Karabakh. The peculiarity of the third Karabakh war was the use by Azerbaijan of the new Turkish concept of air-ground combat, developed and tested in Syria and Libya, and the tactics of conducting a new type of maneuverable war in difficult mountain conditions. It was a question of coordinated mass use of combat drones, separately and in interaction with other forces and means in the framework of offensive operation.

The last Azerbaijani-Armenian (or the third Karabakh) War was a landmark that deserves the attention of observers, military and politicians. After all, the Azerbaijani army demonstrated the world a victory in a qualitatively new war in Karabakh's difficult mountain conditions.

A special feature of the third Karabakh War was the new Turkish concept of Air-Ground Combat by Azerbaijan, developed and tested in Syria and Libya and tactics of a new type of manoeuvrable war in difficult mountain conditions. It was about the coordinated massive use of combat drones, separately and in cooperation with other forces and means of a combined-arms offensive operation

It was preceded by the General Staff and the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan's complex work, national support for the country's long-term, multilateral and multi-level preparations for the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Army received everything required for a modern battlefield: qualitatively new types of weapons and military equipment. For one thing, the edge-cutting surveillance and strike systems of Turkish and Israeli production, high-precision ammunition, hidden communications and a new combat control system. It was about a qualitative leap and the acquisition of the ability to conduct network-centric combat.

Along with the purchase of drones, artillery and missile systems in Israel and Turkey, Baku has created a licensed production of Israeli kamikaze drones (unmanned aerial vehicle) Orbiter 1K (National Code *Zarba*).

Given Baku's close relations with Ankara, the latter sells its weapons and trains its officers and helps in military planning at the level of the two countries' general staff. Therefore, Baku's plan for the liberation operation was based on Air-Ground Combat's innovative Turkish concept, modified according to Karabakh conditions.

The Azerbaijani troops gained practical experience in interacting and using new weapons within the framework of the latest conceptual features in August of this year during the joint military manoeuvres with the Turks held on Azerbaijan's territory.

A new concept of air-ground combat

The two Turkish operations with the mass use of combat drones: in Syria and Libya preceded the Azerbaijani operation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The first was called "Spring Shield" and was a response to the death of 33 Turkish soldiers in a Russian airstrike on February 27 this year.

The Turkish army soon attacked Syrian regime targets in Idlib, using *Bayraktar TB2 and Anka-S* combat drones for the first time. The new doctrine of using the latter with the other forces and means, developed within the air-ground combat concept developed by the Turkish General Staff, allowed hitting targets with high efficiency.

Fig. 1. Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone at the moment of a high-precision bomb dropping

The new concept's essence is non-contact combat operations: a coordinated massive strike using UAVs and high-precision ammunition, electronic warfare systems, and artillery. Combining these elements allowed the Turkish military to get superior results in Idlib (although limited from a military and political standpoint and geopolitical conditions).

The Turkish achievements in military technologies, dynamic development of unmanned systems and operational art demonstrated in Idlib came a real surprise to public opinion and even most experts. The active development of unmanned systems in Turkey resulted from Ankara's purposeful long-term scientific and economic policy, where drones are considered critical elements of the security strategy and the primary means of terrorism combatting operations against Kurdish rebels.

The characteristic features of the operation in Idlib were the use of the surprise element (the enemy was struck by the scale and effectiveness of the Turkish operation, especially the massive use of attack drones in an area where there was no air defence); the interaction of different types of weapons under a single plan and the use of drones as a critical means of operation.

The most efficient element was a high-precision airstrike using smart ammunition (including *MAM-L and MAM-C* missiles) against targets. Drones were also engaged in reconnaissance, surveillance, guidance and correction of artillery fire. And the *Anka-S* UAV was used for electronic intelligence (*COMINT*).

Usually, drones attacked targets from outside the reach of MANPADS with extreme accuracy. A good example was the attack on February 27 by the *Bayraktar TB2* drone of an army column on the highway near Kafranbel. From a height of 6,845 m, a direct hit destroyed a tank moving between an IFV and a truck.

The operation had the features of a contactless war of the future with limited participation of the

ground strike component, which was the formation of the pro-Turkish militia. Therefore, in the classic version of the Turkish Army operation (Special Forces, tanks, motorized infantry, etc.), the effect could be much greater.

An essential feature of the operation was its flexibility and the ability to adapt depending on the changing combat environment. Thus, after the involvement of air defence elements by the Syrian command (Pantsir-S air defence system and Buk-M2 air defence system*)*, the Turkish headquarters changed their tactics, which primarily provided for the neutralization of enemy air defence facilities.

This happened in the order as follows. The *Anka-S* UAV carried out reconnaissance of the targets and transmitted information to *Koral* electronic warfare stations near the Turkish-Syrian border. Accordingly, the latter interfered with the operation of Syrian air defence systems (primarily the RDRE). And already open, localized and muffled electronic enemy's air defence systems were destroyed by *Bayraktar TB2* combat drones using the high-precision *MAM-L* ammunition with laser guidance.

The combat environment also facilitated the use of drones. It was about atypical conditions of the battlefield, actually limited to Idlib province. Therefore, drones operating from the bases in the Turkish Province of Hatay could not be attacked by the enemy before crossing the borderline or after returning to the base. After the launch, the UAVs gained altitude (5-7 thousand metres) and were sent to the area of defined targets.

Consequently, the attack on ground targets required only a short stay of drones over Syrian territory, a few dozen kilometres from the border. Proper logistics ensured the high pace of attacks.

From the very beginning, the drones operated massively and around the clock and on the first day literally "hung" in the air over Saraqib, attacking even single targets (vehicles, groups of soldiers, etc.) and paralyzing traffic in the entire area. Several vehicles were in the air simultaneously.

Along with attacks on Saraqib city targets, which temporarily paralyzed traffic on the M5 highway,

the drones destroyed enemy-sensitive points: headquarters, control points and artillery positions. The interaction of drones with artillery *(T-155 Firtina, T-122 Sakarya, T-300 Kasirga)* allowed hitting targets even in the Russian-Syrian troops' deep rear. Finally, drones' constant presence over the battlefield negatively affected the enemy's morale and paralyzed its manoeuvres.

On February 29, the reports on the downing of several senior officers of elite units (25th Special Forces Division, Republican Guard, 4th Division), including two colonels, one Lieutenant Colonel, and three Majors, came. The headquarters of the 124th Brigade of the Republican Guard was also affected.

In the other case, the destruction of two 130-mm M-46 self-propelled guns by drones in the Tal Hadiya area was reported. Along with the destruction of the dozens of tanks, IFVs, cannons, and other, many vehicles were abandoned and captured by the rebels.

Even the Russian media acknowledged that Turkish drones' activity quickly "changed (for the Assad army) the battlefield conditions." According to Turkish President Recep Erdogan, Turkish UAVs in Spring Shield operations noticed as many as eight (!) anti-aircraft missile and gun systems "Pantsir-S", so highly promoted by the Russian propaganda with an emphasis on exceptional opportunities in the fight against drones (!).

The Libyan experience.

In Libya, where Turkish Expeditionary Forces arrived to support the legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA), the combat environment had its peculiarities and differences from those in the Syrian Idlib. Consequently, the practice of using combat drones in the framework of the concept of ground-air warfare improved and once again confirmed its effectiveness.

The new tactics introduced by the Turkish military became a surprise to the rebellious General Khalifa Haftar, who did not have effective forces and means to fight the drones, which changed the situation, stopping the offensive of the Libyan People's Army (LPA) on Tripoli.

Given the Libyan civil war's manoeuvrable nature, Turkish UAVs operated from the very beginning far beyond the besieged Tripoli, using field runways and sections of highways. The Bayraktar TB2 and Anka-S UAVs made constant monitoring of essential enemy communications and bases and the launch of high-precision strikes to destroy enemy fortifications, military equipment and staffing, possible.

Fig. 2. Tanks burned by Turkish drones in Libya

The high mobility, flexibility, and effectiveness of the Turkish Special Forces' actions in cooperation with combat drones were noted. Especially successful was the practice of using self-propelled 155-mm T-155 *Firtina* howitzers in conjunction with gunner drones during Special Forces' raids, which provided rapid high-precision destruction of moving targets, transport columns and even armoured targets.

Already on March 25, the Mobile Strike Group of the GNA forces, together with Turkish Special Forces, launched a raid in the rear of the LPA and unexpectedly attacked and surrounded the strategically important Al-Wattiya Air Base in the northwest of the country, at that time in the centre of the territory controlled by Haftar. Mercenaries from Sudan and officers – military "advisers" from France and the United Arab Emirates, were surrounded.

Simultaneously, government forces launched a counteroffensive and liberated the cities of Garyan (Haftar's former headquarters), Sorman and Sabratha on April 12-13 and regained control of the Mediterranean coast from Tripoli to Tunisia. On May 18, GNA forces broke through a front in northwestern Libya. They regained control of a section of the border with Tunisia and communication with the previously cut-off enclave in the Southeast. And on May 21, south of Tripoli, government forces surrounded a large enemy group starting its destruction.

Since May 22, the government forces' primary efforts have been focused on ousting the LPA from the suburbs of the capital, firstly from the airport area, liberated on June 3. On June 4, government forces occupied the location west of the Tripoli airport, city of Qasr bin Ghashir and moved south to the Fom Valga area. All this time, Turkish drones

accompanied the advancing troops and struck to destroy the retreating enemy columns.

On June 5, Haftar's last bastion in the west of the country, Tarkhuna (100 km east of the capital), fell. The scale of the LPA's defeat in Tripolitania was evidenced by the heavy losses of the LPA in staffing and equipment, trophies captured by the government forces (tanks, armoured personnel carriers, ADMS, cannons, aircraft, helicopters, etc.) and prisoners.

Due to the lack of adequate means of combating drones, the LPA suffered catastrophic on the scale of the Libyan war losses in military equipment and staffing. Excruciating for Haftar was the loss of up to 15 MAPC "Pantsir-S1ME", for which Turkish drones staged a real hunt. "Pantsirs" could not withstand simultaneous attacks from several directions and were destroyed.

To fight Turkish drones, Russia even secretly handed over several MiG-29 fighters to Haftar, which were urgently transferred to Libya and immediately involved in combat operations. However, although the soldiers could destroy several drones, this happened after the government forces entered the combat and had no significant consequences.

The success of using the Turkish concept of ground-air warfare in Libya is difficult to overestimate. It led to the Haftar's loss of some essential modern warfare means, which led to his defeat in Tripolitania and the subsequent strategic retreat to the East due to the loss of air dominance. Only the threat of direct military intervention by Egypt saved the LPA from its final defeat.

Azerbaijani playing with Turkish notes

After the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas of Azerbaijan by Armenia in the early 1990s (the first Karabakh War), Baku always carefully prepared for their liberation by force. At the same time, Yerevan did not want to implement as many as four UN Security Council decisions on troops' withdrawal from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. And the protracted Minsk talks in no way brought the solution to the conflict, considered frozen for 30 years, any closer.

The four-day (the second Karabakh) War of April 2-5, 2016, despite its military superiority and drones' use, was unsuccessful for Baku. The offensive of the Azerbaijani troops was prevented by a powerful Armenian defence system based on challenging mountain terrain. Minefields tightly covered it, artillery and mortar batteries on the reverse slopes of the heights, manoeuvrable tank groups and air defence systems. New tactics and new weapons were required to overcome such defences.

The Azerbaijani liberation operation started on September 27 under the scenario of future wars – the neutralization of enemy air defence. For this, various types of drones were engaged, including radio-controlled UAVs based on old An-2 aircraft (local name is *Andula*). They provoked the air defence system to open fire (with the consumption of scarce missiles), give out the air defence system's positions, immediately destroyed by drones (*Harop-Orbiter-Bayraktar*).

The drones provided systematic reconnaissance and coordinated the strikes of heterogeneous forces against the targets both along and deep in the Armenian defence line. The short-range air defence system was neutralized with confirmed destruction of 10 to 15 ADMS-type air defence systems, several Strela-10 systems and electronic warfare stations (including Repellent). Later, the S-300 air defence system, P-18 detection and ranging system, and the like were also destroyed. Therefore, one of the main factors of the Armenian defence ceased to exist.

Considering the mistakes and deficiencies of the 2016 war, Baku made a bet on a gradual overcoming of the enemy's defence. To hide the direction of the main strike and complicate the enemy's forces manoeuvre, Azerbaijani troops attacked the Armenians simultaneously on the entire front line. Subsequently, the main strikes' directions were determined - North and South, where tactical helicopters landings were made.

In the first week, the attackers, taking advantage of their air dominance, controlled the battlefield, and the drones switched to attrition strikes, gradually knocking out the existing Armenian equipment, blocking the supply of ammunition and ev-

erything required to the positions. The Armenians' disregard for even basic rules of disguise also facilitated this.

In two weeks, the attackers advanced in the northern (Talish-Madagiz) and southern (Jabrayil, Hadrut, Füzuli) sectors of the front, freeing eight settlements, mainly abandoned by residents. Progress on the first mountainous section was measured in a few kilometres. On September 27, Special Forces occupied a strategic height – Mount Murovdağ, the Sugovushan. Road junction (Madagiz) and the village of Talysh, which allowed fire control on the Vardenis-Agdere highway, which connected Karabakh with Armenia.

In the south, the attackers advanced 25 km. On October 2, a LORA ballistic missile damaged the bridge over the River of Khakari on the Berdzor-Goris highway, which also connected occupied Karabakh with Armenia. Consequently, the Azerbaijani command intercepted Rokadni highways

from the flanks with the threat of encircling the enemy, simultaneously linking its forces in the central area.

The dominance in the air allowed the offensive forces to use the manned combat aircraft. Su-25 attack aircraft and combat helicopters operated together with drones that provided reconnaissance and laser illumination of targets, minimizing the risk of manned vehicles staying in the combat zone.

Round-the-clock shelling levelled the difference between the front and rear and demoralized the enemy. The airstrikes disrupted the Armenian troops' control and logistics and made delivery of fuel and ammunition to the front line impossible. A new factor on the battlefield was the widespread use of high-precision ammunition, which devastated the Armenian fortifications. Every day Artsakh lost several pieces of equipment and significant manpower.

Fig. 3. Armenian armoured vehicles smashed by drones

The Azerbaijani Special Forces' actions and ADMS interacting with drones played a significant role in this. Only on October 8, two tanks and Grad unit were destroyed, and 13 tanks and five IFVs were captured. On October 9-10, the Armenians lost 70 tanks destroyed or abandoned by their crews, 21 guns and 20 BM-21 MLRS guns.

On October 9, in the area of Hadrut, Artsakh's Tactical Group with tanks was destroyed by airstrikes. The city was liberated, which allowed striking north with the threat of destruction of the Armenian front's entire central section.

Fig. 4. Remnants of the Armenian T-72 after the ammunition explosion resulting from the direct drone hit

The ceasefire agreement signed on October 10 was soon violated, as was the subsequent one. On October 11, the Azerbaijani air defence system repelled a missile attack from the Armenian territory made on the HPP in the city of Mingachevir, preventing the regional catastrophe. In response, Azerbaijani drones destroyed the Elbrus TBMS on the territory of Armenia.

On October 17-18, Azerbaijani units broke through the front in the region of Jabrayil and Hardrut and entered operational space, liberating territories along the Iranian border. In other words, the attackers bypassed the Armenian defence in Nagorno-Karabakh from the flank with the threat of encirclement.

The Armenians' attempt to stop the offensive failed, including due to the inefficient use of existing forces and means (MLRS and ADS), engaged in battle in singles and destroyed. But the Su-30 fighters purchased by Armenians in the Russian Federation on the eve of the war, capable of fighting drones, never took to the air.

Thus, on October 29, Azerbaijani drones found and destroyed three Armenian long-range ADMS BM-30 "Smerch", which shelled the Azerbaijani city of Bard. The first was hit in a firing position; the second was escorted to a disguised shelter, where it and another disguised BM-30 were destroyed.

In the last days of the war, Azerbaijan's *Bayraktar* tracked down the latest Armenian Tor-M2KM ADS, heading to a disguised hangar between rural buildings and aimed 2 *Harop* kamikaze drones at it, which hit the air defence system through an open gate. Another drone hit the hangar roof.

The last Armenian counterattack's attempt near Goradiz failed. The best Armenian strike units, devoid of air defence, were shot from the air in the open space near Füzuli-Hadrut-Jabrayil. Also, due to the systematic destruction of Armenian transport convoys, warehouses and infrastructure by drones, the defence potential of Artsakh has critically decreased. Soon, its defenders were forced to switch to semi-partisan ambush tactics on mountain roads.

The advancing troops also changed tactics and launched special mountain forces, which advanced through the mountains, bypassing resistance nodes. On November 8, they liberated the city of Shusha, the ancient cultural capital of Karabakh.

The loss of a critical point on the route connecting Artsakh with Armenia meant for the Armenians their defeat in the war.

The next day, the General Staff informed the Armenian Prime Minister about further warfare's im-

possibility, and the latter was forced to agree to negotiations with Baku. At midnight on November 10, Nikol Pashinyan signed with Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev a joint statement and, in fact - the surrender of Armenia.

Fig. 5. Bayraktar drones destroy the latest Armenian Tor-M2KM ADS with the hangar

Some conclusions

Assessing the use of drones by the Turkish military in Idlib, Turkish expert Bahri Mert Demirel announced the emergence of a new military doctrine, which is just being formulated and therefore is not yet a subject for discussion even in military science circles. According to him, in the Spring

Shield operation, the drones were first used as the air search and strike system's main element. The expert also stressed the critical role of the *Koral* electronic warfare system in the operation.

In the future, the concept was supplemented with additional elements, particularly the synergistic use of drones, which themselves do not yet win

the war, and manned aircraft and artillery with a clear distribution of functions on the battlefield. The Azerbaijanis fully implemented this concept in Karabakh.

We are talking about combat operations within a single information space when the constant data exchange allows using the received intelligence to destroy identified targets almost immediately (in real time). As we can see from Azerbaijan's example, the Turkish concept can be implemented entirely or in separate units, armies of other countries with similar battlefield conditions.

The 2020 Azerbaijan-Armenian war was the first local network-centric war with UAVs' widespread use for reconnaissance and target designation and independent strikes on targets with high-precision ammunition.

This war once again proved that modern armoured vehicles are entirely defenceless against UAV attacks from the upper hemisphere, and its use without appropriate protection is a huge risk. After all, the cost of a small kamikaze drone (up to 100 thousand dollars) with a 50-kg warhead is much lower than the cost of a modern tank, ADMS or ADS.

Due to the destruction of a large number of Armenian tanks in a relatively short time, the voices of "the need to abandon tanks that should be sent to the dustbin of history" are already being heard. At the same time, the development of anti-drone means has accelerated.

According to Sputnik-Azerbaijan News Agency, during the 44 days of the war for Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian side lost arms and materiel worth USD 2.7 billion. This, according to the Clash Report, also includes USD 1.9 billion of 976 targets destroyed by Bayraktar TB2 drones, including 187 armoured vehicles (including 138 tanks), 257 guns and ADMS, 57 FES, electronic warfare and communications equipment, 386 vehicles, etc.

At the same time, the loss of only two Bayraktar TB2 drones was reliably confirmed (October 19 and November 8). Although a considerable part of success probably belongs to the other types of drones used by the Azerbaijanis in battles.

Numerous videos provided by the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry showed the world a new quality of the battlefield with indicative pinpoint defeats from the air of both stationary and moving targets, including armoured vehicles, convoys, headquarters, warehouses, etc., both day and night, which ensured the success of the offensive. With its outdated approaches, the Armenian side lost both on the battlefield and in the information plane.

As of the end of September, Armenia was technically and tactically inferior to Azerbaijan, including in the field of drones. The Armenian Army was armed only with light reconnaissance drones of its design *Krunk*, *Bazé and X-55*. Their characteristics were inferior to the Azerbaijani counterparts, primarily in combat load of 15-20 kg against 50 kg and above in TNT equivalent, which did not play a significant role in battles.

However, on July 12 this year, during another escalation, an Armenian drone destroyed a group of senior officers led by General Polad Hashimov, a key figure in the conflict zone, on Azerbaijani territory.

In turn, on September 28, an Azerbaijani *Harop* drone hit a bunker where senior officers of the Armenian Armed Forces, including the Head of the GS Intelligence Department, General Arakel Martikyan, stayed. And on October 27, as part of the Azerbaijani Special Services operation, a car carrying the Minister of Defense of Artsakh, General Jalal Harutyunyan, was hit by a drone.

For Ukraine, the conclusions from the course and results of the last Karabakh War are of particular importance. The example of Azerbaijan refutes the widespread thesis that the Donbas war does not seem to have a military solution. Instead, it has no diplomatic solution (except in the case of a possible collapse of the Russian Federation itself), as the Kremlin will never return the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and TOUTU (temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine).

Therefore, to free the latter, it is impossible to exclude the use of a force component under certain circumstances. Such a scenario requires a new quality of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, includ-

ing due to the new organization of the Army, the introduction of new strike missile and unmanned vehicles and high-precision ammunition.

The Turkish concept is all the more noteworthy as there are very similar conditions in the JFO zone in the Donbas (a limited region and a ban on the use of aviation), and *Bayraktar TB2* drones are already in service with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and their number will grow. This already means a qualitative advantage over the occupier, not yet armed with anything like this. But Ukraine still lacks a reliable strategic ally.

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Turkey's Sea Policy: Struggle for Survival

Anyone who looks at the world map will see the critical geographical and geopolitical location of Turkey both on land and at sea. This location brings both benefits and challenges. Due to its geographical location, many countries do not want to leave Turkey alone. For this reason, the country needs to pursue an active regional policy for its own survival. This article is an attempt to summarize Turkey's maritime policy.

Between East and West

Turkey's geopolitical location on land is of critical importance, since the shortest ways linking Asia with Europe pass through Turkey. In addition, the Turkish Straits are on the main route that connects Russia and the other coastal states of the Black Sea with the rest of the world. The Straits also serve as a transit point for the energy sources of Southern Caucasia and the Central Asia. From time to time, Russia had the ambition of gaining access to warm waters and she still aims at gaining influence in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean (as the cases in Syria and Libya shows). In that issue, the Turkish Straits have had a great importance for Russia. On the other hand, the Black Sea region has a key importance for the own security of Russia. The Blach Sea region is one of the most sensitive places for security of Russia and for this reason, Russia is not inclined to tolerate the presence of a non regional force in the Black Sea. Therefore, Russia, throughout history, has either urged Turkey not to allow the battle ships of non littoral states to the Black Sea, or she sought to establish direct control on the Straits. On the other hand, other powers, who wished to establish control in those regions, have always sought to establish control on the Straits. The Turkish Straits became arena of one of the blodiest battles of the First World War, when the Allied Navy tried to occupy the Straits (first the Dardanelles Strait, and then Istanbul, the then capital of the Ottoman Empire, thus to bring the Ottoman Empire out of war and to render support the Tsarist Russia by sea). The failure of the Allies to pass the Turkish Straits would be one of the major reasons of the extension of the war. Those brief examples show that a state like Turkey, which is located in this part of the world, has no alternative other than being active in foreing policy and defence spheres. (At this point, there is a similarity between Turket and Ukraine: Both have been located between the East and the West and both of them have been experiencing advantages and disadvantages of this situation).

Turkey is surrounded on three sides by the sea. She has coasts on four seas (the Black Sea, Marmara Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean).

Of those four seas, the Marmara Sea is located between the two Turkish straits, therefore, it is subject to the regime of internal waters. Among the rest of the three seas, the Black Sea is the place, where Turkey is not in a conflict of right claim with any state, whereas the Aegean Sea has always been an arena for conflicts and problems between Turkey and Greece. Tensions have also rose in the Mediterranean.

Turkey's sea policy is determined by two factors: 1- Security problem 2- Energy issues (especially after gas fields were discovered in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the 2000s).

In the west (on the Aegian coast), Turkey is completely surrounded by Greece and since the Aegean Sea is on the way from Istanbul to Mediterranean, any crisis in Turco-Greek relations can disturb the traffic on this route.

Fig.1. Turkey's coasts on four seas

Historical Legacy

Some of the problems in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions are related with history. The 19th century and the first 20 years of the 20th century was the collapse period of the Ottoman Empire (the empire, which once controlled almost all of the Mediterranean). In 1878, Britain occupied Cyprus and in 1882 – Egypt – another Ottoman territory . Defeated at the Turco-Russian War of 1877-78 which brought the Russian Army to the gates of Istanbul, the Ottoman Government accepted to give Cyprus to Britain on the terms of a rental agreement. However, in 1914, with the entrace of the Ottoman Empire to the I. World War, Britain would annex the island in full. In 1882, Britain occupied Egypt, another Ottoman territory.

In its last ten years, the Ottoman Empire entered three wars, which brought a quick end to the 600 year long. The first of those three wars was the Turco-Italian War (1911-12), which resulted in the annexation of Libya (the last Ottoman province in Africa) and the occupation of the Dodecanese islands. According to the terms of the Ouchy Peace Treaty, the Dodecanese Islands were given to Italy temporarily (since during the peace negotiations the First Balkan War had already broke out and the Ottoman Government did not want those islands captured by Greece, it deemed convenient not to oppose the Italian occupation). However, Italy, in 1915, upon her access to the First World War on the side of the Allies, would annex those islands, together with the island Castellorizo in Mediterranean, which is just 2 km off the Turkish coast.

Before the Turco-Italian War ended, a much disastrous war for the Ottoman Empire broke out. It was the I. Balkan War, which resulted in the loss of almost all of the European territories of the empire. At that war, four Balkan states (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro) had formed alliance against the Ottoman Empire and Greece, due to her navy, could capture the Aegean Islands

within one month. At the end of the war, Greece had seized almost all of the islands in the Aegean and consequently, even those islands, which are only a few kilometers off the Turkish coast, came under Greek rule.

The last war of the Ottoman Empire was the I. World War. During that war, the Allied Navy was mainly based on those islands in the Aegean, which came under Greek rule, as a result of the Balkan Wars. After that war, the motherland of Turks, the Anatolian peninsula was occupied by the Allied states, which, in turn triggered Turkish Independence War. The Lauseanne Treaty of 1923 (signed after the Turkish Independence War), laid the foundations of the present Turkey and formed almost all of its present borders.

In the late 1920's and 1930s, there was a relative balance of power in the Aegean: First of all, there were three countries in the Aegean: Turkey, Greece and Italy. Secondly, under the terms of the Lauseanne Treaty, two islands near the Dardanels Strait, which were used to be under Greek and British occupation (Imroz and Bozcaada), were returned to Turkey. Thirdly, under the terms of the Lauseanne

Treaty, Greece had to demilitarize those Northern Aagean Islands, which were just off the Dardanels Straits and Turkish coasts (namely, Limnos, Samothrace, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Icaria). However, after the Second World War, as a result of the transfer of the Dodecanese Islands and Kastellorizo Island from Italy to Greece (according to the terms of the Paris Treaty of 1947), this balance changed in favour of Greece. Thus, Turkey found herself encirled from the west by a single country, while some of those islands that passed to Greece were just a few kilometers away from Turkish coasts.

This situation also explains, why Turkey adopted a very active policy when the Cyprus Problem erupted in the 50s' and when Greece demanded annexation of Cyprus (enosis): Turkey, having already surrounded from the west, could not have accepted to be surrounded from the south. For this reason, Turkey would oppose all annexation attempts of Cyprus by Greece and while Cyprus was considered by all major powers as and unsinkable aircraft carrier, Turkey would seek to keep its control in the northern part of the island in order to secure her southern coasts and ports.

Fig.2. Former Italian, now Greek island of Kastelorizo off the Turkish coast
Source: https://globalsecurityreview.com/kastellorizo-key-to-turkish-greek-ambitions-eastern-mediterranean/

The Black Sea: A relatively stable place for Turkey

As it is mentioned above, Turkey does not have any dispute with any littoral country in the Black Sea region considering maritime zones. The agreement between Turkey and the Soviet Union on demarcation of continental shelves was signed in Moscow in 1978 and came into force in 1980. By signing this treaty, the two states determined the borders of their continenetal shelves in the Black Sea, in accordanve with equity principle. In 1982, Turkey increased th limit of her territorial waters in the Black Sea to 12 miles (while the limit of her territorial waters in the Aegean remained 6 miles). After the USSR and Romania declared their exclusive economic zones in the Black Sea in 1984 and 1986 respectively, Turkey on her turn declared 200 miles of exclusive economic zones in the Black Sea in 1986. By means of exchange of letters between Turkey and the USSR, the previous continental shelf border was accepted as the border of exclusive economic zones. After the collapse of the USSR, this border became valid also for her successor states. In this way, Turkey has been conducting gas exploration activities in her exclusive economic zone and as it has been recently announced, the total gas reserve in the field "Danube-1" is 405 billion cubic meters. This helps Turkey to gain her independence in gas.

Fig.3 Gas Field «Danube-1» in the EEZ of Turkey
Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2020/09/18/turkeys-new-natural-gas-find-in-the-black-sea-exciting-but-tricky-process-ahead/?sh=467526c05a86

 Turkey attaches particular importance to peace and stability in the Black Sea region (after all, any development against stability in this region will also have heavy consequences for Turkey). In any case, neither increase of Russia's activity in the region and in the Mediterranean, nor the increase of activity of NATO in the Black Sea region are desirable for Turkey, since both cases may cause increase of pressure on Turkey related with the the Turkish straits, while Turkey never wishes her sovereignyty on the straits to be brought into question. From this point of view, the Five Days War between Russia and Georgia in 2008 had brought Turkey to an inconvenient situation, especially when the USA demanded from Turkey to allow two naval ships to pass from the straits for Georgia, whose tonnage

exceeded the limit of the tonnage of the military ships for non littoral states. Similarly, Russia'a activization in the Mediterranean region beginning from 2011 (as a response to the Western backed "Arab Spring") caused deep concerns of Turkey. But a much more undesirable situation occured in 2014 following the revolution in Ukraine when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula. Concerning the Crimean Question, Turkey refrained from entering into an open conflict with Russia, while at the same time she has always declared her support to territorial integrity of Ukraine including the Crimean Peninsula. At the same time, cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine increases especially in defence sector.

The Turkish Straits

The status of the Turkish Straits is determined by the Montreaux Convention of 1936. This treaty unconditionally recognizes Turkey's sovereign rights on the Straits and gives her the right to arm the Straits. On the other hand, for military ships, the rights of the littoral and non littoral states differ from each other. The total tonnage of military ships of non littoral states in the Black Sea can not exceed 8000 tons at the same time and they can not stay in the Black Sea longer than 3 weeks. It is known that the current status of the Straits is not favourable for the USA and she has expressed her concern on this issue and also express her wish to revise the status of the Straits.

At this point, it will be proper to mention the Istanbul Canal project. This project was first mentioned in 2011 and it aims at opening a canal, parallel to the Istanbul Strait, on the European part (western part) of Turkey. Accordig to the project, the depth of the proposed canal will be approximately 25 meters, whilt the width will be 140-150 meters and it is foreseeen that 150-160 ships will pass this canal daily. Such a canal can not be a full alternative to the Istanbul Strait, in which the narrowest place is 700 meters and the widest place is 4200 meters. In fact, it is a unique project for the reason that a canal contruction is planned in a place where a natural waterway already exists.

Fig.4. Approximate scheme of the channel bypassing the Bosphorus
Source: https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-technology/2842117-kanal-stambul-nevozmozno-vozmoznyj-proekt.html.

Although there are some claims that this canal may cause revisions in the Montreaux regyme, in fact, such a change in the status of the Turkish Straits is not so probable, since the Montreaux Convention regulates the whole passage from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea. In other words, in the Montreaux Convention, under the term of "Turkish Straits" it is meant the Dardanelles Strait, the Marmara Sea and the Istanbul Strait, while the Istanbul Canal may become an alternative only to Istanbul Strait, but it can not bypass the whole Turkish Straits, which are the subject of the Montreau Convention. Moreover, that project can not bring a change to the period of stay for the military ships of non littoral states. Yes, it will be important, who will be the contractor of this project and whether Turkey will pertain her sovereign rights on this canal and it will be important whether it will be stated that only trade ships will pass the canal; but this canal alone can not change the whole status of the Straits. On the other hand, this project had caused the concern of Russia, since it offers an alternative to pipelines for transfer of energy resources to Europe.

The Aegean Sea – The Place of Permanent Conflicts

As it was mentioned above, Turkey's western coasts are surrounded with Greek islands and some of them are just 6 or 8 km away from Turkey. The main problems in the Aegean Sea can be classified in those cathegories:

a) Territorial waters and continental shelf;

b) Disarmament of the Aegean islands;

c) Legal status of some Aegean islands;

d) Flight Information Region (FIR) boundary;

e) Save & Rescue activities.

According to the Lauseanne Treaty of 1923, both Turkey and Greece would have 3 miles of territorial waters. In 1936, Greece increased her limit of territorial waters to 6 miles, while Turkey did the same only in 1964. Beginning from the 1970s',

Greece started to claim that she must a limit of 12 miles of territorial waters in the Aegean and this behaviour of Greece had further increased the tension between the two countries, which was already high because of the Cyprus Question. Considering the closeness of some Aegean islands to the Turkish coasts, such a practice would not allow Turkish ships to leave their ports. The then Foreign Minister of Turkey İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, during negotiations with Greece had said that in the case that Greece extends her limit of territorial waters to 12 miles, a person on the Turkish shore, who wishes to swim, will have to take his passport with him. Greece in 1994 had attempted to extend her territorial waters to 12 miles in the Aegean as a unilateral act ant this had brought the two countries to the brink of an armed conflict. Although Greece at the last moment declared that she suspends this decision, again, in 1995 she declared that she reserves the right to extend the limit of her territorial sea to 12 miles.

Greece had announced such a claim for the first time just after Turkey's operation to Cyprus in 1974 and Turkey had declared that such an act of Greece will be perceived as "casus belli" (reason for war). After the UN Convention On the Law of Sea was signed in 1982, Greece start to repeat her claims, this time by basing on this convention, arguing that the mentioned convention gives the right to extend the territorial sea up to 12 miles.

Turkey, on the other hand, claims that the Aegean Sea is a unique, semi closed sea and in this case, it is impossible to implement the limit of 12 miles. In the case that the limit of 12 miles of territorial waters is introduced, Greece will increase the proportion of her territorial waters in the Aegean from 40% to 70%; while the proportion of international waters will fall from 51% to 19% and Turkey's proportion will be less than 10%.

A similar problem between the two counties in the Aegean is the problem of continental shelf. Greece claims that the islands in the Aegean also have continental shelf. The Aegean Sea is unique for having a large number of islands. It has more than 3000 islands and isles, but only about 100 of them

are inhabited. Greece argues that almost all of the islans isles belong to them, while3 Turkey claims that, there are a large number of islands and isles in the Aegean, whose legal status have not been determined by agreements (Turkey says that, in the treaties which were signed during the collapse period of the Ottoman Empire and the names of the islands on which the Ottoman Empire gives up her sovereign rights are mentioned. Those islands and isles, which are not mentioned in the treaties are in a disputable position). In this case, Greece's claims to have sovereignity on almost every island and isle of the Aegean and that those islands have their continaenetal shelf would cause turning all of the Aegean Sea into a "Greek lake". Turkey, on the other hand, claims that such islands and isles can not have their cotinental shelves and that con-

tinenetal shelves and exclusive economic zones in the Aegean can be determined by means of a midline that passes from the middle of the Aegean Sea (between the two mainlands). Turkey also grounds her claims on the fact that the islands in the east of the Aegean are a geographical continuation of the Anatolian Peninsula (where Turkey is located), so they may have exclusive rigths only within their territorial waters. Those Eastern Aegean islands, according to the Lauseanne (1923) and Paris (1947) Treaties, sould be demilitarized. In other words, on those islands, no armed forces other than local police forces can exist. However, Greece has constructed military bases on those islands, which are just a few miles off the Turkish coasts – Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Rhodes.

Fig.5. Greek military bases near the Turkish costs
Source: https://www.haber7.com/dunya/haber/3013694-yunanistanin-egede-en-cok-silahlandirdigi-5-stratejik-ada-belli-oldu/?detay=2.

Another problem related with those problems is the FIR boundary problem. Greece claims that her islands have a 10 miles of air space zone, while Turkey claims that their air space can not exceed the borders of their territorial waters (ie, 6 miles). As a result, "dog fights" between Turkish and Greek jets on the Aegean is almost an ordinary news that happens in everyday life.

As a result of those aforementioned problems, Turkey's oil exploration activities in the Aegean in the 1980s' had called the reaction of Greek authorities and again brought the two countries to the brink of war.

The Mediterranean – The Cyprus Problem and Energy Issues

Turkey's concerns qand interests in the Mediterranean had been initially on security issues. At the beginning of the 21 century, when hydrocarbon reserves were found the Mediterranean gained particular importance for Turkey for energy issues. So, it can be said that, the Mediterranean is important for Turkey for two aspects: Security and energy issues.

After the Dodecanese Islands were given to Greece by Italy in 1947 and consequently Turkish coasts were surrounded by a single state (Greece) from the west, Turkey started to give great importance to Mediterranean, where she has access to world seas. According to the Paris Treaty, the island Kastellorizo (Meis), which is in the Mediterranean and which is just 2 km off the Turkish coast was also given to Greece, tohetger with the Dodecanese Islands.

Immediately after obtaining the Dodecanese islands, Greece started to demand from Britain the island Cyprus, by claiming that the Cypriot Greeks form the majority of the population on the island. Greece had also presented her claims as the realisation of the "self determination right of the Cypriots". Nevertheless, Turkey and Britain opposed this and both claimed that there is not a single "Cypriot" nation or community which can exercise its self determination rights alone, but there are two seperate communities (Cypriot Turks and Cypriot Greeks), therefore, the right of self determination

must be given not to the population of the island as a whole, but to Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities seperately. In addition, Turkey drew the attention of the world community to the fact that, Cyprus is just 65 km away from Turkey, while ist distance with the Greek mainland is 965 km and that under such conditions it would be contrary to the international law to give that island to Greece. During the negotiations in the 50s' among Turkey, Greece and Britain, Turkey proposed different solutions, while the completely undesirable opyion was the annexation of the island by Greece. All the policies and endeavours of Turkey on the Cyprus Question since the 1950s' have been based on two principles:

a) To reiterate that Turkish Cypriots have their own self determination right and in this connection, in every question concerning Cyprus, the will of Turkish Cypriots must be respected.

b) De jure or de facto unification of Cyprus with Greece is totally unacceptable.

In 1960, the Republic of Cyprus was also based on the understanding that both communities on the island have the right to self determination, and neither of the sides could exert its will to the other side. Turkey's operation to Cyprus in 1974 following the coup d'etat organized by the Greek Government also aimed at protecting the Turks of Cyprus from a genocide and to avert annexation of the island by Greece. (From those points of view, it can be seen that, Turkey's policy towards Cyprus has nothing in common with Russia's annexation of Crimea).

Cyprus is also located off the coasts where some pipelines (such as the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık Oil Pipeline and the Baku-Tibilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline) and this situation increases the importance of the island ever more. This is a place, where all the major powers of the world try to establish their influence. In this case, it is quite normal for Turey to guaranteee her own security. With the exploration of hydrocarbon sources in Eastern Mediterranean at the beginning of the 2000s, this region gained more importance and the necessity of demarcation of maritime zones became a necessity.

Fig.6. Turkey's disputed geological gas exploration area in the Eastern Mediterranean.
Source: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/9/28/pompeo-urges-greece-turkey-to-resolve-mediterranean-row.

In this framework, the Greek Cypriot Administration, in the name of whole Cyprus, started to sign bilateral contracts with regional states. Thus, The Cypriot Greek Administration in 2003 signed demarcation agreement with Egypt, in 2007 with Lebanon and in 2010 with Israel. In all those agreements, Cyprus was considered as a big island. As a result, Egypt and Israel lost many water territories, since in those agreements those states drew midline was drawn between their countries and Cyprus, but not between their countries and Turkey. Moreover, those agreements ignored the will of Turkish Cypriots. Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration grounded their rights on a map which was prepared by some academicians of the Seville University (for this reason, it is called Seville Map).

Fig.7. The Seville Map
Source: https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2020/09/22/seville-map-us-turkey-greece/

This map ignores Turkey's rights to territorial waters in the Mediterranean and it gives 40 km2 of continental shelf to the island Kastellorizo, which is just 2 km away from Turkey and 480 km away from the Greek mainland and which has a total square of 10 km2. In this way, a tiny island deprives Turkey of continental shelf and a part of exclusive economic zones! As a result, the Seville Map deprives Turkey of 144.000 km2 of maritime zones and locks Turkey to a zone of 41.000 km2 in the Mediterranean Sea.

Fig. 8. Delimitation of maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean according to Turkey
Source: https://www.ekathimerini.com/233555/article/ekathimerini/news/yeni-safak-greece-egypt-eez-plan-invasion-from-crete.

Under those circumstances, Turkey concluded a demarcation agreement with Turkish Republis of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Turkey started negotiations on demarcation with Libya in 2000s, when Muammar Gaddafi was in power. Although the events in 2011 in Libya caused an interruption in this dialogue, within a short time, the negotiations with the internationally recognized government of Libya resumed. At the end of 2019, the Agreement of Demarcation of Maritime Zones between Turkey and Libya was signed and came into force. This agreement, which has recently been recorded by the UN, recognizes the western borders of Turkey's economic zones.

Fig. 9. Demarcation of maritime zones between Turkey and Libya.

Shortly after that agreement, Greece and Egypt also signed an agreement considering their maritime zones in the Mediterranean. However, Turkey does not accept the validity of Greece's claims on the Mediterranean. Because, Greece grounds her claims on the assumption that the islands Rhodes, Karpatos, Kasos and Creete have their coctinental shelves and exclusive economic zones. However, Turkey emphisizes that those islands are located on the opposite side of the midline between Trukey and Greece, i.e closer to Turkey, so they can not have wide economic zones (beyond their territorial waters). For this reason, Turkey does not recognize Greece as a party in Mediterranean on the questions concerning exclusive economic zones.

Conslusion

Located at the crossroads, Turkey has to defend her rights not only on the land, but also on the seas. The price of ignorance of maritime policies had grave consequences for the Ottoman Empire, since Anatolia, the Turkish homeland was threatened and occupied as a result in 1920's. Secondly, while energy issue becomes an important factor in conflicts and wars among many countries in the world, Turkey can not neglect the energy reserves, which exist in her maritime exclusive economic zone. Thus, Turkey's active policy on the seas, which could be observed in recent years, is aimed at defending her homeland and securing her basic rights; not at any imperialistic policies.

Fig.10. Delimitation of maritime zones between Greece and Egypt

Source: https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/08/07/turkey-cancels-meeting-with-greece-following-eez-deal-with-egypt/.

IN FOCUS: TURKEY

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Georgia and Ukraine: Potential Partners in the Three Seas Initiative

Ukraine and Georgia remain the only states of the Eastern Partnership capable of taking real steps towards Western political, economic and military structures. However, they must lead this process despite the West's reluctance to open up for them, and therefore to use the structures and allies they have. Such a structure is the Three Seas Initiative and their leading ally, due to its potential, is Poland.

On October 19-20, 2020, Tallinn hosted the Fifth Summit of the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), a forum founded in 2015 [1] by the President of Poland Andrzej Sebastian Duda and Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović for cooperation between twelve EU Member States from the eastern flank (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary). The event was attended by the Presidents of Poland Andrzej Duda, Bulgaria Rumen Radev and the host of the meeting - President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, seven presidents participated in the conference in an online format. Croatian president Zoran Milanović did not participate in the event, being reluctant to take this initiative of his predecessor, afraid of conflict with Germany and "not wanting to isolate Russia" [2]. And Hungarian President János Áder did not participate in the presidential debate, despite his participation in the online meeting, demonstrating his cold attitude to the Three Seas Initiative [3]. The Summit's remote

format was also attended by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Deputy Mark Menezes and Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Keith J. Krach, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Vice-President of the European Commission Margrethe Vestager [4]. The participants' level in the Tallinn Summit was proof of the Three Seas Initiative's dynamic development.

The **Three Seas Initiative** Summit in Tallinn is an excellent opportunity to reflect on this internal EU initiative's broader impact on the entire Baltic-Adriatic-Black Sea region. There is a reason why the project was called the Three Seas Initiative and not Intermarium. The name - the Three Seas Initiative - emphasizes the difference from the historical Promethean concept of the interwar period (Intermarium). Its initial core was to be the Polish-Ukrainian military alliance concluded on April 21, 1920, for a joint struggle against Russia with the subsequent unification of Central Europe's states, threatened by Russia and Germany [5]. Today, the subject of cooperation is not a collective defence but infrastructure development. Given the mentioned name, which is particularly important for further considerations, the Three Seas area, rather than the Intermarium, covered by the infrastructure cooperation under this Initiative, occupies these three seas' basins, not the territory between their coasts. Thus, the doors are open to Scandinavia, which belongs to the EU, visible from Tallinn. It will be a natural addition to the infrastructure of communication routes on the north-south line. However, these doors are also not completely closed to other countries. The leading candidates for strategic cooperation among them are two Eastern partnership countries — Georgia and Ukraine, victims of Russian aggression since 2008 and 2014, respectively.

What are the Three Seas? - summary

The Three Seas or Three Seas Initiative is a Forum for cooperation in three infrastructure dimensions: transportation and communication (highways, railways, waterways, air communications), energy (energy transmission infrastructure - gas pipelines, LNG terminals, interconnectors, power lines, etc.) and digital technologies (IT systems for economic cooperation, secure information and data flows in real time and retention of the qualified IT special-

ists in the countries by creating attractive jobs for them) [6]. In addition to the 12 Three Seas Member States, the United States of America has been participating in this project as a strategic partner since 2017, following President Trump's visit to Poland, accompanied by the Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw and became a true promoter of this initiative [7]. And Germany is now cautious, if not cold, observer afraid of reducing its influence in the region [8]. Ukraine and Georgia, remaining outside the EU, seek cooperation with the Three Seas Initiative. The twelve Tree Seas countries have 29% of the EU territory, where 112 million people (25% of the EU population) live, and their total GDP is USD 3.3 trillion (20% of the EU GDP). [9] Poland, with 2018 economic growth of 5.1% GDP, Romania with 2017 growth of 7.3%, Estonia - 4.9%, the Czech Republic - 4.3% and Hungary - 4.0%, make this region the fastest-growing market in the EU [10]. The COVID-19 epidemic has slowed this growth somewhat, but compared to other EU countries, the Tree Seas economy dynamics remains impressive. It is estimated that by 2030, the entire region's GDP will increase by 35% [11]. Poland itself is twice as large a sales market for Germany as Russia. The Visegrad Group countries are the largest market in the world for Germany (their imports from Germany in 2019 amounted to 151.69 billion Euros), outrunning the US (118.65 billion Euros), France (106.67 billion Euros) and China (95.97 billion Euros). In 2019, imports from Germany to all Three Seas Initiative countries totalled 254.3 billion Euros, which means that it was twice as large as the import of another Germany's largest trading partners - the world superpower - including in the economy – the United States [12]. The total trade volume between Germany and the Visegrad Group(V4) is similar. For Germany, this market is more important (the exchange volume was 293.1 billion Euros in 2018) than China (199.3 billion Euros), the US (177.8 billion Euros) or France (170.5 billion Euros). It is linked to industrial production in Germany due to the cheaper labour that has filled Central Europe. It means that the export of goods produced only in V4 countries, and the income from their sale in a significant percentage is also the income of German companies that own production plants

in these countries. Thus, the unemployment rate in Germany largely depends on the ability to sell German goods and services in our markets and the supply of those goods that German companies produce in our country to the German market [13]. The Czech Republic, with a population of 10 million, absorbs twice as many imports from Poland (in 2019 - 14.58 billion Euros) as Russia [14] with over 140 million inhabitants (7.43 billion Euros). The development of the north-south road and rail networks will connect this huge and absorbing market, covering the countries by the market for the EU core (Germany, Benelux, France, and others) and each other, which will further accelerate their economic growth. Digital services will have a similar meaning. Logistics centres in the Three Seas region that provide services, including transport, developed at an impressive pace in 2008-2018. During this period in the logistics sector in Hungary, employment growth was 130%, Poland - less than 100%, and the Czech Republic - 40%. At the same time, the level of IT services is still low. The percentage of transport orders received in Poland digitally from abroad is only 3%. The EU average is 5%, while in the leading countries - Sweden and Ireland - it exceeds 10%. In the Three Seas region, only Estonia [15] boasts a similar indicator (over 10%). Thus, IT services hide a powerful momentum for the expansion of this economic sector.

Money is specific. Polish-Romanian FIIT initiative

Until 2015, the Polish government's program to provide funds necessary for the country's development was limited to EU funds' consumption. Poland should have had ideas, and the EU should have had money. The naivety of the concept of basing Poland's "strong position in the EU" on its payment by the third parties does not need explanation. Politics doesn't work that way. Those who give funds use them to achieve their own goals, not others'. As part of the Three Seas Initiative, Poland and the other Member States can confidently state: "We have an idea, and we have the funds we are ready to invest in its implementation.

Anyone who wants to make money on it can join us." The draft EU budget for 2021-2027 provides for approximately 42 billion Euro for structural investments in the Three Seas region, while the regional needs reach 600 billion Euros. Therefore, on May 29, 2019, the Polish Home Economy Bank (BGK) and the Romanian EximBank created the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (FIIT). This decision was announced at the previous Summit of the Three Seas Initiative in Ljubljana (June 5-6, 1919) [16]. The founders of FIIT intended to accumulate up to 5 billion Euros for investments under the Three Seas Initiative, intended for commercial use for infrastructure projects, the individual cost of which would be up to 10-15 billion Euro, with the total of 100 billion Euros. All needs are estimated at over 570-600 billion Euros. BGK (Poland) 's initial payment was 500 million Euros, and EximBank's - 60 million Euros [17]. Thus, FIIT is a kind of a "primer" that ignites the investors' attraction to profitable infrastructure projects under TSI [18].

US support and FIIT expansion

On February 15, 2020, at the Munich Security Conference, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the US intention to allocate USD 1 billion to develop the energy infrastructure of the Three Seas Region [19]. The scale of this support was not of strategic importance in a purely financial sense. Still, it was a political signal of Washington support of TSI for the United States and other investors. Therefore, in May 2020, Microsoft decided to invest USD 1 billion in Poland. Thus, it joined Google, which in September 2019 decided to invest USD 2 billion in creating a Google Cloud Services Centre in Poland for the Central and Eastern European region. American support catalyzed the process [20]. Estonia [21] joined FIIT on April 16, Latvia - on May 7 [22], Hungary - May 27 [23], Bulgaria - September 2 [24] - each country with a contribution of 20 million Euros, and on October 17, just before the IT Summit in Tallinn, Croatia [25] announced a similar decision.

FIIT and decisions made on the first day of the Tallinn Summit

October 19 - during the TSI Summit in Tallinn, Keith Krach announced that the United States intends to support FIIT to accumulate 3.4 billion Euros and add 30% of the amount collected by the Three Seas member states Initiative. Still, the US own contribution will not exceed USD 1 billion. On the same day, BGK Board President Beata Daszyńska-Muzyczka announced an increase in Poland's contribution by 250 million Euro to a total of 750 million Euro [26]. On the first day of the summit, Slovenia also announced its accession to FIIT. Summing up the previous declarations of IT countries (923 million Euro) and American support, we will get about 1.23 billion, not including the above US contribution of USD 1 billion, declared by Mike Pompeo in February, and USD 3 billion of private USA investment. Considering the experience of other investment funds arranged similarly, FIIT has the opportunity to play a crucial role in funding cooperation under the Three Seas Initiative. A similar European strategic investment fund, known as the Juncker Plan, raised over 300 billion Euros in just three years, with only 21 billion Euros in margin financing [27]. If we calculate FIIT's planned own contribution (3-5 billion Euros) the same way, we should get 42-71 billion Euros in the coming years, which will become a significant financial base for further operations. BGK already has experience in such operations. It gained them by investing in the Marguerite I Fund, of which BGK is one of the shareholders. It raised 710 million Euros investment capital for this purpose, which allowed investment in 20 infrastructure projects with an estimated cost of about 10 billion Euros. Currently, BGK will be investing in the Margeurite II Fund, which will fund the projects related to renewable energy sources, energy security and digital communications. The investment capital, as in the Marguerite I Fund, is 700 million Euros [28].

The beginning of the Three Seas Initiative institutionalization?

At the Three Seas Initiative Summit in Tallinn, Hungary reaffirmed its declaration made in May on the occasion of joining FIIT, after the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the need to establish a permanent secretariat for the Three Seas Initiative, based in Budapest. This position in Tallinn was supported by the Hungarian Secretary of State for Security Policy Péter Sztáray, who participated in the Ministerial Commission. Simultaneously, he declared his readiness to cover the costs of Secretariat maintenance [29]. If the proposal is supported, it will be a milestone on the road to institutionalization. According to Tallinn's agreement, the next Summit of the Three Seas Initiative will be held in Bulgaria. The Tallinn Summit made many specific decisions both in the financial dimension and expanding new cooperation areas. It confirmed the viability of the initially Polish-Croatian initiative, now being co-hosted by more and more countries. We can only be proud of this fact. It proves the project's viability and spreads a sense of freedom in other countries, which is a good role model. The more countries feel their co-authorship in this project, the more it will be our joint task - Polish, Croatian, Romanian, Estonian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian, etc., and not "Polish megalomania" as our opponents would like to present it.

Structure of the Tallinn TSI Summit

The Summit was held in four thematic blocks:

1) within the framework of the presidential panel (today it is the only formula for the Three Seas Initiative Summits), a high-level discussion and an online press conference were held with the participation of the heads of states, Vice-President of the European Commission Margrethe Vestager and US Secretary of State for Energy Mark Menezes.

2) the "Smart Money" Interdepartmental Commission was entirely devoted to the development of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (FIIT). As a result of the IT Summit's agreements, by that time, built as a sphere of presidents' activity to create an atmosphere of cooperation, its activities were reformatted into the sphere of budget and financial decisions.

3) a panel dedicated to protecting democracy and ties in the virtual space is an important issue due to the information war that Russia is waging with our region's countries. During the meeting, US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and Environment Kit Krach and Estonian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister discussed the security of the Three Seas region in the energy field, 5G technologies and cyberspace security. (Estonia has a special position in the cybersecurity field. An attack in 2007 [30] on this country by the Russian hackers in connection with the so-called Russian-Estonian "War for the bronze soldier monument" led to NATO recognizing cyberspace as a theatre of operations, taking it under its control, and Tallinn establishing in 2008 the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCD COE). [31]

4) a panel dedicated to intelligent connectivity is the flagship Estonian proposal, the essence of which is to combine energy and transport infrastructure with digital platforms that ensure their operation [32].

A group of "Founding Fathers" is growing

As noted, the Three Seas project was originally a Polish-Croatian initiative. Its immediate goal was to build a gas transmission system that would connect the Polish LNG terminal in Świnoujście with the Croatian terminal on the Island of Krk in the Adriatic Sea. The remaining ten countries did not have their flagship projects of a similar scale. In 2017, at the Warsaw Summit, the TSI project received strong support from the United States [33]. In 2019, at the Ljubljana Summit, Romania joined the "Founding Fathers" group, creating FIIT together with Poland. Estonia's ambition as the last Summit organiser was to turn FIIT into a viable financial base for the Three Seas Initiative. And it has achieved this goal. Poland, Romania, Estonia and Latvia are full shareholders of FIIT; Bulgaria, Hungary and Lithuania are joining, while Croatia and Slovenia [34] expressed their desire to join FIIT

at the Tallinn Summit. Of the 12 member countries of the Three Seas Initiative, nine are covered or will soon be covered by this cooperation. The Czech Republic and Slovakia will join at the latest next year [35]. Among the institutions that signed the letter of intent to create FIIT, in addition to the already mentioned founders from Poland (BGK) and Romania (Exim Bank) are Investmeny Holding A.S. [36] (Slovakia), HBOR [37] (Croatia), Altum [38] (Latvia) and Českomoravská záruční a rozvojová banka, a.s. [39] (Czech Republic). Only Austria, the most remote from the seas state, is missing [40]. Hungary, which initiated, as mentioned above, the Three Seas Initiative institutionalizing process, declaring its readiness to place the organization's Secretariat in Budapest and cover the operational costs of this institution, decided to emphasize its role in designing the Three Seas Initiative at the Tallinn Summit.

Key achievements and decisions of the Summit

The most important achievement of the Tallinn Summit was to ensure the functioning of FIIT. The second was to transform the TSI Summit nature from an inter-presidential to an intergovernmental, which provides for specific measures related to the member states' budgets and contributes to attracting business, thus forming the basis for the actual implementation of the adopted projects. The third was the TSI institutionalization through the creation of a Secretariat. The fourth was an update of the list of priority projects adopted at the Bucharest Summit in 2018. In particular, 20 new ones were added [41]. Currently, the TSI website is interactive, and potential investors can receive updated information about individual projects and make investment decisions based on this. Fifth, Estonia expanded the cooperation scope to include the concept of "Intelligent Communication" mentioned above [42].

Three Seas in the US election campaign

President Trump's statements in Warsaw in 2017 raised the Polish-Croatian initiative to the highest political level, giving it the support of the global superpower. After that, Germany moved from the

policy of open disavowation of TSI to joining efforts, which eventually gave it observer and strategic partner status in Bucharest in 2018 [43]. After the Tallinn summit, the Three Seas Initiative became an element of rivalry in the US election between President Donald Trump and his opponent Joe Biden. Indeed, this is a marginal topic of this campaign. Still, in the fight for the Polish diaspora's votes, Biden's international adviser Michael Carpenter, in an interview with the Polish Press Agency (PAP), considered it appropriate to express support for the Three Seas Initiative on behalf of his boss [44]. Confidence in this statement, made not by the Democratic candidate himself but his adviser, is low, but the fact of its submission is significant. It is optimistic that there is a cross-party agreement in the United States on the legality of US participation in the development of the Three Seas Initiative. A resolution on this issue was unanimously adopted on October 1 by the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, legalizing support for this initiative [45].

Two deals - deepening US involvement

US participation in implementing the Three Seas Initiative and financial support, still relatively modest, was expanded during the Tallinn Summit by two bilateral agreements made on this issue. On October 19, Polish Government Commissioner for Strategic Energy Infrastructure Piotr Naimski and US Secretary of Energy Dan Bruyère signed a 30-year Polish-American intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the development of the Polish Nuclear Power Programme (PPEJ) and the civil nuclear industry in Poland. Under the Program's provisions, Poland and the United States will within 18 months prepare a joint report, indicating the preparatory work and proposals on the program funding structure. This report will be the basis for the long-term participation of the United States and the Polish government - the basis for decision-making on choosing a partner for the implementation of PPEJ. The agreement defines the areas of long-term prospects for cooperation both in the framework of supporting the involved business entities and activities at the state level (regulation of legal norms, research, personnel training, development of the supply chain, infor-

mation campaign, cooperation on projects in the field of nuclear energy in Europe) [46]. The Three Seas region's energy dimension has become more plastic and has received American technologies, rather than Russian ones, for nuclear power plants, as, among other things, the Hungarian Paks nuclear power plant [47]. In this context, it should be emphasized that the Polish-American PPEJ agreement almost immediately became the object of criticism by Russian propaganda [48].

On October 21, Estonian Foreign Affairs Minister Urmas Reinsalu and Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bonnie Glick signed in Tallinn a statement on strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of digital transformation [49]. Digital technologies are one of the three levels of cooperation under the Three Seas Initiative and Estonia's flagship brand, which positions itself as e-Estonia - the best digital country in the region [50]. It is worth noting that the summit of the Three Seas Initiative organized by Estonia can be outlined with the "triumph of specifics" slogan. Its remarkable features and specific facts were the expansion of FITT, the creation of a permanent Secretariat, the emergence of 20 new projects, and the specifics - the Polish-American and Estonian-American agreements signed based on the Tallinn meetings' results.

Political position of Ukraine and Georgia on the Three Seas Initiative - key restrictions and their significant easing

As mentioned above, the Three Seas Initiative is a forum for cooperation between the EU member states. Therefore, full membership in this structure requires membership in the European Union. Neither Ukraine nor Georgia belong to it and will not join soon. Consequently, they cannot be the member states of the Three Seas Initiative. Belonging to the EU single market and the absence of any barriers to the four European freedoms (free movement of people, goods, capital, and services), at least theoretically existing in the EU (in practice, this was recently violated by the decree on seconded workers promoted by France) [51], gives all the advantages of the development of transport

and communication infrastructure, infrastructure for the transit of energy resources, power and digital technologies, which are the three main levels of Three Seas cooperation. However, this restriction is significantly eased by the fact that both Georgia and Ukraine have association agreements with the EU [52]. Ukraine - because of the conflict with Russia, which the EU "did not want to annoy", signed it in stages - on March 21, 2014 – the political part and on June 27, 2014 - the economic part. The agreement fully entered into force on September 1, 2017 [53]. Georgia signed a deal with the EU on June 27, 2014. One of these agreements' elements is the creation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area (FTA) [54] between the EU and a particular country. The relevant provisions in relations between the EU and Ukraine entered into force on January 1, 2016 [55]. Some were implemented in relations between the EU and Georgia from September 1, 2014, and all - from July 1, 2016 [56]. As of March 28, 2017, a visa-free regime was introduced in relations between Georgia and the EU [57], and on June 11, 2017 – between Ukraine and the EU [58]. Indeed, this is not equal to the free movement of people enforced in the EU but makes it much easier. Although both countries do not belong to the European Union, the scale of mutual openness between them and the EU is large enough for cooperation under the Three Seas Initiative to be mutually beneficial for them and the Three Seas member states.

Ukraine's lost chances

At the time of creating the Three Seas Initiative, its exclusive EU format was ultimately not decisive. For a short time, Ukraine had the opportunity to join this group. Kyiv received an invitation to the Three Seas Initiative's first summit in Dubrovnik in 2016 [59]. Unfortunately, the German-oriented camp of then-President Petro Poroshenko did not take advantage of this invitation, given Berlin's unwillingness to join the Polish-Croatian initiative, which violated the EU's format regional projects in Central Europe existed at that time. Until 2015, such projects were invented or at least supported by Germany (joint EU strategies for Russia [60] and Ukraine since 1999 [61], four joint projects

between the EU and Russia [62], directed towards Russia German concept of "change through ties" [63] and EU-Russia "partnership for modernization" [64], Black Sea Synergy) [65]. The Eastern Partnership, initiated by Poland and Sweden, absolutely fit into Germany's concept, which sought to limit the momentum that France had been creating in the EU in the Mediterranean region since 2008. Until 2015 this direction was of little interest to Germany. Therefore, the project received German support. However, from Berlin's point of view, the Eastern Partnership had an opposing goal of stopping the EU funds' excessive outflow to the South [66] primarily. The situation was different with the Three Seas Initiative, not integrated into the German political system. Therefore, in 2016 Kyiv rejected it. An opportunity that won't happen again shortly has been missed. However, the pro-Western Ukrainian elite, which is deeply disappointed by the lack of membership in the Three Seas Initiative, is looking for a way to join this Initiative at least partially. The defeat of Poroshenko's team in the elections in 2019 [67] and Germany's promotion of the Nord Stream 2, contrary to Ukraine and Poland's interests, showed the Kyiv political elite an actual reality picture [68].

The reality of integration with the EU - stagnation after the success

Both Ukraine and Georgia have achieved everything they could on the path of rapprochement with the EU (association, visa-free travel and FTA). They won't get any more. Enlargement of the EU by any developing country is highly unpopular among the leading EU countries' electorate. It was evident in the Netherlands, where the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU [69] was rejected in a referendum, which, fortunately, was not binding and did not stop the association [70], but reflected the mood of the public, i.e., voters, which each government should take into account. In 2005, France introduced to its constitution (Article 88-5) a requirement for referendum ratification of each subsequent Association Agreement with the EU of a country, which population exceeds 5% of the EU population [71]. The idea was to block Muslims' accession and the demographically powerful Turkey without blocking tiny Croatia, which membership in the European Union was essential

to Germany. However, by the way, Ukraine was blocked. In 2008, the French Senate approved another amendment to Constitution, recognizing that this rule does not apply to countries invited to join the EU before June 1, 2004 [72]. Thus, in theory, the EU has opened its doors to Ankara again. (Of course, Turkey's accession to the EU today is also a completely unrealistic scenario.) However, for Ukraine, they remain almost closed from this formal standpoint. The positive outcome of the French referendum on Ukraine's accession to the EU is incredible. On the Seine, the electorate's reluctance to expand the EU East is deep and insurmountable. It has become a widely used "political fuel" for President Macron's actions. Since 2004, he does what he can to de facto cancel EU enlargement, promoting the "Two Speeds Union", intending to push the "new member states" to the second speed. He also blocks the Berlin process, i.e., integrating the Western Balkans with the EU and demonstratively insults Ukrainians and Bulgarians as undesirable in French immigrants [73]. He did this deliberately, hoping that such statements would give him a win in the election. The unwillingness of the "old EU" to expand to the East and German-Russian gas interests determine the EU's eastern neighbouring countries' current European prospects. The focus on Germany as the EU leading country for Ukraine after 2017 (or after the enforcement of the Association Agreement) exhausted all possibilities for further success. At the end of this road, there was a clear inscription - "Nord Stream 2". Poland turned out to be the only faithful ally that promises further steps that the Zelensky's Administration could boast to its voters. The time has come for Kyiv to realize this.

Georgia - forms of a potential partnership with the Three Seas Initiative

Georgia, unlike Ukraine, has no territorial connection with the countries of the Three Seas region. Therefore, it cannot be a party to projects expanding the roads and railways' network. What remains are the energy dimension, digital technologies, and air traffic. Georgia, which advertises itself well, for example, as "Caucasian Estonia", may specialize in cooperation with Three Seas in the field of digital technologies, for which geographical distance is not a key factor. As a transit country for gas and crude oil from the Caspian Sea basin, mainly from neighbouring Azerbaijan, Georgia is also a

potentially interesting partner in the energy dimension. It has 15-year experience in this field since the GUAM Energy Summits (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova), during which it actively cooperated with Poland and Lithuania [74]. Unfortunately, the Russian aggression in 2008 made it clear to investors that territory devoid of NATO and American military protection is a risky investment field since investments can be "bombed" at any time. This truth is all the more apparent when it comes to the infrastructure for energy resources transporting from sources and routes not controlled by Russia. Russian troops deliberately destroyed gas and oil facilities in Georgia in 2008 [75].

Consequently, Tbilisi's strategic, rather than symbolic, cooperation in the Three Seas Initiative project's energy and infrastructure dimensions depends on US military protection. However, Georgia's membership in NATO, as well as in the EU, is unlikely in the near future due to almost certain resistance from Germany and France, which in 2008 at the Alliance Summit in Bucharest vetoed the actions plan for Georgia's and Ukraine's membership in the Alliance [76]. However, NATO membership is only a tool; the goal is adequate military protection. Whether and when Washington makes such a decision in the format of a bilateral agreement is unknown. Attracting American business is possible within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative. Still, in this way, we get to the square of the circle - the presence of this business in the appropriate scope would attract American political will to American military protection. The creation of such protection is a necessary condition for attracting investors. However, there is no other way for Tbilisi. Georgia should try to interest Washington, and Georgia's cooperation can help collaborate with the Three Seas Initiative with the United States' support.

Ukraine - existing forms of partnership with the Three Seas Initiative

Ukraine's position is much stronger both due to its geographical location and its potential. It also states its policy on the Three Seas Initiative much more clearly. Kyiv's desire to join cooperation within the framework of the Initiative was confirmed by President Volodymyr Zelensky, stating this at a joint press conference with Polish Presi-

dent Andrzej Duda on August 31, 2019, in Warsaw, where he was on a visit on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of World War II outbreak [77]. On the same day, Polish-Ukrainian-American cooperation in US gas transit from Świnoujście via Poland to Ukraine was also declared [78]. Thus, the implementation of this project, which is already ongoing, will lead to the actual inclusion of Poland's south-eastern neighbour in the infrastructure of the Tree Seas "blue fuel" transit network. Ukraine, despite the lack of official membership in TSI, is already a participant in many projects, including the flagship project "Via Carpathia", in which it participates as a full-fledged party under the Lancut Declaration II dated March 3, 2016, confirmed in the Lancut Declaration III dated April 17, 2019 [80]. If Via Carpathia is construed as a ridge route and "ribs" of Lublin-Chełm-Kovel-Lutsk-Kyiv, Lublin-Zamostye-Lviv-Tarnopol-Vinnytsia-Uman, Rzeszów-Lviv-Uman are added, it becomes an actual project. An element of the region's transmission network system will be the already planned GO (Gdansk-Odesa) line, which should route from Gdansk through Lublin and Zamost to Lviv, to Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia and Uman, where it will connect to the Kyiv-Odesa line. The idea has already received a promise of financial support from the EU [81]. This will be the axis of cooperation between the ports of both end cities of the planned route - Gdansk and Odesa. The corresponding Memorandum of intent on this project was signed by the representatives of the state enterprise Administration of Seaports of Ukraine and the Sea Port Gdansk SA on October 13, 2020, in Odesa in the presence of the Presidents of Poland and Ukraine Andrzej Duda and Volodymyr Zelensky [82]. In a joint statement, the heads of both countries noted that "the Republic of Poland supports the deepening of cooperation between Ukraine and the Three Seas Initiative" [83].

The project to diversify gas supply sources and integrate gas infrastructure in the Three Seas region with the implementation of the Baltic Pipe project (operated by the Polish Gaz System - Operator of a Gas Pipeline from Norwegian fields through Denmark to Niechorze) and cross-border interconnectors [84] may be even more strategically impor-

tant than highways. The project is managed jointly by Poland, Slovakia, Denmark and Norway. The Ukrainian dimension includes the creation of a huge gas transmission corridor, providing for the construction of a new gas pipeline from Poland to Ukraine. Also, the upgrade of the compressor station in Strachocin, the expansion of the domestic gas transmission systems in both countries and, as a result, the provision of the Polish-Ukrainian Hermanowicze-Bilcze-Volica interconnector system for the transfer of 5 bcm of gas per year with a sales period scheduled for 2022. This also confirms the expediency of the aforementioned Polish-Ukrainian-American declaration. In the end, the gas transit route from Poland to Ukraine **that will be included in the Polish gas pipeline system** will be opened regardless of this gas origin – Norwegian or American fields.

In addition to these two key projects, Ukraine is also participating in other projects that fall within the Three Seas Initiative's scope. These are Romanian transport exchange projects and a digital platform for monitoring the hydrographic base in the Three Seas region, the Viking Train railway connection project (which also involves Georgian Railways as an operator) [85], the Polish drone control project (Central European Drone Demonstrator - CEDD) [86], the construction of the second railway line between Koper and Divac [87] and the reconstruction of the Ljubljana railway junction (LRJ) [88]. Although geographically remote from Ukraine, the last two projects are two parts of the railway network that will connect the country with Western Europe. Also, Ukraine is considered a future partner in the Romanian-Hungarian-Slovak natural gas transit corridor, part of the Three Seas Initiative [89].

Therefore, even today Kyiv, without an official membership in the Three Seas Initiative, participates in many projects implemented within its framework. Ukraine is a natural direction for expanding the transport infrastructure of the Three Seas Initiative. The energy dimension is even a key country in the region's gas transmission system due to its unstable role as the Russian gas transit country [90]. In the institutional dimension of Kyiv's ties with the Three Seas Initiative, a precedent in the form of Ukraine's membership in

the format of cooperation between the EU member states, namely Kyiv's participation in the *EU Macro-Regional Strategy for the Danube Region* (EUSDR) Forum, which Ukraine will even lead in 2022 [91], is essential.

Conclusions - for Poland, Georgia and Ukraine

The Eastern Partnership was created in an image sense (although not entirely) as the EU's response to Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008, as the primary platform for cooperation between its countries and the EU. It was revived in 2014 due to the efforts of Ukrainians who pay for its dynamisation with their blood and are experiencing a crisis of reform and cohesion. The first goals mentioned above were achieved. There are no new ones of this strategic scale. Two partner countries - Armenia and Azerbaijan - are at war with each other, and the third - Belarus - is gripped by a revolution with an unknown outcome. Moldova is fighting between the West and Russia, being the game arena for the great powers' special services and the local mafia. Last year's attempt by Polish diplomacy to encourage the Eastern Partnership countries to repeat the Visegrad Group's experience and create their similar association as a means to join the EU for many reasons, including the ones mentioned above, had the opposite effect. Thus, Ukraine and Georgia remain the only states capable of taking actual steps towards western political, economic and military structures. However, they must manage this process despite the west's unwillingness to open up to them and use the structures and allies they have. The Three Seas Initiative is such a structure, and their leading ally, due to its potential, is Poland.

References:

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Far Eastern (Con)Federation

As of the end of November 2020, protests in Khabarovsk are still going on despite the freezing frosts. Spontaneous mass protests over the arrest of Khabarovsk Krai Governor Sergei Furgal are considered the longest in Russia's recent history. Why has the Kremlin still not used a harsh scenario of dispersing protesters, as is the case in Moscow and St. Petersburg? What are the parallels between the protests in Khabarovsk and Minsk? What is the role of the GRU and the FSB in the protests in Khabarovsk? And the main question – what is the potential of the protests in Khabarovsk for Russia as a whole? Let's try to give answers.

It is necessary to start with the fact that Khabarovsk's protests have their own **historical and ethnic background.** The truth is that the south of the Khabarovsk Territory, including Khabarovsk, is included in Zelenyi Klyn. Once Ukrainian migrants made up a large percentage of the population here (about 300 thousand Ukrainians lived in the region). Moreover, 100 years ago, during the Empire's collapse in 1917-1921, local Ukrainians held All-Ukrainian Congresses of the Far East and declared the Zelenyi Klyn Republic, a colony of a free, independent democratic Ukraine. It all ended with the Bolsheviks' arrival in 1922, followed by repressions and assimilation of Ukrainians. However, the spirit of freedom, as we can see, has not entirely disappeared. [1] On the Internet, a joke has already appeared that instead of Novorossiya, the Kremlin's project that collapsed in 2014, Novoukraina will come to the Khabarovsk Territory. And if the historical and ethnic background can be called more an attempt of Ukrainian historians to add fuel to the fire, RF has some actual economic background problems.

Economic background of the Far East problems

Personal ties of the Khabarovsk and Primorsky Territories residents with China are much stronger than with the rest of Russia. People see themselves that China is getting richer, and they are getting poorer; Moscow is essentially devastating them [2]. The Russian Far East can be considered **a "Gastarbeiter" region**, despite the strict migration legislation in China and frequent detention of illegal Russian migrants working without a work visa. For example, over the past five years, tens of thousands of Russians have regularly travelled to China to teach local children English. There is a boom in education in the country, and a "European-looking" teacher instantly increases the institution's status [3]. The coronavirus pandemic forced China to close its borders to foreign labour migrants in early November. Therefore, thousands of Russians were forced to return home. According to Rosstat estimates, in 2017, up to 164 thousand people were employed in the shadow sector of the Khabarovsk Territory economy - almost 21% of the working-age population! Moreover, the maximum concentration of illegal business is observed in the service sector, trade, construction, and logging [4].

The Far East, historically poorly populated and developed, played the role of nothing more than a military outpost in tsarist times. Being a great theatre of military operations until 1923 in its entirety required significant investments. Starting from the second half of the 1920s (see Dalrevkom projects) [5] huge resources were directed not only to the construction of the factories (and entire cities - it will just suffice to mention Komsomolsk-on-Amur alone), the fields development and logging, but also to the growing the necessary transport, energy, housing and other infrastructure, which allowed at least to some extent overcoming the geographical isolation of this hostile and poorly developed region. Along with the giant construction sites of Komsomolsk and BAM, one of the most signifi-

cant infrastructure activities was the organisation and development of local agriculture.

Everything changed in the 90s. First, the transition to market rails hit the purely physical rails: price liberalisation led to a sharp increase in tariffs for freight and passenger rail transportation: in 1992 by 35.6 times, in 1993 - by 18.5 times. [6] The trend of rising railway prices continues today. For example, a reserved seat ticket from Moscow to Khabarovsk at the end of August costs 11.3 thousand roubles, with an average salary of 44 thousand roubles. BAM, constructed in taiga areas and therefore not cheap to maintain, was abandoned. All this has led to an explosive, even outstripping the average in Russia price growth rate for almost all types of goods. In social networks, one can often find posts expressing indignation at "artificial" food products from China and high food prices. The "Crimean" sanctions have further aggravated this problem.

Fig. 1. Food prices in Okhotsk city in Khabarovsk Territory in November 2019
Source: http://vestnikburi.com/hvatit-terpet-moskvu-pochemu-protestuet-habarovsk/

The catastrophe of the early 1990s, when most of the country's population quickly realised that nothing good should be expected from Moscow's reformers, naturally gave rise to strong regionalisation trends. Sometimes simply taking advantage of the chaos, local leaders were trying to mitigate somehow the consequences of reforms in their fiefdom to claim autonomy from the Federal Centre. An extreme example of this trend is Chechnya. However, in other regions of the newly created Russian Federation, it did reach all but direct separatism. This affected national republics and "Russian" regions: the most striking example here, perhaps, is the project of the "Ural Republic" of the Sverdlovsk Governor Rossel. In some places, this resulted in an actual confrontation between local "rational managers" and "Moscow emissaries", as in the Chelyabinsk region. [7]

And the farther the region was located from Moscow, the more noticeable the reduction in central funding was. The louder the demands for autonomy and expressions of dissatisfaction with the federal authorities sounded. The old generation of Yeltsin business managers fit seamlessly into the "Putin vertical" of the early 2000s, replaced by appointed technocrats a few years later. However, the faces have changed, and the problems of the regions have remained.

Putin's abuse of the Constitution with the "zeroing" of his term of tenure and Crimean sanctions, and all this against the background of problems with the pandemic, woke up the economic issues of the late 90s and early 2000s, which at that time they managed to lull asleep with high oil prices.

And then we come to the cherry on the cake. In 2018, Khabarovsk subsidies from the centre amounted to 6.43 billion roubles [8]. Therefore, the Khabarovsk Territory is a region that exports natural resources (timber) and is weakly dependent on federal subsidies. The election of opposition mayors (Roizman In Yekaterinburg, Lokot in Novosibirsk, and Avksentieva in Yakutsk) and the governors (Levchenko in Irkutsk, Konovalov in Khakass, and Furgal in Khabarovsk) was a signal to the central government: "We don't like you."

Regions that feel their deep isolation from the European part of Russia and remember the trauma of the 90s perceive appointees from Edinaya Rossiya as a kind of colonial administration that does not give anything to the entrusted region but only profits from it. And the only alternative available in the legal field was local opposition members. Let it be from "pocket parties" like the Communist Party or LDPR [9].

And here it is worth taking a closer look at the figure of the "protest people's governor" Furgal and seeing that the disgraced official does not stand out in any particular way. In the late '90s, Furgal, a doctor by education, went into business, first reselling Chinese consumer goods, then selling timber, then black and coloured metal scrap. The hypothesis of Furgal's involvement in criminal activities is also beyond doubt, which is typical for a regional official. Therefore, his main mistake in the governor's chair was that he began to spend too much money for intended purposes. He reduced the provincial budget deficit from 9.7 billion roubles in 2018 to 3.2 billion roubles in 2019; started roads renovation and combat with unnecessary spending on luxury property. Therefore, the implementation of these measures singled out Furgal against his predecessor's background, Shport, a member of Edinaya Rossiya. Thus, his elimination was perceived by Khabarovsk as an aggression of the metropolis against the "bandit" but a "their kin".

Influence of China

Beijing is watching the Khabarovsk protest very closely because China has always seen the Far East as its prospective future territory. More and more Chinese people are in the ethnic composition of the region, and the Yuan has long been a freely convertible currency, but the PRC cannot yet openly claim these territories. Recently, Beijing has been testing the limits of acceptable by introducing its business into the Far East economy, the actual lease seizure of territories and natural resources, and the creation of certain "misunderstandings" provocations based on territorial issues. For example, on November 5, 2015, leading Chinese media discussed the transfer of 5 km of Russian territory to China. There was no transfer of Russian territory but manipulation, which created a massive wave of discussion and public triumph. Sometime later, information was spread in the Chinese internet segment that in the Jewish Autonomous Region, about 80% of farmland is at the illegal disposal of Chinese citizens. It may mean that these territories can be recognised as Chinese. And there are many such cases. Therefore, China has an excellent opportunity to observe the region's protests. The population has long been contemplating the neighbouring China flourish and Russia decay, and turn these protests in its favour. The Khabarovsk protests are already becoming a platform for information sabotage by Chinese bots that incite Khabarovsk residents' mood in social networks. And this is only testing the technologies of the PRC's information operations, which will undoubtedly be fully applied at the right time. [10]

Beijing is using the Khabarovsk protests as levers of influence on the diplomatic front in negotiations with the Russian Federation. According to Russian experts from South Front, the network of bots that spread information about the Chinese social network protests TikTok only consists of at least 50 thousand accounts. Direct political advertising is prohibited on TikTok, but protest content is not removed online, despite the rules, and the #weareprofurgal tag is common [11].
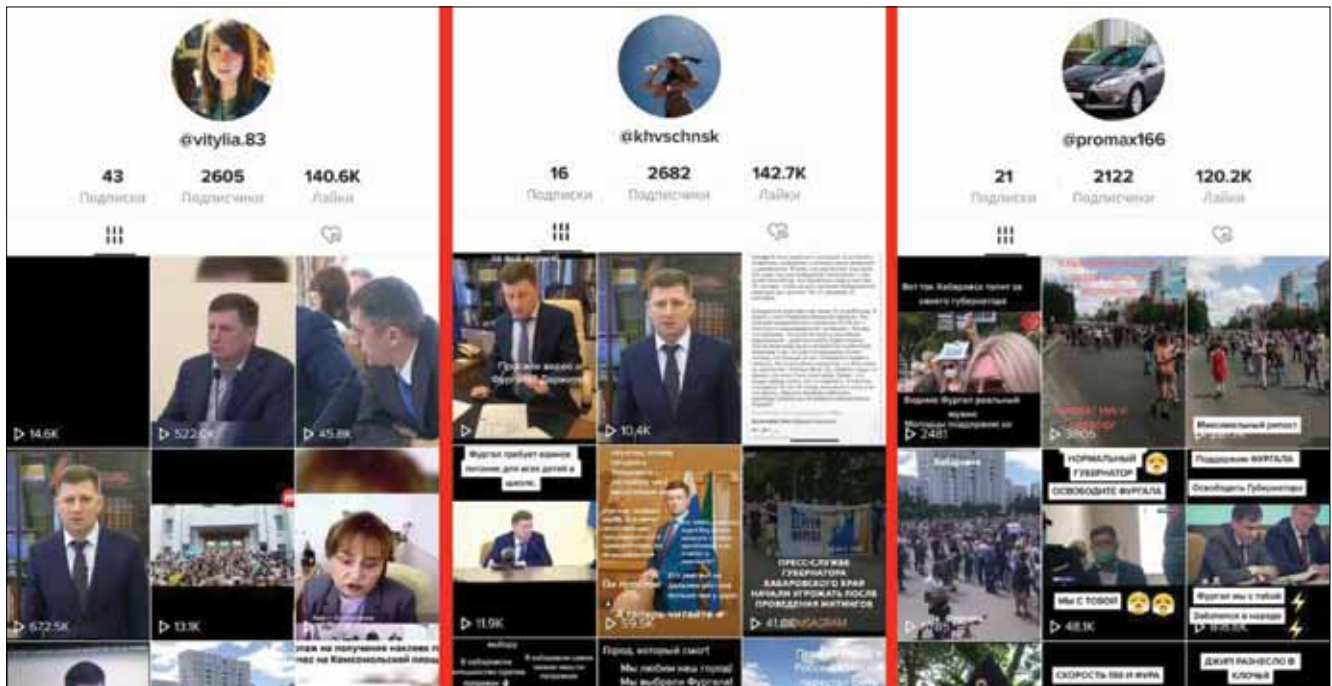
Fig.2. TikTok accounts participating in the Furgal support campaign

It seems that China is working on using the turbulence in the Far East to achieve its political goals and gain additional leverage over the Russian leadership. This approach fits perfectly into the general principles of Chinese diplomacy. Beijing seeks to weaken its ally to improve its negotiating position in bilateral relations. This situation demonstrates that China will certainly take advantage of the internal political instability in the Russian Federation when the time is right to promote its interests in the Far East, and now is just laying the ground for this.

The oligarchic structure of "putinomics" is another aspect of the economic background of the protests in Vladivostok, where a new point of tension in the Far East was formed in late October and early November. We are talking about the strike of dockworkers of the Vladivostok Commercial Seaport, which required the old management's return because the newly appointed managers withdrew money from the enterprise, and some chief executives were citizens of other states.

For a deeper understanding of the essence of the processes in Khabarovsk, we should go back to 2019 – the year of elections to the Legislative Assembly of the Khabarovsk Territory, when Edinaya Rossiya received only two mandates, while

the majority of Deputies elected, 28 out of 36, were from the LDPR. Therefore, the entire region was outside the Kremlin's power vertical – a truly self-governing federal unit, which became a threat to the Kremlin. Under Furgal, **anti-colonial sentiments such as "stop feeding Moscow"** began to grow in the Khabarovsk Territory [12]. Another essential demand of the protesters in Khabarovsk was **the return of real self-government and real, not fictitious, federalism,** as evidenced by the slogans "This is our land!", "Moscow, go away!", "Putin is a thief", and "They stole our country from us". The Far East and its separateness, based on its remoteness from Moscow by 7-8 thousand km and a different time zone, as well as the traditional tendency to separatism, grounded on the emergence of threats of the resuscitation of the Far Eastern Republic of 1920-1922 from time to time - all this simultaneously re-emerged in the political agenda of the Russian Federation. [13] According to many experts, the anti-colonial struggle must transform into a national liberation movement with the stage of emancipation of colonies and the creation of national states in their place because Russia is essentially a conglomerate of such states on the territory of Putin's colonial empire. The tougher the punitive policy of the central government is, the more alienated new state entities will become from the centre [14].

Fig. 3. Protesters' anti-colonial slogans - "Moscow, go away!»

The Kremlin's power under Putin has essentially ruined federal politics with its kleptocratic tendency to rob regions indefinitely. Khabarovsk is the beginning of a process of spontaneous disintegration, which, however, can run over for decades. Of course, without the tacit consent and maybe the hidden support of **local elites**, it would be complicated to organise people's mass participation in manifestations on the streets. Local elites, who are fighting for access to the "feeder" in the face of sanctions, the collapse of the rouble exchange rate, and oil prices, can lead the future anti-colonial struggle because all the property and assets of local elites are concentrated in the regions. Therefore, local elites are faced with a choice to demonstrate loyalty to the central government and face the prospect of losing their assets. Putin's inner circle will try to redistribute in their favour during the crisis or embark on a path of separatism. With its "Stop feeding Moscow" slogans, Khabarovsk is the first bell about what choices regional elites tend to make. Therefore, we approach the fact that the alternative to complete disintegration can be

Russia's real federalisation, which can replace the modern imitation of the federal structure – through a new distribution of powers between the centre and the regions and actual, rather than imitated, decentralisation.

Now the Kremlin **does not resort to a violent dispersal of demonstrators**, as it usually happens in Moscow and St. Petersburg because it relies on the fact that fewer people will take to the streets with the onset of cold weather, and the protest will gradually subside. Instead, bloggers, journalists, and streamers covering the protests are being actively detained. Semyon Novoprudsky, an "independent" Russian journalist, predicts[15] that separatist sentiments and hatred of the entire Far East towards the federal centre will increase. Another possible consequence of the Khabarovsk protests may be a change in the Far East's whole management scheme: all regions will merge into one. It will be managed by the de facto governor appointed by Moscow with considerable powers and political weight. And here it should be men-

tioned that the Russian Federation is a conglomerate of peoples who are very different in mentality, traditions and religion. Therefore, the national issue will undoubtedly be added to social protests related to human rights in Russia. Still, a little later in the future, as we can see, the processes of forming a public protest have already been launched.

The protest in the Khabarovsk Territory did not win, but the authorities lost, losing the region. By itself, the Khabarovsk Territory – even if people leave the streets – will remain hostile to the federal authorities. A radical minority has already appeared in the region, which can become the core of future riots. Moreover, the lack of opportunities for legal channelling of sentiment through elections and political movements will again push the future Russian protest to the streets. [16]

And here we come to a different version that exists on the Internet. Was/is there a protest in Khabarovsk at all? Aren't these manipulative mass management technologies used by special services to "release steam", channelling and controlled fusion of protest moods growing in society?

Manageability of protests in Khabarovsk and the struggle for the redistribution of influence between the FSB and the GRU?

Oleksandr Kovalenko, a military and political commentator of the Informatsiynyi Sprotyv (Informational Resistance) Group, better known under the pseudonym Zloy Odessit, sets out in his articles an interesting view of the protests, which cannot be ignored: "*...the Khabarovsk protest in itself is not a free expression of the will of citizens, but is a project of a "peaceful debauch" under the supervision of the GRU, promoted after the FSB clans tried to remove Sergei Furgal from the political arena and bring the Khabarovsk Territory under their heel. In turn, KhT has been being a region controlled by the GRU for two decades already*." The observer draws attention to the fact that the Centre did not resort to dispersing demonstrators, as is usually the case in Moscow and St. Petersburg, for several months because the FSB-controlled Rosgvardiya (National Guard Troops) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not have the right to interfere in the region controlled by the GRU [17].

Here, it should be noted that we have not found any evidence to support the opinions of Oleksandr

Kovalenko, but we cannot ignore them due to their exclusivity. However, it is impossible to disagree with the version that Russia is a territory distributed to the zones of influence between power blocs. Today we see an "interdepartmental zero-sum game" in the Russian Federation and a struggle for access to resources between the FSB and the GRU against the background of proposals for significant structural reform of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

An analogy between the protests in Khabarovsk and Minsk

Some analysts, such as Oleksandr Kovalenko, point out that Belarus's protests are also a GRU project. Evidence of this can be the detention of journalists of Komsomolskaya Pravda (a periodical controlled by the GRU), who allegedly coordinated the protest masses. We also did not find any evidence to support this version. It is evident that the special services are trying to gain control over the protests, guided by the logic of the saying, "if chaos cannot be overcome, it must be led."

In mid-November, activist Roman Bondarenko was killed in Minsk after being beaten by security forces, and armoured vehicles are increasingly being brought to the city centre. The OMON in Minsk begins to act more cruelly towards demonstrators, as well as the OMON in Khabarovsk; it also begins to act with greater violence, although on a point-by-point basis while the most active journalists and bloggers get it in the neck. Protests in Belarus and Khabarovsk are led under authoritarian regimes, and peaceful protest puts the system unable to compromise in a desperate situation. Sooner or later, the system will have to resort to harsh actions and atrocities, thereby provoking even greater society resistance.

The protests in Khabarovsk will remain unprecedented, undermining the viability of the entire ruling system, shaping the social and cultural environment of social uplift, and giving rise to genetic experience. Putin's once extremely popular foreign policy course does not compensate for the problems of his domestic policy, and the Far East, with its deep economic problems, is only the first swallow that can start fundamental centrifugal processes of a true, not simulated federalisation.

IN FOCUS: RUSSIA

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Georgia after Elections: Deadlock

On October 31, 2020 the parliamentary elections were held in Georgia. According to exit polls, the ruling party Georgian Dream, owned by local oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, won. The scale of falsifications can fluctuate around 7-8% in favor of the ruling party. On November 8, tens of thousands of people took part in a protest rally organized by opposition parties that plunged Georgia into a political crisis.

What preceded the elections

The pre-election period had its feature: specific to Georgia information infusions, which have done both the authorities and opposition. The weakness of democratic institutions and low standards of political culture have influenced the election campaign and day of voting.

In autumn 2019, the parliamentary majority blocked the ruling party's attempts to execute its promises to Georgian society and partner countries on the remove of the proportional electoral system. This in turn led the country to a political crisis. The crisis was resolved only in March 2020, thanks to talks between the authorities and the opposition, mediated by the US Embassy and the European Union. As a result of negotiations, the parties signed a compromise in the agreements. In accordance with it, 120 seats were distributed according to the proportional system, and 30 according to the majority system.

The Covid-19 pandemic has adjusted the election campaign. The low level of disease and mortality in the spring led to an increase in the rating of the ruling party, which for obvious reasons gained the title of "winner of the Covid". This was finest hour for the Georgian Dream party. Authorities performed recommendations of all international organizations and received credits. For the first time since 2014, the majority of the country's population in the surveys of authoritative NDI/IRI joint international election observation mission answered positively to the question of the correctness of the vector of development of the country. The personal rating of the Georgia PM Giorgi Gakharia has grown.

The opposition sharply criticized the government, considering the measures taken by the authorities insufficient and inconsistent. Particularly harsh was the criticism of the Strategy Agmashenebeli and European Georgia parties, which accused the authorities of insufficient tests and insufficient preparation of the hospital fund for possible disease growth. Virtually all major political parties presented their proposals to combat Covid-19, which were ignored by the authorities. The sharpest criticism obtained the government's policy in the social sphere. As a result of prolonged lockdown and other restrictive measures, tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs, and already low incomes have declined in almost all groups. During lockdown their wages in full retained only employees of the public sector, moreover public sector employees received not only wages but also bonuses. The opposition criticized the government for the irrational use of budget funds, as well as aid and loans obtained to fight the pandemic. There were also accusations of corruption. The opposition was particularly criticized for the non-transparent selection of hotels for the self-isolation of those arriving in Georgia, which provided the owners of these hotels with a guaranteed income during the pandemic.

The results of the fight against the autumn wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, to put it mildly, were not so successful. Country overtaken by the number of patients and death majority of countries in the region and the world, which also was the

subject of harsh criticism of the government by the opposition. Obvious signs of crisis in hospital sector, misuse of finances, including received to fight the pandemic, suspicions of corruption and lack of preparedness of the authorities to fight the pandemic were the main theme of criticism of power by opposition parties. Unfortunately, the government did not even eye a topic to postpone the election because of increase in covid cases, although it was clear that whatever the organization of the voting process, a sharp covid increase after the event is inevitable. In fact, this happened, but it did not deter the government from holding a second round of elections. As a result, against the background of mass protests against fraud and the second round, Georgia received a covid catastrophe.

Another topic of criticism of the government by the opposition was the growth of crime. The most high-profile cases here were killing of Georgi Shakarashvili, the case of the death of Tamar Bachaliashvili and bank robbery in Zugdidi with taking of hostages, when the robber managed to escape with a sum of half a million dollars, which was paid for the release of hostages. Immediately after this episode, there was a surge in crime in the country, particularly in cases of robberies. In general, the topic of crime was one of the central issues in this election campaign. The authorities' use of the "street" resource in elections is traditional for Georgian political culture, but many experts have noted with concern that there has been a real threat of crime spiraling out of control recently.

However, the so-called "cartographers' case" raised the most questions both in the opposition and in society. It concerns the detention and opening of a criminal case against two specialists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on charges of concealing maps during the 2007 talks, which prove that the disputed part of the territory of David Gareji is part of Georgia. (*David Gareji is a complex of Georgian cave monasteries of the VI century with the status of a laurel. Located 60 km southeast of Tbilisi on the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, which stretches for 25 km along the slopes of the semi-desert Gareji ridge – editor's note).* The

initiation of this case in the pre-election period raised a number of questions about the actions of the authorities in order to discredit the previous government (opposition). Even more questionable was the fact that on election day, the screensaver of the pro-government Imedi TV station read, "David Gareji is Georgia," in order to force Georgian citizens to remember the criminal case. It should be noted, that accusing the leadership of Azerbaijan, Georgia's strategic partner, of bribery, was conducted during the escalation of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh.

For most of the pre-election period, the opposition and the media reported on the mobilization of the government's administrative resources before the election. Authorities refused to hold election debates on television, giving the opposition the opportunity to talk to each other.

As for the opposition, in most opposition parties the selection of candidates was non-transparent, no primaries were held, except for Lelo and Girchi, new parties that have recently appeared in the political sky.

Day of voting

The day after the election, Georgians were surprised to hear that international observers, including the OSCE, said the election was free and competitive. Wonder was so strong that the expert community had to explain to the public that, firstly, it estimates, and secondly, the elections in Georgia were really competitive and it is hard to disagree with international observers. 48 political parties and two electoral blocs took part in the elections to the Georgian parliament, which in itself is evidence of the competitiveness of the elections. Electoral subjects and deputies were not prevented from campaigning.

On election day, opposition TV channels showed a lot of cases of personnel control over the ruling party coordinators who were in the vicinity of the polling station with lists of their supporters checking whether they come in the

elections. Such "duty" were in almost all areas in the regions. Journalists recorded a number of cases of voter bribery. Representatives of the "street" were also active, who also called for voting for the government. There were cases of pressure on election commission members, as well as attacks on journalists and NGO representatives. Observers and committee members from opposition parties and NGOs throughout the day made statements about pressure and numerous violations. Almost everywhere in the regions there were cases of voters being transported to polling stations. Based on the above, the last election can not be described as free.

As for the fairness of the last election, questions to the Central Election Commission arose on the night of October 31 to November 1, when the CEC, which usually announced the first election results immediately after 23:00, announced the first results at 03:30. All this time there were reports of numerous violations during the voting, counting of votes and registration of protocols. The facts of throwing and spoiling of ballots were recorded, and at several polling stations in Tbilisi the lights were turned off during the vote count, which is a very rare phenomenon for the capital of Georgia. After midnight, representatives of almost all opposition parties made allegations of election fraud from their polling station observers.

Post-elections situation

According to preliminary data from the GSAC Politics study conducted based on the Kiesling-Shpilkin method, it is possible to speak about the probable falsification of votes in the regions of both eastern and western Georgia. This is least true of Tbilisi, although there were polling stations in the capital that are clearly out of the picture. The Kiesling-Shpilkin method is used to calculate the scale of abnormal voting, the signs of which have already been identified. According to the data obtained as a result of this study, the approximate scale of fraud may fluctuate around 7-8 % in favor of the ruling party, which affected the overall result of the election. The

situation with the counting of votes in the majority constituencies is even more dubious.

It also raises questions about the exclusion of representatives of opposition parties and majority candidates from meetings of district election commissions to review the amended protocols. This led to clashes between the opposition and the police. According to NGOs and opposition parties, the results are as follows:

For proportional districts:

- imbalance of votes - at 986 polling stations
- lost (missing) ballots - 4,025
- invalid ballots - 63,315
- the number of voters at the disputed polling stations - 597,613

For majoritarian districts:

- imbalance of votes - in 2,000 polling stations
- lost (missing) ballots - 13,125
- invalid ballots - 81,931
- the number of voters at the disputed polling stations - 1,124,591

Thus, in proportional constituencies, 17% of the total number of voters and 31% of the number of voters who came to the polls are disputable. More than half of the ballots for majoritarian districts were controversial. The court refused to consider the lawsuits.

The ruling party received more than 90% of the vote in the special polling stations for the people infected with Covid-19, which clearly does not coincide with the general picture of the election. In the Tsqaltubo district alone, six thousand new voters have been added compared to the previous elections, which is also questionable. Of course, all these facts require careful study and documentation. Authorities allege that there were technical errors that were subsequently corrected and therefore did not affect the outcome of the election. The opposition strongly disagrees

and refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the election and enter parliament. On November 8, tens of thousands of people took part in a protest organized by the opposition parties. It should be noted that people went to these rallies despite the threat of Covid-19, which was constantly talked about by the authorities.

The last election was also discussed during the visit of the then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Georgia. Despite the fact that in an official briefing the Americans called on the Georgian opposition to enter parliament, promising to support the fight for changes in the judiciary and electoral system, the same document stated that the election was held with "fatal mistakes" that affected the result. These "mistakes" are from voter bribery to violence in the polls, and promised support from opposition parties. The US Secretary of State met in Georgia with the President, Prime Minister, Patriarch and representatives of the non-governmental sector dealing with legal issues. The last meeting was probably very interesting for the American side, as lawyers talked about systemic problems and the presence of clannishness in the judiciary, which makes it impossible to solve problems related to elections through the courts.

Pompeo not only did not congratulate the Georgian authorities on winning the parliamentary elections, but also refused to hold a press conference, leaving without comment. The State Department limited itself to publishing a briefing of officials involved in the talks, and exclusively for American journalists. After leaving, Pompeo left his deputy, who met with the opposition and the non-governmental sector. Of course, they did not tell him anything positive.

However, the main problem for the current Georgian government is not the United States or even the opposition. The main problem of the government is Georgian society. An attempt to play black and white cinema once again with the public failed, because voters are well aware that the election results were falsified. It is the result, as the assigned 5-7% allow the Georgian Dream to form a government. And ahead is a very difficult winter with a covid-pandemic, economic crisis and serious external risks.

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Conflicts from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova. Pre-election Anticipations and Post-election Challenges

On November 15, 2020, the second round of presidential elections took place in the Republic of Moldova. The results surprised both Moldovan citizens and the international community. Maya Sandu, leader of the Action and Solidarity Party, received 57.72% of the vote [1]. Her opponent, incumbent President Igor Dodon, an independent candidate backed by the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova, won 42.28%. This situation makes us think about the new realities that will soon come to the Republic of Moldova and their impact on the region. In the near future, domestic players and international partners will have to set new priorities and new strategies on many issues and challenges.

Reflections before the presidential election

In the run-up to the election campaign, most of those who followed the domestic political context in the Republic of Moldova seemed sceptical about the possibility of a radical change in the country's political life. The analyses started from the premise that Igor Dodon was going to keep his status and obtain a new presidential mandate. The pro-European candidates, seemed to act more defensively concerning the government and aggressively to the counter-candidates who were fighting for the support of the same electoral segment. Therefore, the visible competition existed on the right segment. On the left segment, the incumbent president felt strong and convinced that he would gain continuity for himself and the forces that support him.

For the external partners of the Republic of Moldova, especially Romania and Ukraine, this context was worrying. The accentuation of the crisis in the field of justice, but also the economic and social crisis, caused by the pandemic, contributed to lower expectations. The authorities did not react to the criticism brought by different socially vulnerable categories or to those sustained in the public space. From the point of view of public security, with an effect on national security, the economic situation had been and continues to be quite serious. Also, several events that took place before the presidential election drew the attention of external partners in the region, especially those in Ukraine. These conditions indicated that the Republic of Moldova does not seem to be able to escape the captivity of foreign interests or avoid elements of a hybrid war, supported by various active measures.

One of these events was the letter signed by the leaders of the pro-European forces, which was joined by Renato Usatii [2] - a politician whose political interests are limited to generating sufficient conditions to transform his political party into a parliamentary party. The signing of the Letter addressed to the officials from the European Union by Renato Usatii displeased some candidates in the presidential elections [3]. They were against their name to be associated with this politician.

The most important topics for reflection generated by the election campaign for external partners were:

- **The vote of the residents of Transnistria region** - after it became clear that the ruling party will use this opportunity, capitalized in 2016, the vote of Transnistrian residents was analysed more thoroughly not only by experts from the Republic of Moldova but also by those from Ukraine. Leaders in Kyiv have focused on assessing the impact of this vote at the level of the political decision-making process, with great potential to be impera-

tively transferred, as a model, to its eastern region, where there are military operations. It is necessary to mention in this case that the Republic of Moldova is a testing ground for models of "settlement" of regional conflicts, where Russia is involved. For Moscow, the opportunity to test such "democratic" processes is important. The vote of the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region was not always encouraged. The new regional context has made this approach acceptable, especially if it allows for the perpetuation of pro-Russian friendly forces in power. De facto, the vote of the inhabitants of the separatist region allows the promotion of separatists in the public space, to be accepted as dialogue partners by legitimate political actors.

- **The vote of the inhabitants of Gagauzia** (the autonomous region is the stable supporters of the governing forces) - their votes migrate from one political party to another depending on how the structure of governing coalitions changes. The region's relationship with the Russian Federation remains constant, its leadership remaining loyal to directives received from abroad. At the regional level, the behaviour of the electorate in Gagauzia was predictable. The Gagauzians voted both in the first round and in the second, with the pro-Russian candidate.

- **Russia's involvement in the elections** - Igor Dodon paid several working visits to Moscow in 2020. Officially, he claimed that he promoted elements of the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and the interests of economic agents in the Republic of Moldova, and also helped to facilitate access on the Russian markets of Moldovan products. De facto, Moldovan farmers had limited access to these opportunities. Thus, Moscow was not the central subject of the election campaign until very late, when Sergei Naryshkin intervened publicly to accuse the United States of interfering in the election campaign in the Republic of Moldova. The involvement of Russians in the elections was also documented by investigative journalists, who explained how Russian experts contributed to Igor Dodon's election campaign.

- **The actors supported by the Russian Federation and the mechanisms they will use in the Republic of Moldova** - this topic is still current, even if this election campaign has ended. Igor Dodon

was not the only political actor whose personal relations with Russia aroused the interest of public opinion. It is still unclear what the role and real place of Renato Usatii is in Moldovan politics, this politician being accused of several illegal acts, committed both on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and the territory of the Russian Federation. The alignment of Renato Usatii with several initiatives of the pro-European forces led to the erosion of the legitimacy of those intentions. Renato Usatii, on the other hand, extended his opportunities for manipulating electoral sentiments.

- **The strategies adopted by the candidates for the presidential elections** - the content of the messages addressed to the electorate, which was exploited by the candidates, contributed to the confusion of the electorate. The messages exploited was: the candidate-church relationship, human fears and socio-economic vulnerabilities focusing on negative messages, highlighting the role as a national hero of candidates. A deeper analysis of these elements contributed to the identification of several sources of threats exploited internally, but of external origin in the Republic of Moldova. Many of these topics were promoted with the help of various social actors, not necessarily politicians, who had direct access to the electorate of the Republic of Moldova. Both, pandemic issues and topics that are part of the rhetoric, promoted by foreign political actors (the identity, the orthodoxy, and traditional values), were explored. Such themes define the level of the political culture of all participants in political processes: political actors and voters. They are easy to take over or transfer from one country to another, they increase the fears generated by the "invisible enemy", which cannot be defined.

- **The potential for post-election protest in the Republic of Moldova** - this issue has become very current with the multiplication of the number of post-election crises in the ex-Soviet space. After the outbreak of protests and, later, the violence in Minsk, many of the hypotheses proposed for analysis in the post-election campaign period referred to the potential for political protests in Moldova. In different periods of the election campaign, the subject of the protests was used only as an element of the election campaign.

IN FOCUS: MOLDOVA

The vote day

Numerous violations were reported in the first and during the second round of elections [4]. The Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections declared these elections to be partially free and partially fair. However, these violations did not affect the final result of the election. In the second round of the election, Maia Sandu confronted Igor Dodon.

The second part of the election campaign was dominated by verbal aggression, manipulation of the electorate inside the country and misinformation. Also, several illegal actions in support of the electoral campaign of the incumbent president were documented by the press and law enforcement.

The massive mobilization of the vote in the diaspora was impressive. To that contributed the errors in the election campaign of Igor Dodon and his staff. Also, important elements were the policies and measures to reduce the effects of the pandemic at the national level, but also the balanced foreign policy (strategic partnership with Russia and diminishing the importance of financial assistance provided by European partners), promoted by the President-in-Office.

What is next?

According to the legislation in force in the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon's presidential term will end on December 23, 2020. Until then, several important decisions must follow. First of all, they refer to the legitimacy of the current parliament, which has not met since September 11, 2020. The reason that was invoked was the spread of the pandemic and the illness of several deputies. After the preliminary results of the elections showed that Maia Sandu is the newly elected president, the deputies from the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova decided to take the necessary measures to prevent the dissolution of the parliament. Opportunities are being explored to find a place in government formula for Igor Dodon. According to some scenarios, he can be nominated as new prime-minister.

Some political parties, such as Action and Solidarity Party or Political Party "Dignity and Truth Platform", insist that early parliamentary elections are necessary because the current legislature has lost the trust of the population and is no longer representative. For the Action and Solidarity Party, the

dissolution of the parliament and the organization of early elections as early as possible would mean exploring the potential to transfer the popularity of their leader, Maia Sandu, to the political party. Renato Usatii insists that these elections be held by the end of May 2021. For the party he represents, the early elections could offer the chance to enter the parliament. Other parliamentary political parties also claim that a possible election could restore the lost legitimacy to the legislature. For the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, early elections could be useful to reduce the negative impact of the current image of Igor Dodon. Officially, the PSRM claims that the results of the presidential election should not affect the parliament's ability to approve the budget for 2021, but also other urgent laws. In this sense, the Socialists will do everything necessary to avoid the legal provisions for the dissolution of the parliament for now. Other priorities of the Socialists include granting special status as an inter-ethnic language of communication for the Russian language, lifting the ban on Russian propaganda on Russian TV stations, and balanced foreign policy [5]. These objectives are in line with Igor Dodon's interests in maintaining a good relationship with his Russian partners. However, it is important to mention that the Russian Federation recognized the results of the presidential election through the congratulatory message addressed by Vladimir Putin for Maia Sandu.

Among the challenges that the Republic of Moldova will face in the next period are:

- Restoring the legitimacy of the parliament and the government, this implies the acceptance of the scenario of organizing the early parliamentary elections in which other extra-parliamentary political parties will have access.

- Defining the strategy of fighting against the segregation of the country's population on social, ethnic, cultural, religious criteria - segregation was exploited in the election campaign by several political actors.

- Obtaining external technical and financial assistance - an objective that requires an urgent approach. The socio-economic situation of the Republic of Moldova is seriously affected. The pandemic has further exacerbated the economic vulnerabilities of the national economy. Here, the accent must

be on reducing expenditures in the state budget and streamlining the functioning of public institutions.

- Implementation of the provisions of the Association Agreement with the European Union of the Republic of Moldova.

- Promotion of correct partnerships and efficient bilateral relations with neighbouring states, Romania and Ukraine, based on respect for territorial integrity and their sovereignty, but also for mutual respect. Also, a priority of the elected president is to bring back the format of discussion of bilateral relations with Moscow in normal parameters, of mutual respect of national interests.

- Strengthen the institutions in the field of justice and promote the need to have an independent and reformed judiciary, which respond to current challenges.

Conclusions

As mentioned above, the results of these presidential elections are surprising for the Republic of Moldova. For the first time, a woman was elected head of the country. The difference between Maia Sandu and Igor Dodon is over 250,000 votes, which does not allow the second-placed candidate to contest these elections.

In the next period, important political events will take place in the Republic of Moldova. Most of them refer to the reformation of the power structure in the state. We will witness attempts to maintain the current formula for the distribution of political power. However, political parties must take into account the fact that these elections were also an electoral protest of the people who wanted change, a vote of responsibility and civic involvement. Every political actor must carefully evaluate what messages the citizens have sent. The resources available to the President-elect of the Republic of Moldova are limited, which means that new opportunities need to be explored. But at the same time, the new president's mission will be to restore credibility to the country's foreign policy and reduce the vulnerabilities to which it has been exposed by promoting deficient plans that threatened national security. The federalization as a solution for the reunification of the country is only one challenge for Maia Sandu.

It is also very important that the foreign partners of the Republic of Moldova understand the limits of Maya Sandu's presidential term, what she can do as president and what possible scenarios are to be promoted by domestic political actors, who will try to undermine the trust offered by citizens.

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RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE: SPECIAL OPERATION FOR ISOLATION FROM THE WEST

Excerpts from the report on the Project "Countering Western Aid to Ukraine as an Element of a Hybrid War", performed under the auspices of the Center for Global Studies Strategy XXI by experts of the Center for Analytical Studies and Countering Hybrid Threats with the assistance of the Renaissance Foundation.

Western assistance to Ukraine is aimed at solving important problems for the country, strengthening democracy, raising living standards, implementing humanitarian values and principles of justice. Its provision completely coincides with the interests of Ukrainian society.

Western aid does not allow Russia to fully apply the methods of conducting a hybrid war against Ukraine (political pressure, economic sanctions, blockade, overt or covert occupation) and to eliminate its statehood. Therefore, the isolation of Ukraine from the West due to the termination of such assistance is currently a key operation of the Russian Federation in the implementation of the aggression plan.

The complex operation has a preparatory and active phase. Russia has completed the preparatory phase and from October to November 2020 began an active phase of the operation. The shortest way to accomplish this task is to repeal laws related to Ukraine's commitments when signing agreements and other legal instruments on assistance with Western countries.

Part of the information generated by the aggressor to destroy Western aid to Ukraine, clearly shows that this direction of aggression is not even one of the main, but undoubtedly the main at this stage. The purpose of conducting information operations in this area is to prepare public opinion of both Ukrainian society and the countries that provide us with assistance, to the need to stop it.

But carrying out only information operations does not stop providing assistance. This requires concrete action in the political and economic spheres. And the information operations that precede these actions provide a favorable basis for public support, even if they are to the detriment of society.

According to the plan of the aggressor country, the deprivation of Ukraine of Western aid and its further isolation should be carried out through strikes on the guarantees provided by the Ukrainian authorities to fulfill the conditions of this aid. These conditions are the implementation of the reforms proposed by the West. It is the reforms proposed and voluntarily accepted by Ukraine, the implementation of which, as mentioned above, objectively meets the interests of Ukrainian society and poses a threat to the power of the oligarchs and the corrupt «elite».

Such guarantees are determined by the adoption and validity of the laws of Ukraine governing reforms. These include the land market law, a number of anti-corruption laws and some others.

The repeal of these laws will lead to the cessation of assistance, including financial assistance, which in turn will lead to economic collapse in the country.

The development of the operation should take place in the following conditions:

- no direct «traces» from the Russian Federation;

- the initiative comes from Ukrainians, preferably - the people («direct democracy» - an effective tool of hybrid war, which since the early 2000s, Russia is trying to create in Ukraine), as a last resort - the people's deputies;

- everything must take place in the legal field of Ukraine.

What are the options for repealing the laws if there are not enough votes in the Verkhovna Rada?

Option 1. «Democracy through a referendum» - the most effective. Carrying out such an operation in the legal field of Ukraine leaves no reason for the West not to recognize the results of the plebiscite. Russia's testing of the method of «referendums» in the Crimea and Donbas outside the legal field of Ukraine has not ensured the legitimacy of «expression of will» among the world's leading countries.

In addition, the success of the mechanism of «direct democracy through a referendum» is ensured by the low awareness of the source of power (the «people») of dependence on the subject of the referendum state and economic security (emotional voting such as «*our land was stolen and given to the West», "they do nothing"*, etc.), lack of understanding of the impact of the referendum results in the long run and even in the medium term.

Bill № 3612 "On democracy through an all-Ukrainian referendum" (as of the end of 2020) contains Article 3, which regulates one of the subjects of the all-Ukrainian referendum "*the issue of repeal of the law of Ukraine or certain provisions thereof"*.

Its adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine creates favorable conditions for pro-Russian structures to implement the procedure for repealing the laws of Ukraine necessary for cooperation with the West.

At the same time, the bill contains a number of safeguards that complicate its use by the aggressor for their destructive purposes in relation to the state (complicate, but do not make such use impossible).

Option 2. «Democracy through polls»

The mechanism, which was launched three weeks before the local elections in October 2020, can be seen as an attempt to use option 1 outside the legal field. The lack of legally established regulations for conducting such a survey, starting from the list of issues that are allowed / not allowed to be submitted to the «poll» and ending with the procedure for protecting the choice of citizens (protected ballots, the process of counting and reporting results, appeal procedure, implementation) calls into question its results in the eyes of both society and Western partners.

The trial nature of such a step is evidenced by the absence in the list of polls of issues that directly guarantee Western assistance to Ukraine (land, banking, abolition of anti-corruption norms).

At the same time, the threat of such an attempt is as follows:

- the practice of applying unforeseen actions of the authorities in the form of free polls has been introduced into the political sphere, the results of which will be positioned as the will of the people and based on which arbitrary decisions will be made by the authorities (arguing that the poll in October 2020 will have legal consequences, but will have political, and will be taken into account when implementing them in law);

- a precedent was set for local authorities, which received a template to initiate and conduct a «poll» to further approve a favorable decision, under the guise of «legitimate will of the people» within the administrative unit (greatest threat in regions where local authorities are controlled by pro-Russian forces). The range of such decisions may include most issues critical to Ukraine's national security (land, language, taxes, free economic zones, «cooperation» with the regions of neighboring countries, etc.).

Option 3. «Unconstitutionality of the law». It is implemented through the direct power of the Constitutional Court to declare laws unconstitutional, which provides for their repeal.

Thus, the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine № 13-r / 2020 of October 27, 2020 declared unconstitutional a number of provisions of the Law of Ukraine «On Prevention of Corruption» and, frankly beyond its powers, abolished criminal liability for declaring false information, i.e Art. 366-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which led to a constitutional crisis and created a real threat of termination of Western aid, at least to the extent provided under the condition of creating an anti-corruption system in Ukraine.

This should be considered as **the first active action of the operation to halt the support to Ukraine.** Conditions that facilitate the implementation of the operation:

- the appointment of judges (including the President of the Court) during the presidency of Yanukovych, which provides for certain personal «debt obligations» to politicians who have remained in the SPC;

- «recruitment vulnerability» or in other words the presence of factors of pressure on judges by the aggressor (land in Crimea, relatives - citizens of the Russian Federation, the aggressor has financial income in the country, etc.);

- personal interest of judges (there is something to hide from anti-corruption bodies, a number of judges appear in NABU cases);

- corruption of the judicial system of Ukraine (corruption is a key tool of the Russian Federation in the «hybrid war», together with Russian interpretations of the «rule of law» and «freedom of speech»).

The operation began quickly - with the abolition of anti-corruption norms immediately after the local elections and, as evidenced by the reaction of the President of Ukraine, unexpectedly for the government. At the same time, the existence of external influence on the Court's decision was recognized.

There is also information support of the operation. In the infospace, the focus of public attention is on the Constitutional Court, the corruption of judges, the elimination of anti-corruption infrastructure. At the same time, the main goal of the aggressor, which is to destroy Western aid to Ukraine, is deliberately concealed.

The call of the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine to assess the events in terms of the war against Ukraine and the President's phrase that the system of assistance to Ukraine, which it desperately needs, is collapsing, sounded somewhat dissonant in the media mainstream. «We are following the clear actions of a group of people aimed at destroying Ukrainian statehood ... Moreover, I have no doubt that the aggressor country took part in this», he said on October 30, 2020.

A precedent has been set for the further repeal of other laws, which is the basis for further rapid development of the operation. As of the end of 2020, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine is considering petitions of people's deputies on the unconstitutionality of the laws of Ukraine «On the State Bureau of Investigation», «On Prevention of Corruption», «On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Agricultural Land Circulation Conditions». «On the Supreme Anti-Corruption Court», the validity of which directly affects the support of Ukraine by the West.

A deterrent to the aggressor's operations is the decisive reaction to the decision of the Constitutional Court by both the government and civil society. This reaction indicates that despite the scale of the information operations conducted by us during the preparatory period, they were not effective enough and did not achieve the goal set by the aggressor. And the real prospect of being on the dock not for non-declaration, but for treason, we will hopefully, stopped the determination of judges on the destructive decisions of the state.

Thus, at the beginning of 2021, Russia has moved to the next stage of the destruction of Ukrainian statehood, the key task of which is to isolate Ukraine from the West, to stop providing assistance to it. The following probable aggression algorithm would be: **cessation of assistance to Ukraine (primarily financial) by the West** - economic collapse and socio-economic shocks, deepened by the problem of pandemic - transfer of socio-economic crisis to socio-political discrediting the central government - promotion the idea of the independent existence of regions without an ineffective parasitic center - the provision of assistance by the aggressor to selected regions - hidden or overt federalization or disintegration of the country.

Thus, attacks aimed at complete cessation of cooperation with the West will increase. In 2021, new attempts to repeal key anti-corruption laws and land reforms should be expected. Russia will operate through pro-Russian networks of influence agencies, political parties and regional groups. The development of the final stage of Russia's operation to destroy Ukraine's sovereignty will depend on the level of political and economic crisis in the country, which seems inevitable.

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The Baltic Sea's Underwater Environment: Russian Opportunities

Russia has been pursuing a policy of increasing its naval capabilities over the past decade. This also applies to the smallest of the four fleets of the Russian Navy – the Baltic Fleet. But despite some increase in military capabilities, the BF loses significantly to NATO naval forces in the region. Russia is constantly trying to find non-standard methods of compensating for the advantage of NATO's military potential in the Baltic sea. The Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines contain additional opportunities for such compensation. The Nord Stream's submarine infrastructure can be used by Russia to build military capabilities in the Baltic Sea.

The publication of the article "Underwater Space of the Ukrainian Sea: Challenges and Threats" in issue No. 2 (38) of the Black Sea Security Magazine in 2020 [1] on the use for military purposes of the Delta-MGA engineering security system for the TurkStream gas pipeline and its further distribution caused a reaction in Russia.

For example [2]: "...the hysteria inflated by Kyiv around this system may have a political subtext. Ihor Yushkov, a leading expert at the National Energy Security Foundation (Национальный фонд энергетической безопасности), believes that the mention of Russian gas pipelines in Gaiduk's research was made for a reason. "The meaning of such statements is clear. It consists of politicising the topic of Russian gas pipelines to Europe as much as possible. Because there it is a priori considered that if a project is political, it cannot be implemented under any slogans; it should be closed. Therefore, critics of Russia and Gazprom are trying to convince everyone that these are political projects. "

Although the former Commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, expressed doubts about the feasibility of having an extensive tracking system on the Black Sea and simultaneously pointed out that "it would be more viable to build larger underwater surveillance systems **in the Baltic**, North and Far East." So the Baltic direction, although not playing a leading role in the Russian naval strategy, is one way or another among the priorities.

Baltic capabilities of the Russian Federation.

There are nine countries on the Baltic coast, of which six are members of NATO and eight are members of the European Union. The only country outside these organisations is the Russian Federation, which for the past 10-12 years has demonstrated an aggressive policy towards Western countries, mainly NATO members, despite the export of energy resources to them, which brings Russia 2/3 of export revenues. The port of St. Petersburg accounts for 52% of international container cargo transportation in the Russian Federation.

About 125 thousand ships per year pass through the Danish Straits, which connect the Baltic and the North Sea. They rank fifth of eight among the most loaded straits with transportation of petroleum products globally with a volume of 3.3 million barrels per day. This is more than through the Bosphorus, Panama or Suez Canals. Most of these transportations are carried out from the Russian Port of Primorsk.

There are over 200 ports on the Baltic Sea coast, eight of which are large. The largest ports in cargo volumes are Russia's Primorsk and St. Petersburg (each about 60 million tonnes annually).

In terms of hydro-physical parameters, the Baltic Sea is favourable for navigation, the marine industry's development, including the construction of underwater gas pipelines at its bottom, laying underwater cables, and other technical systems, **including military ones (sonar surveillance systems, etc.).**

Over the past decade, Russia has been implementing a policy of increasing its naval capabilities. This also applies to the smallest of the four fleets of the Russian Navy – the Baltic Fleet (BF). But despite a particular increase in military potential, the BF concedes the Naval Forces of NATO countries in the region. This is especially true for submarines' capabilities, setting up minefields, and NATO's control over the Danish Straits, which are of strategic importance for Russia because the main volume of export of oil and petroleum products from the Russian Federation goes through them.

The Baltic region is essential for Russia's geopolitics. To gain control over the Baltic region, the Russian Federation focuses on its hybrid influence below. These include:

1. **The Kaliningrad zone and the region** transformed into a kind of the Baltic bastion, a "zone of prohibition of access" to the enemy and the projection of domestic military force on Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, other countries of the region, and NATO forces. From this zone, it is possible to obstruct the operation of the first LNG terminals on the Baltic coast in Klaipeda (Lithuania) and Szczecin (Poland), which create competition for Russian gas supplies;

2. **Island Zone - Åland Islands, Gotland, Bornholm** to influence maritime activities of Finland, Sweden and Denmark, respectively;

3. **Danish straits** - to control navigation, in particular warships and permanent formations of NATO countries, if necessary, to block them;

4. **The north-eastern part of the Baltic Sea** - to protect and control approaches to its ports-ensure testing the latest warships and weapons.
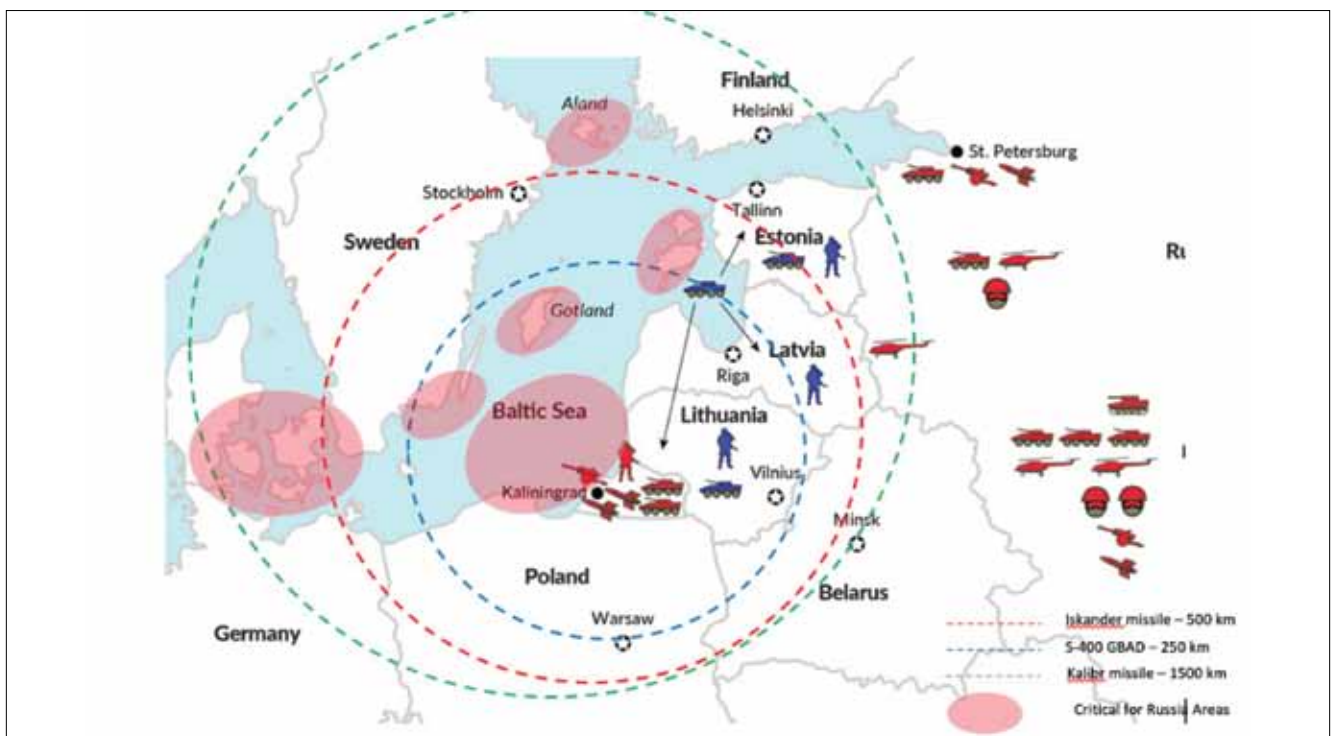

Fig. 1. Zones of the Russian Federation's influence in the Baltic Sea.

To achieve the region's desired dominance, the Russian Federation has created and increased specific military capabilities in these zones in recent years.

In the Kaliningrad region, an **Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) zone** has been created with the deployment of missile systems and means for destroying targets on land, air, and at sea. Since 2016, an intensification of testing of massive missile strikes from coastal complexes, surface ships, aircraft and helicopters on military facilities of NATO countries in the region, including on the islands of **Gotland and Bornholm,** has been noticed. This involves the coastal missile systems "Bastion" SSC-5 Stooge ("Marionetka") and SRBMS Iskander SS-26 Stone ("Kamin'") with a firing range of 300 and 500 km respectively. The SRBMS Iskander, along with the S-400 air defence system and Bastion-class coastal anti-ship complexes, plays a key role in the Anti-Access/Area Denial, A2/AD concept of the Russian Armed Forces, which is the fact that NATO troops cannot be located and move within the range of the A2/AD restricted area systems without the risk of unacceptable losses. The Iskander missile defence system is the most dangerous weapon of the Russian Armed Forces, as it has a very low barrier of non-nuclear use, the long range of missiles and the ability to overcome missile defence systems can immediately lead to huge losses in the event of Iskander strikes on airfields, logistics centres, and similar facilities. Due to the deployment of the S-400 system in the Kaliningrad region (Gvardeyskoye village), an echelon air defence system has been created able to detect targets at a range of up to 600 km and destroy them at a range of up to 240 km, even in the airspace of neighbouring Baltic countries. An integrated system for exchanging information on the sea and air environment is being created and a whole indication with the prospect of its integration into the general state system of the Russian Federation. There are also 561 detachments of Naval Special Forces stationed there and capable of conducting reconnaissance and sabotage activities at sea and from the sea.

The combat activity of the Russian Baltic Fleet Forces is being increased, relying on the long-range strike capabilities of four new Steregushchy-type corvettes, Project 20380, and two Karakurt-type missile ships, Project 22800, which have recently become part of the fleet's surface forces. Each of these ships is a carrier of eight Kalibr cruise missiles with a firing range of 1,500 km, including those with a nuclear warhead. In the coming years, four more Karakurt-type missile ships (bringing their total number to six units in the Baltic) and the latest Alexandrovets-type minesweepers with remote-controlled underwater vehicles are expected to arrive. Russia continues to test new or upgraded types of missile, torpedo, radio-electronic and mine weapons in the region.

The Russian Federation is trying to demonstrate itself as the dominant force in the Baltic Sea by manipulating international law norms. Allegedly, to ensure military activities, the Russian Federation declares significant areas of the Baltic Sea dangerous according to SOLAS-74 for (in fact, closes them for commercial vessels) navigation for a long time without carrying out any activity there. The activities of the maritime industry in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are susceptible to this. There are attempts by the Russian Federation to interpret the requirements of UNCLOS in its favour, especially concerning restricting freedom of navigation in its own exclusive maritime economic zone, which is not allowed by international maritime law. The facts of influence on the satellite communication system Inmarsat (rerouting) and effect on the ship identification system AIS (spoofing) are noticed.

Russia continues intensive reconnaissance to study the Baltic Sea Theatre and identify the surface and underwater forces of NATO countries in areas of combat activities and attracts civilian objects of the marine industry for military purposes. For this purpose, Navy reconnaissance ships, 561 Marine Special Forces units, and civilian fleet vessels, which can be employed for reconnaissance, subversive activity, sabotage, blocking navigation and ports, and damaging coastal facilities and infrastructure, are used. The discovery of unidentified underwater objects off the coast of Sweden in 2014 and 2016 is probably also related to this activity of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation pays some attention to the ports of Szczecin (Poland) and Klaipeda (Lithuania), which due to the LNG terminals recently built, are undesirable competitors to Russian gas supplies. To

block them, among other things, the possibility of using special underwater vehicles of the Main Directorate of deep-sea testing of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation GUGI in the Baltic Sea, which mainly operate at great depths, is not excluded. But nothing prevents the use of small vehicles in the Baltic Sea to conduct specific research in port zones and at the bottom of the sea, actions on underwater cables and pipelines, including their destruction. There are indications that Russia can also use marine animals in the Baltic Sea to achieve this goal, which was practised in Soviet times in the Black Sea. The Baltic Sea is perfect for the employment of marine animals in almost its entire water area. Another Russian practice in the Black Sea that can be applied in the Baltic Sea is the active use of underwater space for exploration activities, including civilian objects on the seabed. Recall that in 2013, the Ukrainian Navy recorded and detected elements of the underwater sonar surveillance system of the Russian Federation in the territorial waters of Ukraine (near the city of Sevastopol). Over the past three years, Russia has created a stationary sonar observation system in the north-western part of the Black Sea and on the TurkStream gas pipeline (at a depth exceeding 2,000 meters).

Meanwhile, despite a certain build-up of military potential, the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy is not currently a priority in the supply of new ships and military equipment (unlike the Black Sea or Northern Fleets). The BF concedes much to the Naval Forces of NATO countries in the region. This is especially true for the possibilities of submarine operations, setting up minefields, and NATO's control over the Danish straits, strategically important for Russia (for fuel supplies).

Composition of the Navies' Surface Forces in the Baltic Sea

Type	RF	Germany	Poland	Denmark	Sweden	Finland
Destroyers	1	7	-	-	-	-
Frigates	2	10	2	9	-	-
Corvettes	14	5+3	2	-	8	-
Submarines	2	6	3	-	5	-
Motorboats	25	-	3	15	12	8
Mine countermeasures ships	14	12	21	6	9	19
Landing carriers						
- ships	6	2	5	4	—	—
- motorboats	—	—	—	—	284	196

The Baltic Sea is an operational area of NATO's permanent strike and mine action units, attracting warships from countries outside the region. For example, now the NATO Standing Maritime Group (SNMG1) consists of ships from Portugal, Belgium and Canada. In contrast, the NATO Mine Countermeasures Group (SNMCMG1), in addition to the ships of the Baltic States, also includes ships from the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway. The maritime operational unit of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia BALTOPS has been strengthening and acquiring additional capabilities; since 2016, it has included a landing component. The latest BALTOPS exercise in June 2020 involved ships from 17 NATO countries and neutral Sweden and Finland.

Given the above, Russia is constantly trying to find methods, non-standard and not entirely clear to the West, to compensate for the superiority of NATO's

military potential in the region. The Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines contain additional hidden opportunities for such compensation.

Non-standard approaches.

Given the pathological antipathy of the Russian leadership to NATO and based on the above assessment of the geopolitical environment, it is possible to assume with high probability that Russian underwater gas pipelines are included in military activities in the Baltic.

The use of the Nord Stream corridor for surveillance and monitoring of underwater space in almost the entire Baltic Sea area provides certain operational advantages that minimise the Russian Federation's lag in total combat potential at sea. This allows more efficient use of ships and missile boats available in the BF to counter NATO forces at sea and determine in advance the covert deployment of underwater and surface forces of NATO countries from their bases to areas of firing positions patrolling.

Technically, it is not difficult to implement the program of creating underwater advantages for the RF BF forces, and it will not require significant resources. Using the standard Delta-MGA engineering gas pipeline security system, specially developed for Gazprom, the Russian military only need to add individual technical components and secretly perform installation of the underwater sonar stations (SS) in the right places, including in the territorial waters of coastal countries. The Russian Federation has considerable experience and capabilities in this regard. Given the shallow depths of the Baltic Sea and the short distances from the Nord Stream corridor to the coast of neighbouring countries and the critical Åland Islands, Gotland and Bornholm Islands, Russia can deploy a passive underwater surveillance system based on several lines of the passive sonar set MGK-608 "Sever" in a fairly short time.

The underwater surveillance system in the Baltic Sea should be considered as a component of the global surveillance system being created by the Russian Ministry of Defence under the official name Unified State Lighting System Surface and Underwater Environment "Harmony". It is based

on special underwater robotic units that come out from a submarine and deploy SS at the sea bottom. Robots transmit the received information to the Command Control Point via satellites. According to experts, some system elements have already started functioning, and "Harmony" will be fully operational from 2020. This system can make entire areas of the World's Oceans" transparent", detecting all ships, submarines, and even low-flying planes and helicopters.

The stationary passive sonar set MGK-608 North is designed to highlight the underwater situation in sea and ocean areas to search for surface and underwater targets, including low-noise submarines.
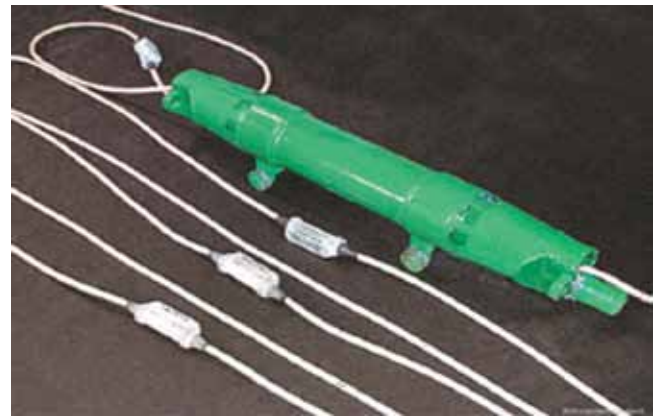

Fig.2. View of the underwater receiver MGK-608 Sever.

Tasks solved by MGK-608:

- search and detection of submarines and surface ships by their sonar field, determining their coordinates;

- tracking of identified targets, determination of parameters of their movement (course, speed, and behavioural model);

- classification of objects by their noise trace;

- automatic output of processed target data for directing manoeuvre forces, including using satellite communication channels.

The unit can detect ships and low-noise submarines in areas up to 1,000 km long, at a distance of up to 200 km from the coast and depths up to 1,000 m, in areas of 30-300 thousand square kilometres at the same time.
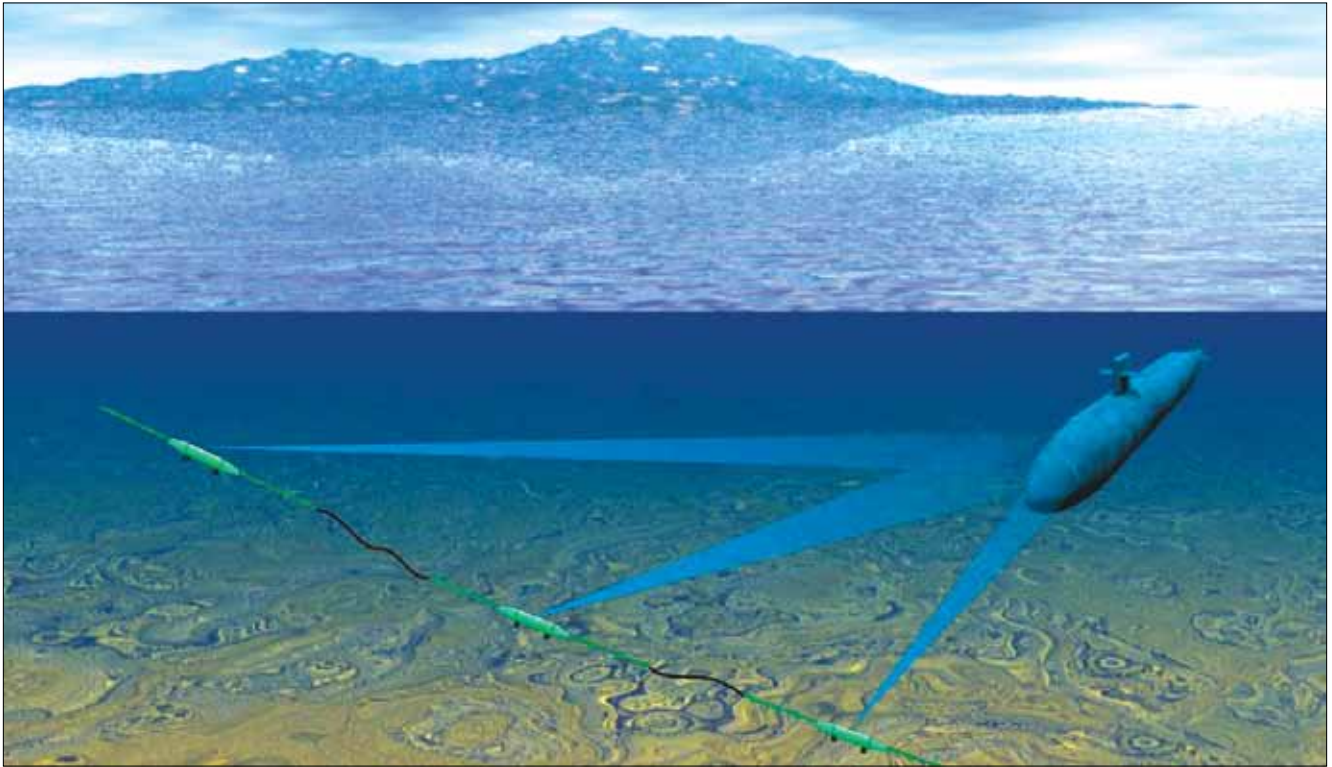
Fig. 3. A variant of the array of the MGK-608 receiver chain on the sea bed.

The target detection range of an individual station is up to 150 km, and the error in determining the distance to the target is not more than 2 km. The MGK-608 is designed for a ten-year uninterrupted operation without the lifting of the bottom part.

Thus, we can imagine that the system of underwater espionage of the Russian Federation in the Baltic Sea can have this form (and most likely already exists, at least in fragments):
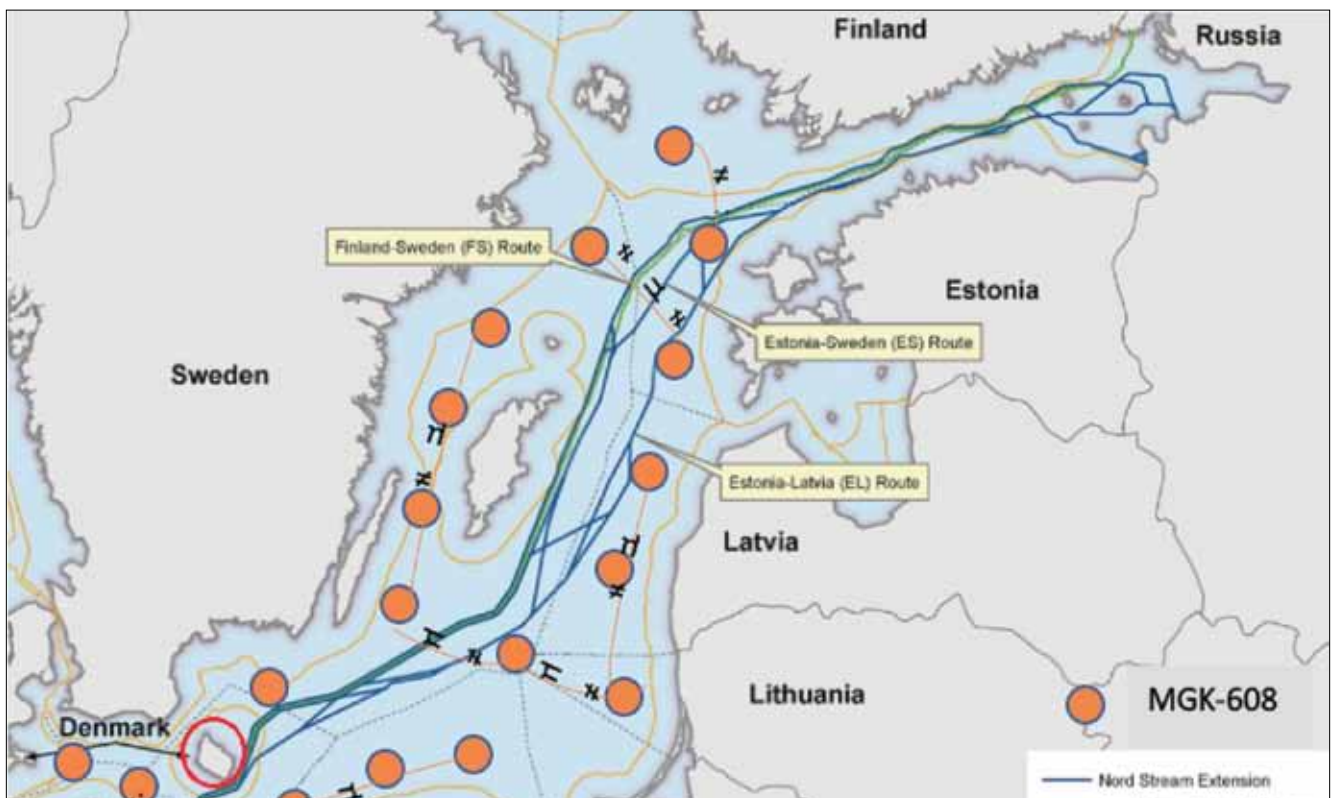

Fig. 4. Option of building a passive sonar surveillance network based on MGK-608.

The MGK-608 stations are located on both sides of the Nord Stream corridor, mainly outside the territorial waters. They could be are connected in chains and located at an offset within the stable coverage of detection zones – up to 150 km. This passive underwater surveillance system will allow Russia to control underwater military and non-military activities, key Baltic islands, and civilian shipping routes. It should be noted that Russia has in its arsenal numerous and diverse SS, but conducting sonar observation in the Baltic Sea requires relatively simple equipment. Concealed installation of MGK-608 stations is probably carried out from the sides of hydro-graphic or reconnaissance vessels of the Yantar type or the autonomous underwater vessels of the Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation - GUGI.

The underwater infrastructure of the Nord Stream can be used by Russia to build up its military superiority over NATO forces in the Baltic Sea zone. Its place in the global system "Harmony" mentioned above can be defined as a component of the information module "Sonar information support of the Russian Navy and BGS (Border Guard Service)" in the "Military Circuit of the Unified Marine Information Lighting System". The operator is the Hydro-sonic Centre, as a secret unit for collecting sonar data (the Centre's location is unknown).

Special units of the Russian Navy can use the received sonar information to establish control and damage, if necessary, underwater power cables, fibre optic lines, pipelines, and other underwater objects of NATO and EU countries. The latest example is the sudden disappearance in August 2019 in Eckernförde Bay of a large monitoring station "Boknis Eck" of the German Centre for Ocean Research GEOMAR, used to collect important scientific data in the Baltic Sea. Only a broken communication cable remained at the station installation site.

Underwater communications in the Baltic Sea. The modern economy depends on the information transmission infrastructure. Approximately 95-97% of intercontinental information traffic (e-mail, phone calls, money transfers, etc.) is transmitted via fibre-optic communication lines laid on the sea and ocean bed. Their collapse can

have serious economic and security consequences for the affected countries [3]. In the case of malicious sabotage actions, control systems, communications, energy infrastructure, and others are affected. The time required to search for and detect a fibre optic fault can be quite long. At the same time, there are no general emergency response procedures.

All this equally applies to the Baltic Sea's underwater communication infrastructure, where there is also a fibre optic communication network. Disruption of communication due to underwater cables' breakage will lead to serious long-term consequences, challenging to mitigate, even for those countries where there are several communication hubs. Therefore, fibre optic communication lines are an important target in hybrid warfare. Admiral James Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe of the NATO Joint Forces (SACEUR), wrote that in the event of increased tensions, access to the underwater cable system represents a good catch for reconnaissance, as well as for causing severe damage to the enemy's economy. Thus, such actions can lead to disorganisation and instability in countries that have been victims of hybrid aggression and demonstrate the inability of state authorities to restore infrastructure.

Many underwater cables that connect energy and information flow between the countries of NATO and the European Union, essential for their economies, lay at the Baltic Sea's bottom.

Fig.5. Location of underwater cables in the Baltic Sea. https://www.submarinecablemap.com/#/.

In the south-western sector of the Sea, the Baltic and Denmark-Poland-2 fibre optic lines are laid.

Fig. 6. Fibre optic cable between Bornholm Island and the Polish coast.

In addition to the fibre optic communication network, the Baltic Sea has a network of power cables for power transmitting. For example, SwePol Link between Sweden and Poland. One of the first cables in the world was Gotland, which connects the Swedish mainland to Gotland. The Baltic cable from Herrenwyk (Sweden) to Lübeck (Germany) is the longest electric power cable in the world - 250 km.

Russia has "the most advanced forces for waging war on the sea bed," according to a report by the American Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS. In particular, we are talking about the placement of SS, the survey of the sea bed, "listening to underwater cables" to collect intelligence.

In December 2017, the head of the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, warned that Russia could "immediately and potentially catastrophically" hit global economies if underwater cables - 545,018 miles of total length in 213 independent systems -

are interrupted or disrupted. He also said that cable vulnerability poses a "new risk to our way of life" and it is critically important for NATO to prioritise cable protection "in response to the threat posed by the modernisation of the Russian fleet, both nuclear and conventional submarines and ships."

At the same time, US Navy Rear Admiral Andrew Lennon, commander of the Submarines NATO, said that they are "now seeing Russian underwater activity in the vicinity of undersea cables that I don't believe we have ever seen." "Russia is interested in the underwater infrastructure of NATO countries," he said. "And what we have observed is an increased activity of that in the vicinity of undersea cables. We know that these auxiliary RF submarines are designed to work on the ocean floor, and they're transported by the mother ship, and we believe they may be equipped to manipulate objects on the ocean floor."

In the Baltic Sea, Russia's Baltic Fleet Forces, creating A2/AD zones, prevented the laying of a 400-km NordBaltic power cable between

Lithuania and Sweden in April 2015 [4]. According to the press secretary of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Russian Navy demanded that the ALCEDO vessel chartered for laying the cable leave its positions in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Lithuania, where, according to international law, it had a legal right to be located. The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also made statements about Russian interference in cable laying. Russia ignored the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry's official notes, limiting itself to the remark that this is "protection of their zones of military exercises."

The reaction to such military actions of Russia and the proposal to counteract them came from the Estonian parliament: "Russia reacts only to a show of force, so Sweden, which has a larger fleet than the Baltic States, should resist the Russians and send a ship there", but a more sustainable solution would be to provide NATO protection at sea as well as in the air " [5].

Threat from the bottom.

Given that the route of both "Nord Streams" crosses most of the Baltic Sea undersea cables, Russia will have significantly simplified access to them for espionage and sabotage purposes.

GUGI units can do this. We are talking about military unit No. 45707, one of the most classified military units of the Russian Federation, planning and engaged in special undersea operations. GUGI hydronauts are involved in intelligence activities - listening to communication cables, installing motion sensors, and collecting the wreckage of ships, planes, and satellites from the seafloor – both their own, so they not fall into the wrong hands (NATO), and others to obtain information about the level of technological developments of possible opponents (NATO).

According to former hydronaut Vladimir Ashik, his colleagues' task was "to collect intelligence information about enemy equipment, protect and maintain deep-water communication lines, and lift from the bottom the remains of secret equipment left after tests or accidents." Military unit No. 45707 is stationed in Peterhof, a suburb of St. Petersburg. This unit may likely be used

for special military operations on undersea cables of the Baltic Sea under cover of certain planned routine maintenance works in the Nord Stream corridor route.

The infrastructure of Nord Stream brings the Russian Federation closer to the areas where acts of covert interference and sabotage are carried out at strategically important military and industrial facilities of NATO countries. This applies primarily to the naval bases of the Alliance's member countries, Sweden and Finland, seaports, and LNG terminals in Świnoujście (Poland) and Klaipeda (Lithuania). For this purpose, units of the Naval Special Forces of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Federation (561st detachment), GUGI hydronauts can be involved.

Special operations are greatly facilitated by the proximity of Nord Stream to the areas where they are conducted and the possibility of justifying the Russian presence due to the availability of a long pipeline system, the smooth operation of which requires technical supervision, which can also be used for military purposes.

The Nord Stream gas pipeline is a kind of "force projection lever" for special operations in the central and, especially, in the south-western part of the Baltic Sea. Maintenance and safety of the Nord Stream gas pipeline can be used as a means for manipulating the norms of international maritime law (in particular, UNCLOS) and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS 1974).

In practice, this can be implemented by the Russian Federation through the declaration of closed sea areas along the gas pipeline under the guise of work or research for unreasonably long periods. This, in turn, will affect business losses due to additional costs incurred by shipowners to bypass the closed areas.

Conclusion.

The above is the basis for a safe audit of the routes of undersea gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea and installed equipment in their zone. In fact, the certification of Nord Stream gas pipelines is incomplete. It is precisely its security component that is missing in the form of verification of the impossibility of using

undersea gas pipelines for non-project purposes, not related to ensuring gas transportation and maintaining its functional technical condition.

The requirements of national regulators granting appropriate permits relate only to technological and environmental safety and anti-terrorist measures. A priori, it is considered that gas and gas transmission systems may be under certain external threat (natural or human-made). Still, they cannot generate or contribute to the generation of military threats to third parties. The latter is not true, as Russia has created and is improving hybrid warfare technologies, using non-military infrastructure to create hidden benefits. This was proven efficient in the Black Sea, and therefore the Russian Federation can also use this template in the Baltic Sea.

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Overview of Foreign Sources
on the Black Sea Region

This piece collects the most interesting topics covered in foreign publications in the period October-November 2020, and an analysis of events that we believe will have an impact on security in the region in the first half of 2021.

1. What Turkey Stands to Gain from Its Natural Gas Discovery

By Rauf Mammadov, Oct 02, 2020
Fair Observer
https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/rauf-mammadov-turkey-natural-gas-discovery-deposits-energy-security-feoreign-policy-news-15555/

If confirmed, the natural gas deposits off Turkey's Black Sea coast will enhance the country's energy security and help shape Ankara's foreign policy trajectory.

Turkey's first natural gas discovery was undoubtedly breaking news. As the world focused its attention on the escalation between Ankara and Athens in the eastern Mediterranean over natural resources and maritime borders, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made the announcement on August 21 that marked the end of Turkey's unsuccessful quest for indigenous oil and gas. If confirmed, the discovery of a 320-billion-cubic-meter natural gas deposit off Turkey's Black Sea coast will enhance the country's energy security and could help shape Ankara's foreign policy trajectory.

The finding could alleviate Turkey's energy import options and equip Ankara with a powerful bargaining chip in negotiations with traditional suppliers. It could also help to transform TPAO into a significant player in the industry.

Given the complexity of deep-water drilling, TPAO's inexperience when it comes to offshore projects and the costliness of such endeavors, the development of the Black Sea fields may require partnerships with more experienced companies.

TPAO has already partnered with the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in upstream projects in the Caspian Sea. Given the fraternal relations between the two countries, which have only solidified in light of the recent fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, SOCAR's engagement in the project is not excluded. Ankara's unequivocal support for Baku in the conflict with Armenia and Azerbaijan's increasingly growing share in natural gas supplies to Turkey could be easily translated into cooperation in the oil and gas sector as well.

TPAO may also partner with Qatar Petroleum, which has extensive experience in managing such complex deep-water projects. Turkish authorities have already suggested such a possibility. In March, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated that Ankara is considering a partnership with Malaysian, British and Qatari companies in the eastern Mediterranean. Qatar Petroleum has decades of experience in operating the North Dome, the largest natural gas field in the world. Turkey and Qatar may use the opportunity to capitalize on their political relations and channel the geopolitical alignment into cooperation in the business sector.

If the findings are confirmed, aside from providing a strategic advantage in the energy sector, the deposits will be a crucial element in bolstering Turkey's foreign policy efforts, such as the Blue Homeland strategy and the pivot to the Maghreb

and the Sahel. TPAO's recent expansion abroad, especially in Africa, indicates the prerogatives of Ankara's foreign policy goals. Turkey already faces strong opposition from almost all eastern Mediterranean littoral states that have collectively aligned to resist Ankara's endeavors. To cope with these challenges, Turkey will need to build geopolitical alliances and economic partnerships of its own.

2. Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security

In this report, the authors first assess how Russia is employing a variety of nonmilitary and military instruments to advance its goals. They then consider how the three North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey) and five NATO partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) in the Black Sea region perceive and are responding to Russia's activities and where those countries' interests align and diverge. Finally, the authors identify possible elements of a Western strategy to protect mutual interests, counter Russian malign influence and aggression, and foster regional stability.

Russian Strategy and Instruments to Advance That Strategy

- The Black Sea Fleet received new priority in the 2011–2020 State Armaments Program, which included six new submarines, three frigates, and other smaller surface vessels; however, there have been procurement delays. Long-range strike capabilities have grown, but individual platforms have limited salvos. The State Armaments Program for 2027 calls for qualitative improvements but a quantitative decline, given budget constraints and other requirements. It includes five corvettes and up to 12 small-missile ships (some with long-range strike capability)—not a force capable of operating far beyond Russia's borders.

- In the annexation of Crimea, Russia recovered a small fraction of the Soviet Union's strategic air defense space. Crimea provides a two-echelon outer layer of defense against an air attack emanating from the Eastern Mediterranean. And if Russia's coastal defense brigades perform as designed in a contested environment, they pose a significant threat to enemy maritime forces within range.

- Russia has limited warfighting capabilities for large-scale operations in both the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions. Changes to ground-force posture provide the ability to move large combat units rapidly into Ukraine. Available and planned forces will be able to deal with the most likely conflicts in the Caucasus and Ukraine.

- The threshold for employing forces in non-NATO territory adjacent to Russia is arguably low. But Ukraine's containment of Russia's military incursion into eastern Ukraine and the West's response, including painful economic sanctions on Russian entities and military assistance to Ukraine, might have increased that threshold. Through nonmilitary and perhaps military means, Russia will oppose any formal political or military integration with the West by the countries along its periphery. For Russia (and the Soviet Union), losing a perceived ally to the West has been a casus belli (i.e., act provoking or justifying war) but has not always led to military intervention.

- An adverse change in the political status of Russian interests is a reliable, though insufficient, indicator of possible Russian military intervention in the Black Sea region. NATO's anticipated response would be a factor.

Key Findings

Most countries in the Black Sea region must carefully balance relations between Russia and the West.

Bulgaria is committed to Western integration but is subject to various Russian influences, which often leads it to balance relations between Moscow and the West.

Romania is wary of Russia's intentions and military capabilities. And although it is largely resistant to malign influence, it gives high priority to countering Russian hybrid threats.

Turkey still values the NATO guarantee but is willing to impede Allied initiatives and is systematically balancing relations between Russia and the West.

Georgia and Ukraine are committed to Western integration and deeper defense cooperation with the United States and other allies, but they are constrained by active armed conflicts.

Armenia is dependent on Russian security patronage but is open to diplomatic and limited security cooperation with the West.

Azerbaijan pursues practical, measured relations with Russia and the West but can play a limited role in reducing Southern Europe's reliance on Russian energy.

Moldova had a divided government that was seeking a middle road between Russia and the West before reorienting toward Moscow in 2019, but the nation has contributed to Western exercises and welcomed support on military reforms.

Recommendations

- Issue selective and proactive responses to Russian influence measures, highlighting the benefits of Western integration rather than seeking to discredit pervasive false narratives.

- Redouble assistance by NATO and European Union governments to help Black Sea countries counter Russian informational, cyber, economic, clandestine, and hybrid threats.

- Strongly support compliance with international laws, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Montreux Convention, that contribute to regional stability.

- Develop a more robust conventional deterrent posture, beyond the NATO Tailored Forward Presence—although it need not match Russian capabilities. It could include expanded U.S. and NATO naval presence and exercises, as well as further integration of existing maritime capabilities, asymmetric responses, and the deployment of advanced air and coastal defense systems in Romania and possibly Bulgaria.

- Continue security assistance to strengthen partner resilience and self-defense capabilities, backed by allied cohesion, which can temper Russian aggression (as seen in Georgia since 2008 and Ukraine since 2014).

More effectively use flexible bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships on mutual priorities (with opt-ins and opt-outs for potential spoiler nations), as well as existing mechanisms for subregional cooperation, such as the South Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial Process.

3. Turkey and Ukraine Boost Mutual Defense Ties

Following the October 16–17 summit between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, Turkish-Ukrainian strategic ties look poised to bring about a new geopolitical reality in the Black Sea region.

The most notable current area of cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine is in unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Turkey's forthcoming high-end combat drone, the Akinci (the Raider), was notably powered by Ukraine's Ivachenko-Progress AI-450T turboprop engines during its prototype test flights. Produced by Baykar Company—the maker of the famed "Pantsir-hunter" Bayraktar TB-2 UAS—the Akinci will mark a true leap forward for the Turkish arsenal thanks to its advanced sensors and available weapons systems, an active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar and air-launched cruise missiles, respectively (Baykarsavunma.com, accessed November 9). Last year, Baykar boosted its defense industrial cooperation with Ukraine by establishing a joint venture, Black Sea Shield, with Ukrspetsexport, a member of the state military-technical conglomerate Uk-roboronprom. The Black Sea Shield program covers a broad cooperation agenda, including aerospace engines and missile technology (see EDM, February 12; Baykardefence.com, accessed November 9).

Akinci drone from the Turkish company Baykar,
Source: https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-54823780.

The "heart" of Bayraktar Akinci are two turboprop engines with a capacity of 450 horses of the Ukrainian state enterprise Inchenko-Progress
Source: https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-54823780.

According to the Ukrainian Defense Review, Baykar and Ukraine's military-industrial base has geared-up to co-produce an unmanned fighter jet with a total weight of some 5.5 tons (with at least one ton of combat payload), a top speed of 900

kilometers per hour, and the ability to climb above 12 kilometers. One plausible solution for this joint ambition may be Ivachenko-Progress's AI-25TLT turbofan engine, which is already equipped on various international platforms, including the Czech L-39 Albatros trainer and light-attack aircraft (Ukrainian Defense Review, January–March 2020).

Turkey's Bayraktar TB-2 armed drone sales to Ukraine deserve attention in their own right. The Bayraktar TB-2 UAS is one of the most combat-proven platforms of its class. It has built up an impressive reputation that dates back to the Turkish military's Syrian expeditions and now extending to the recently concluded Armenian-Azerbaijani war in Karabakh (see EDM, October 15). Equipped with Roketsan-made smart weaponry, the Bayraktar TB-2 offers reliable solutions against a wide set of targets, including armored land-warfare vehicles, main battle tanks, troop concentrations, mobile air defenses, artillery pieces and even mobile ballistic-missile launchers, as seen in the recent Azerbaijani example. Turkish news outlets reported that Ukraine initially procured 12 of these systems, which could soon be followed by a larger package of 48 pieces (Daily Sabah, October 6). More importantly, the Ukrainian security forces could soon begin employing Turkish-made UASs in their operations against Russia-backed military units in the eastern part of the country. If this happens, such a development would mark the fourth front where Turkish drones are or have faced off against Russian-manufactured weaponry—after Libya, Syria and Karabakh. Following in Azerbaijan's footsteps, gaining an edge in advanced drone warfare could significantly bolster Kyiv's military capabilities (see EDM, November 9).

Another interesting arms transaction between Ankara and Kyiv was the recent sale of a modernized S-125 (Goa-3) variant surface-to-air missile (SAM) system to Turkey (TRT Haber, October 7). The Ukrainian modernization program has increased the Soviet-legacy S-125's range of 25 kilometers against maneuvering targets to some 40 kilometers (Ukrainian Defense Review, January–March 2019).

The Turkish military could employ the Ukrainian-modernized S-125 in two ways. First, the SAM system can be forward-deployed in support of its expeditionary contingents. Libya is the most plausible destination in this respect. Watiya Airbase, where Turkey previously deployed MiM-23 Hawk and Korkut air defenses alongside electronic warfare (EW) assets, was attacked in July 2020, reportedly by United Arab Emirates Air Force assets taking-off from Egypt (Anadolu Agency, July 5; EDAM, July 8). Turkey has limited medium-range SAM systems in its arsenal, and the indigenous Hisar line still has a way to go before reaching full operational capacity. Thus, modernized S-125 SAMs can offer a stop-gap measure for Turkish military planners.

Second, Turkey can use the Ukrainian-modernized S-125s as a part of its forthcoming S-400 SAM site configuration. With ongoing tests in the Black Sea city of Sinop, the Turkish Armed Forces are expected to declare the S-400s operational soon (Daily Sabah, October 24). Based on the Soviet-Russian design philosophy, the two SAM systems can operate within a layered architecture—which Ankara should be able to exploit with the help of the Ukrainian defense technological and industrial base.

Turkish defense giant Aselsan's investment portfolio in Ukraine is another important aspect to monitor. Last year, the company secured a lucrative contract in Ukraine for high-end military communications systems. Aselsan even started a local production facility in Kyiv for the deliveries (Anadolu Agency, December 20, 2019). Armor survivability is also a critical agenda item for bilateral strategic ties. Having faced dangerous anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) threats during its Syrian expeditions, Turkey has shown interest in active protection systems since 2018. Aselsan (and Roketsan) now work closely with their Ukrainian partners on active protection system co-production based on the Zaslon family (TRT Haber, March 7, 2018; Kyiv Post, December 14, 2018).

Finally, when it comes to maritime systems, Turkey's MILGEM-class corvettes can offer a capability boost for the Ukrainian Navy in the Black Sea (TRT Haber, October 19). If such a deal is secured, Ukraine will be the second export destination for this vessel type, following Pakistan.

The burgeoning defense ties between Kyiv and Ankara highlight some notable geopolitical re-

alities. Turkey is carrying out a unique strategic-military agenda that eludes simple classification. Namely, the Turkish administration signed a comprehensive defense cooperation deal with Ukraine while, at the same time, test-launching the S-400 SAM systems it had previously purchased from Russia (Anadolu Agency, October 16). Turkey is, thus, the only North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member that has procured a strategic weapons system from the Russian Federation even as it has developed extremely close defense ties

with Ukraine in the aftermath of the Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

In fact, Turkey's defense technological and industrial base has long benefited from mixing NATO and non-NATO partnerships—first and foremost with South Korea and Israel—when it comes to lucrative technology transfers and co-production opportunities. Ukraine stands to become another important partner of this type but with the additional political-military value of helping Turkey counter-balance Russia in the Black Sea.

4. U.S. Troops in Germany Should Be Redeployed to Poland, the Baltics and the Black Sea

Center for Security Policy
John Rossomando
https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2020/11/24/u-s-troops-in-germany-should-be-redeployed-to-poland-the-baltics-and-the-black-sea/
Nov 24, 2020

Defense establishment resistance to President Trump's plan to redeploy U.S. troops from Germany to Poland, the Baltics and the Black Sea region exposes an antiquated way of deterring Russia. The Trump administration announced in July that it was moving 5,600 members of the U.S. V Corps from Germany to Poland and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. A broader redeployment should take place in the long run.

Germans hate the idea of redeployment and claim that it will weaken the alliance. Senator Mitt Romney called the idea of moving troops out of Germany a "slap in the face at a key ally, a friend, and a great country."

The NATO establishment has failed to deter Russia's repeated provocations against NATO's Eastern flank in recent years. These include the introduction of nuclear-tipped Iskander short-range ballistic missiles that threaten Warsaw along with Russia's invasion and annexation of the Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Deterrence against potential Russian aggression should dictate strategy instead of outdated territorial orthodoxies.

Today, the military threat to NATO and Europe lies 800-1,000 miles to the East. This is not 1985.

Having the bulk of American forces in Europe in Germany makes little sense if you have to transport them by rail to Poland or the Baltic states in case of a Russian invasion over a seven-to-ten-day period. In that time, the approximately 100,000-200,000 Russian troops based in the Kaliningrad region along Poland's northern border and near Russia's border with the Baltics will have had ample time to overrun allied forces.

At present, America and its NATO allies lack adequate heavy armor in the Baltics to impede Russia from quickly overrunning those nations. Opponents will complain about the costs of redeployment to Poland, the Baltics and the Black Sea region, but such costs will be dwarfed by what it would cost to liberate such territories from a Russian invasion. Prevention costs less than reactive measures.

Russia's invasions of Georgia and Ukraine demonstrated its ability to rapidly overwhelm its enemies. Having the right forces, both nuclear and conventional, in place on Day Zero will send a strong message to Vladimir Putin that waging any

sort of military action against the Baltics, Poland, or in the Black Sea region is unwinnable.

Deterring Russia means going toe to toe with it. U.S. nuclear forces should be deployed to Poland as a bargaining chip to compel the Russians to withdraw their nuclear weapons from Kaliningrad.

The next administration should continue and enhance President Trump's strategy of increased military support for our NATO allies along the alliance's eastern flank. Adhering to the existing establishment orthodoxy is a gift to Putin, and the new Biden administration likely would do just that.

5. Joe Biden's Foreign Policy and Russia. While Biden recognizes China as America's top competitor, he calls Russia the biggest threat to the United States.

The Moscow Times,
By Dmitry Trenin
Nov. 19, 2020
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/11/19/joe-bidens-foreign-policy-and-russia-a72096

In terms of foreign policy, President-elect Biden is often compared in Russia to his former boss Barack Obama, but although many of the people likely to get top positions at the National Security Council, the state and defense departments, and the U.S. mission to the UN are former members of the Obama administration, Biden's foreign policy experience goes back much further.

For the seventy-eight-year-old, the Cold War is not something he learned about from books, like Obama, but something he lived through. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1972, Biden visited Moscow in 1979, when the ill-starred SALT-2 treaty was signed, and then again nearly a decade later just after the signing of the INF agreement, which was canceled by Donald Trump last year.

US Senator Joe Biden (right) and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Andrei Gromyko hold negotiations on ratification of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, 14 January 1988 (TASS via Getty Images)

A photo taken during the latter trip of Biden with Andrei Gromyko, the patriarch of Soviet diplomacy who was then the nominal head of state of the USSR, has become a big hit on Russian social media since Nov. 3. Therein lies a major distinction between Biden and Obama where it comes to Russia: for Biden, the present confrontation with Moscow is a postscript to the Cold War. And like the Cold War itself, it must be won by the United States.

Of course, Biden does not entirely conflate Russia with the Soviet Union. As a U.S. senator, a longtime chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and a two-term U.S. vice president, he has been intimately involved in world affairs for almost a half century.

However, while Biden recognizes China as America's top competitor, he calls Russia the biggest threat to the United States. Even though he describes Russia as a country in enormous decline, an oil-based economy and a second-rate military power, unable to compete with the West and saddled with depressive demographics and a kleptocratic regime run by KGB thugs, he sees Moscow's policies as aimed at weakening Western countries internally; undermining the unity of such institutions as NATO and the European Union; and subverting the liberal world order. He sees an increasingly revanchist, aggressive Russia that is taking the fight beyond the former Soviet space and getting closer to China.

Thus, in Biden's view, Russia should not be cornered: one, it would make it too dangerous for the United States; two, the only thing that keeps Putin in power is nationalism and anti-Americanism. Eventually, Russia will come back to its senses, ditch Putin's policies, and recognize that it cannot rebuild itself unless it engages with the West.

Such a conclusion provides an insight into Biden's future policy toward Russia and suggests that that policy will be to better coordinate the Russia-related activities of U.S government agencies; mount a cyber offensive against Russia; consoli-

date U.S. alliances and partnerships; put pressure on Russia and make it pay a very heavy price for its misdeeds; but also structure the conflict not as one between the United States and Russia, but as between the Russian kleptocracy and oligarchy on the one hand, and the Russian people on the other, with America supporting Russia's "underground civil society."

Exposing Russian official corruption through leaks, while naming and shaming the perpetrators and discrediting the Kremlin in the eyes of ordinary Russians is the main tool of this approach.

Besides extending the frontline of the U.S.-Russian confrontation to include democracy and human rights, Biden can also be counted on to take on Russia more boldly in the former Soviet Union, from Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. For years, he closely oversaw Washington's Ukraine policy for Obama; more recently he has been very vocal in support of the Belarusian opposition and highly critical of Moscow's policies toward Minsk, as well as Russia's role in Nagorno-Karabakh. More U.S.-Russian friction in all those regions is a sure bet.

Another follow-up from the forty-fifth president could be the development and ultimately deployment in Europe of U.S. intermediate-range missile systems that would target Russian command centers and strategic assets at very close range. Biden supports arms control, including the extension of the New START Treaty negotiated by the Obama Administration, but he favors arms negotiations from strength.

Looking ahead, the prospect of U.S. INF deployments minutes away from Moscow could be one element of that position. Strategic stability talks with Russia, if they begin on Biden's watch, will be as tough as any in history.

NATO 2030: United for a New Era.
Excerpts on the Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General

Russia is a declining state, but it is still dangerous, so the the Alliance must respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a politically united, determined, and coherent way, without a return to 'business as usual' barring alterations in Russia's aggressive behaviour. This is stated in a report on NATO's strategy for the next ten years.

"While Russia is by economic and social measures a declining power, it has proven itself capable of territorial aggression and is likely to remain a chief threat facing NATO over the coming decade," – stated the report published on December 1, 2020 by a group of experts from various NATO countries chaired by former German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere and former Assistant US Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell. The report was prepared for NATO leadership as part of a discussion of the strategy for the next decade, until 2030.

The authors propose to strengthen NATO's ability to counter threats from Russia, expand cooperation with those wishing to join the alliance - with Ukraine and Georgia, and be prepared to strengthen sanctions against Moscow.

Recommendations:

1. NATO should continue the dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue, within parameters agreed at the Wales and Warsaw Summits, as the basis for its approach toward Russia.

2. NATO must continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a politically united, determined, and coherent way, without a return to 'business as usual' barring alterations in Russia's aggressive behaviour and its return to full compliance with international law. NATO unity on Russia is the most profound symbol of the political cohesion that is the basis of effective deterrence—the clearest demonstration that, when threatened, it responds with clarity and strength.

3. For this reason, NATO Allies must adhere to the common guidelines agreed at NATO when formulating security and defence-related national-level policies toward Russia, and must clearly and consistently communicate the indivisibility of the security of the Euro-Atlantic area, as unanimously expressed in Summit communiqués or, when cyber or other incidents are involved, in common attribution. "NATO should evolve the content of its dual-track strategy to ensure its continued effectiveness." "NATO must continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a politically united, determined and coherent way."

4. NATO must maintain adequate conventional and nuclear military capabilities and pos-

sess the agility and flexibility to confront aggression across the Alliance's territory, including where Russian forces are either directly or indirectly active, particularly on NATO's eastern flank. Non-U.S. Allies need to step up their efforts to ensure that their financial commitments and military contributions match NATO's strategic needs and are capable of delivering an effective balance between U.S. commitments and the development of other Allies' capabilities.

5. NATO should remain open to discussing peaceful co-existence and to react positively to constructive changes in Russia's posture and attitude. To be productive, such dialogue must be firm on principles and conducted from a position of unity and strength. Dialogue cannot replace necessary transparency or fulfilment of obligations Russia has committed to under international law and bilateral agreements, including refraining from using force. NATO Allies must therefore maintain unanimity in their effort to induce Russia to return to full compliance with international law, including via coordination in other international institutions. In all of its actions toward Russia, NATO should continue to show that it has no quarrel with the Russian people, and that its actions are in response to those of the current Russian Government.

6. The Alliance should continue to treat the NATO-Russia Council as the main platform to deliver political messages to Russia. NRC should serve as a platform to communicate to Russia a unified, two-fold political message: those related to confidence and security building measures and those aimed at underscoring the steadiness of Allied defence and deterrence postures. The conflict in Ukraine must remain high on the agenda of the NRC.

7. NATO should continue to develop de-confliction and confidence-building measures. It should maintain regular contact with Russia in areas of immediate threat to the security of the Alliance, including in arms control, military transparency, and maintaining channels of communication to avoid misunderstandings that could escalate into major crises.

8. Looking ahead, NATO should consider ways to evolve the content of its dual-track strategy to ensure its continued effectiveness. The Alliance should consider a dynamic template under which it takes steps to raise the costs for Russian aggression (e.g., coordinating to tighten rather than merely renew sanctions, according to Russian behaviour, exposing the facts of Russian covert activities in Ukraine, etc.) while at the same time supporting increased political outreach to negotiate arms control and risk reduction measures. Evolving the strategy in this way would preserve cohesion within NATO while providing a prospect for breaking the stalemate with Russia on NATO's terms.

9. NATO should designate a special unit within the JISD to monitor and assess how Russia-China cooperation in the military, technological and political fields, including coordination in disinformation and hybrid warfare, impacts Euro-Atlantic security, and provide regular updates to the NAC.

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Rumble in the Himalayas: India against China

The peculiarity of relations between India and China requires Ukraine to distance itself from their conflicts, and especially not to interfere in the Sino-Indian confrontation. In fact, we are talking about the quadrangle Ukraine - USA and West - China - India, when it comes to promoting Ukrainian interests in the region. At the same time, the geopolitical dynamics of Indo-Chinese relations indicates the sensitivity of both countries' relations with Russia. Therefore, in building its foreign policy towards India and China, Ukraine should take into account the peculiarities of these countries' relations with Russia.

India and China are Ukraine's two leading foreign policy partners. The status of relations between them can have a sensitive impact on our country's foreign trade balance. Relations with both countries are essential for Ukraine. On the one hand, at the end of 2019, China's share in Ukraine's foreign trade was 10% against about 2% with India. At the same time, India is the second partner of Ukraine after Egypt in terms of the largest foreign trade surplus (+ USD 1.3 billion in 2019), while with China, Ukraine has, on the contrary, the largest negative balance of foreign trade (- 5.5 billion for 2019).

Big Asian chessboard

Today, a review of the US strategy across the Asian continent opens a window for changing the configuration and balance of interests, including between Southeast Asia countries. This opens the way for an intensified leadership struggle between the major regional forces, including China and India. The aggravation of relations between these two Asian countries, which began in May this year, is the next stage of the geopolitical transformation of a large area from East and Central Asia to the western part of the Asian continent, the Arabian Peninsula.

Today, India is considered a full-fledged and independent regional player and competitor to China [1]. If China is the main threat to India, the PRC, for its part, considers India a secondary entity in the struggle for dominance in the region with the United States. There is a struggle between two major geopolitical concepts in Asia – the Chinese concept of the New Silk Road and the American concept of the Indo-Pacific region.

Competition and confrontation between India and China have several consequences, which include:

- escalating tensions in the South China Sea with US involvement;

- fight for Central Asia, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan;

- struggle for control over small Asian states (Bhutan, Nepal, etc.) and attempts to strengthen their regional positions by seizing territories;

- control over energy resources and trade routes. India and China are direct competitors for energy resources and, consequently, for the space between oil and gas production regions and their delivery routes to Asian consumers. In this sense, there is a struggle for control of production regions in Central Asia, particularly in Iran, as well as control over the Persian Gulf. Besides, such a struggle is taking place against the backdrop of a global energy confrontation between the oil monarchies of the Arab East, as well as Russia and the United States, including for sales markets in Asia;

- Military confrontation. India has recently been building up its military potential and modernizing its Air Forces at a fast pace. India is also intensively developing its naval capabilities, including for projecting power

into the zone of its traditional influence in the Indian Ocean. Today, China has become a direct competitor to India due to its expansion, primarily to the African region and to Tibet and Kashmir. Thus, if earlier India was not very interested in participating in American projects to contain China in South Asia and tried to share the zones of influence with China, today the change in China's policy forces it to actively participate in the struggle for the geopolitical configuration in entire Southeast Asia.

Unfinished map

The issue of the border between India and China remains unresolved. This caused a direct military conflict back in the 1950s and 60s [2]. According to some estimates, China is actually in no hurry to resolve the issue of the border delimitation not only with India but also its northern continental borders and in the south in the South China Sea area. Thus, the PRC leaves room for manoeuvre with the aim of territorial expansion and future pressure on the neighbouring countries.

India believes that the instruction to attack Indian positions this time came directly from the Chinese government. The border military stand-off with India has particularly worsened since May 2020, leading to a tougher clash between troops in June. At the same time, judging by the information reports and considering the course of negotiations on the settlement of the conflict between the parties, we are talking about the penetration of Chinese military personnel into territories disputed with India. According to the Indian side, most of the border conflicts between the two countries over the past 50-60 years are related either to illegal entry or the threat of China's expansion into India. As a rule, these conflicts ended with the growth of the People's Army of China's presence and the installation of Chinese facilities in these disputed territories [3].

At the same time, there are escalations in the highlands on the border with India and other Chinese territorial disputes in the South China Sea zone. We are talking about China's claims to the significant part of this sea in the confrontation with other states in the region – Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei. These conflicts are accompanied by an increased confrontation with the United States, Great Britain and other Western states.

According to observers, the simultaneous aggravation of China's territorial conflicts with neighbouring countries testifies a liaison between these conflicts. It is becoming a new feature of China's current regional and foreign policy. China's territorial policy in South Asia has a clearly defined systemic character, which, apparently, is now associated with the transformation of the New Silk Road into a full-fledged geopolitical project. Previously, this project existed in the form of unconsolidated disparate programs of individual Chinese corporations, and the feasibility of implementing these programs raised many questions even in China itself.

Conquering the Himalayas

China intends the attack on India's positions in these high-mountain areas as a signal of its geopolitical ambitions. This policy is, on the one hand, related to the issue of Tibet, and on the other – to the transport corridor to Pakistan via Kashmir.

Today, India is already close to becoming the de facto and the only possible counterweight centre for China in the region. This situation arose due to several circumstances:

- Unlike in previous years, India was able to catch up with China significantly and became a real competitor of the Celestial Empire in many areas. And in this status, India has become a welcome ally, both for the countries of the region and other geopolitical players (the United States, Russia, Turkey, and others) in the confrontation with China. By the way, China, unlike India, can be today proud of its friendship mainly with a narrow circle of countries in the region, primarily with Pakistan.

- India is becoming a magnet, pulling foreign and particularly Western investment away from China, especially amid the conflict with the United States. Thus, this country can gradually push back China as the main production centre of Asia.

- In recent years, India has rapidly tried to change the balance of power in its favour along the PRC's entire line of contact. India still managed to get ahead of China and achieve a strategic advantage in the border high-land triangle between China, Pakistan and India. This pass is a crossroads between Central and Southern Asia; it also intersects paths from the west and north of the Asian continent to Southeast Asia.

- India has accelerated investment and is actively developing road, transport and military infrastructure along the contact line; such construction enhances military logistics capabilities in the region. Infrastructure development has dramatically increased the military airport's capacity and strategic importance near the border with China and Pakistan, turning it into a springboard for direct access to their territory. Also, India plans to deploy modern air defence systems here and use the airfield for the latest French Raphale and heavier aircraft. Amid the worsening situation on the border, India has further increased its military presence in the region and plans to invest more in the completion of infrastructure construction. These infrastructure and military achievements of India in this region should radically change the balance of power in its favour, especially after the purchase of the first batch of the latest French fighters in July.

Fight for Central Asia

China sees India's 2019 changes to the Ladakh region's administrative status as an attempt to cut off the trade and economic corridor that runs from China through Pakistan and Afghanistan to Iran and Central Asia. The abolition of the autonomous status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, according to China, threatens the existence of the China-Pakistani Economic Corridor and its energy infrastructure projects in Pakistan and may bury one of the branches of the new Great Silk Road – its railway and continental part. In essence, China and India are competing to establish control over this route, where the parties' trade, economic, and energy interests overlap.

India and China are actually direct competitors for energy resources and, consequently, for ways to supply resources in the Middle East to consumers in Southeast Asia. According to the International Energy Agency, India meets almost 80% of its oil needs and 50% of its natural gas needs through imports, compared to 70% and 40% for China [4]. In this context, there is a struggle for control over production regions in Central Asia, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. The advantage in this direction is now on China's side, especially since India is deeply integrated into the Western economic and political-legal system. Therefore, unlike China, it must comply with the United States and Western countries' embargo on oil imports from Iran. In this regard, India is forced to become more actively involved in Russian energy projects in the Far East, a promising component of Russian-Indian relations. Russia is trying to attract Indian capital and labour force to develop its resources in the region, especially in contrast to China's encroachments on these territories.

According to the latest data, China began to oust India from Iran[5], intercepted Iranian ports from it, and project to build a railway from Iran to Afghanistan. We are talking about forming a full-scale and comprehensive strategic partnership between Iran and China, which will ultimately push India out of the Iranian market [6]. According to some estimates, this is how China responded to India's actions in the Kashmir region, namely, cutting off its way to Central Asia via Iran. Such a development could pave the way for strengthening China's role and changing the balance of power in the Middle East, including Syria.

New Order in Southeast Asia

Violent confrontations between the Himalayan triangle countries pose a significant threat, given the availability of nuclear weapons in them. It is noteworthy that India is actively building up its nuclear potential through close cooperation with Russia, including for developing the energy market of Southeast Asian countries. India has recently taken big steps to increase its military potential, modernise its air forces with the help of Russian air defence systems, French aircraft, and American weapons.

India is also intensively developing its naval forces, including for projecting influence in the Indian

Ocean. India's prioritisation of actions in the western and southern part of the Indian Ocean has historically allowed it to distance from the attempts to draw it into American schemes of confrontation with China in the Far East, eastern Indian Ocean, and South Asia. However, today China has become a direct competitor to India in the region due to Chinese expansion, primarily in Africa. Conversely, China's offensive against India's traditional zones of influence encourages the latter to build muscle more actively and join the geostrategic games in Southeast Asia.

In general, in the context of increasing confrontation with the United States in the South China Sea zone, it is now disadvantageous for China to open a new front of confrontation, especially with India [7]. Moreover, Beijing understands that the escalation of the regional conflict will only lead to even greater US intervention and an increase in the American presence near the border with the Middle Kingdom (and, consequently, to a complication of the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia). As a result of the latest conflict, many American strategists are rubbing their hands in anticipation of India's more decisive steps towards rapprochement with America [8]. Indeed, as a result of the conflict, India stopped looking back at China in its defence policy and began to actively involve the United States, the countries of the South China Sea and Australia in its military programs. If earlier India was not very interested in participating in American projects in South Asia and tried to share zones of influence with China, today, the change in China's policy forces it to join the struggle for the region's geopolitical configuration. Also, the deterioration of US relations with Pakistan, the strengthening of the Sino-Pakistani alliance, along the outflow of American capital from China amid the economic war increases the chance and potential of strengthening American interests towards India.

Southeast Asia chooses peace with China

The paradox of the region's situation is that in the fight against each other, the United States and China rely on almost the same allies – India, Japan, Australia, Vietnam, and other states of Southeast Asia. Now the United States is trying to unite these countries under the banner of struggle for democracy and freedom, against tyranny and communism, and thus, practically, revive the Cold War's ideological discourses. China, in turn, is negotiating with these countries to create a free trade zone.

Most likely, the US attempts to enlist India's support in the fight against China will again end in nothing, as almost all countries in the region choose a more moderate diplomatic and pragmatic economic line and do not want to spoil relations with China or choose between China and the United States. In particular, this position at the diplomatic level was brought to the American leader by the Prime Minister of Australia during a visit to the United States at the end of July 2020 [9]. India, according to many experts, is also unlikely to go far in its confrontation with China. Moreover, the traditional non-aligned policy (*Editorial reference: India has a non-aligned status and is a member of the International Non-Aligned Movement*) has actually become an integral part of this country's foreign policy culture.

Thus, India, being one of the main pillars of the American anti-Chinese alliance in Southeast Asia, is in no hurry to resort to open confrontations with China, nor does it prefer to join the crusade against China Administration of Donald Trump tried to impose on its allies. Despite the severe pressure from China, it is noteworthy that India is trying to relieve tension between the two countries through diplomatic means without resorting to a symmetrical response.

Thus, the peculiarity of relations between India and China requires from Ukraine's foreign policy a relative distancing, and especially non-interference in the Sino-Indian confrontation. We are talking about Ukraine - USA and West - China - India quadrilateral when promoting Ukrainian interests in the region. At the same time, the geopolitical dynamics of Indian-Chinese relations indicates the sensitivity of relations between both countries and Russia. Therefore, building a foreign policy towards India and China, Ukraine should consider the peculiarities of relations between these countries and Russia.

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The Ukrainian Prism Foreign Policy Council with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation in cooperation with partner-organizations: CSO Strategic & Security Studies Group, East European Security Research Initiative Foundation, Pylyp Orlyk Institute for Democracy, Black Sea Center for Security Environment Research (BSCFSER), Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation, Centre for Global Studies Strategy, Civil Network OPORA, has finalized a report "Rethinking deoccupation policy of Ukraine in the framework of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine".

The purpose of this study is not only to outline the views of stakeholders on the deoccupation process, but also to analyse the motives and interests of Ukraine, Russia and other international players (assessing the sustainability of their positions and factors that may determine their change), take into account relevant cases of deoccupation and reintegration in other countries of the region (analysis of errors and successful approaches that affected the course of deoccupation and reintegration, and should be taken into account in Ukraine), analyse previous analytical developments on this issue (to identify ineffective approaches and demonstrated their falsity/inefficiency and counter productive-

ness), and offer recommendations for a new policy of deoccupation of the Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by Russia (the Crimean Peninsula, Black and Azov Seas and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions) as part of Russia's undeclared hybrid war against Ukraine.

The team of authors made efforts to:

- demonstrate a comprehensive and politically neutral position of a wide segment of the Ukrainian expert community;

- to strengthen the negotiating position of our state in the international arena, adding arguments to Ukrainian diplomats and statesmen who have the opportunity to appeal to the Ukrainian expert and public position, as well as to domestic and international experience set out in the Report;

- develop recommendations that could be the basis for developing new and improving existing policies on deoccupation of TOT.

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