

Policy brief

Липень 2019

Black Sea security: New challenges

(II quarter 2019)¹

1. General assessment of the security situation in the Black Sea region

As of July 2019, the security situation in the Black Sea region is estimated to be unstable. There are signs of further deterioration. Some parts of the territories of the Black Sea countries remain under the occupation of the Russian Federation: Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali district, Georgia); Transnistria (Moldova); Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, parts of Lugansk and Donetsk regions (Ukraine). At the same time, official Moscow continues to disregard these facts, despite the position of a number of international organizations - the UN, the OSCE, NATO and the EU. For example, in the Luxembourg Declaration² of the 28th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of 4-8 July 2019 recognized such occupation and expressed the call for the de-occupation of the territories of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, as well as full respect for their sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

Though the Putin project "Novorossiya" failed, Russia continues to use hybrid war technology. It builds on the continuation of her aggression against Ukraine around her propaganda stamp of the "civil war in Ukraine", despite thousands of material evidence of Russia's direct military action against Ukraine. This testifies to the immutability of the goals of the Russian Federation regarding the taking of all Ukraine under its control. At the same time, the Kremlin's military assets are considered as levers of pressure and can be used to influence Ukrainian society in support of pro-Russian political forces and Ukrainian authorities to resolve the conflict on Russian conditions.

Against the backdrop of a dangerous tendency towards a dysfunction of the collective West, the actual surrender of the Council of Europe to Russian expansion and restraint of the EU, the only organization of Western civilization capable of confronting the hybrid aggression of Russia remains the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That is why NATO and its member countries are constantly in the sight of the Kremlin, and partner countries in the Black Sea region, first of all - Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, are undergoing constant blows from the RF.

Russia has shown that it is not going to stop, but is on the way of escalation. As a result, today one can state the growing Russian military presence outside the Black Sea region with access to the Mediterranean - in Syria and Libya, as well as in other regions - in Venezuela and Central Africa.

At the same time, Russia masks its multidimensional multi-frontal hybrid aggression under the slogans of securing peace and stability, which is becoming a dangerous challenge for genuine peacekeeping processes.

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² <https://www.oscepa.org/documents/annual-sessions/2019-luxembourg/3882-luxembourg-declaration-eng/file>

2. Challenges, threats and signs of deteriorating security situation in the Black Sea region

Political domain

From the beginning of occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia continues to expand its presence in the Black Sea region, producing new challenges and threats to regional security. Having captured Crimea and related infrastructure, as well as creating new infrastructure objects (energy bridge, Kerch Bridge, Turkish Stream, etc.), the Russian Federation expands its controlled areas with the ultimate goal of turning the Black Sea into a region of Russian influence.

According to the Kremlin's plan, this should create a basis for further Russia's advance on the West as far away as it has enough resources, and to what extent it will be allowed. At the same time, the Black Sea region is not a final goal for Russia - it is only a springboard for entering the Mediterranean region. Such a policy of the Russian Federation poses a threat to the security not only of the Black Sea countries, but also of the EU and NATO as a whole.

The Kremlin is worried about the international non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea, and therefore Russia is trying to use any auxiliary mechanisms, at least for its partial legalization. One of such mechanisms is the holding of "international" forums and visits of foreign officials, mostly from right-radical pro-Russian political forces, to the occupied Crimea. Thus, in April 2019, three deputies of the German Bundestag from the right-populist party "Alternative for Germany" visited the Yalta Economic Forum, using diplomatic passports. Also, Forum was attended by the Supreme Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Sheikh Muhammad Ahmed Hussein. In May, a delegation from five deputies of Kyrgyzstan illegally visited occupied by Russia Crimea at the invitation of "Crimean deputies".³

In an effort to overcome international isolation, Moscow is making efforts to develop relations at the highest level with the leaders of the Black Sea countries, giving priority to Turkey and Bulgaria. For example, on April 8, 2019, in Moscow, a meeting between President Putin and President of Turkey Recep Erdogan was held in Moscow to discuss energy issues and the situation in Syria, and on June 6 in St. Petersburg, Putin had a meeting with President of Bulgaria Rumen Radev. The development of Turkish-Russian relations and cooperation, in particular with regard to the purchase by Turkey of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile complexes and the joint implementation of the construction of the Istanbul Channel bypassing the Bosphorus, threatens deepening disagreements between Ankara and the United States and other NATO countries. The influence of the Russian Federation on the Bulgarian leadership also has negative consequences for the Black Sea security. In 2016, the official Sofia did not support the idea of creating the NATO united navy force in the Black Sea, and today it has the same position.

The Kremlin's destructive policy and leveling the interests and moods of Black Sea countries' societies lead to an aggravation of the internal political situation. The main challenge was the participation of Russian parliamentarians in the Orthodoxy Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the statement of the RF State Duma deputy Sergei Gavrilov from the position of the Georgian Speaker's chair in June 2019 in Tbilisi, which provoked massive anti-Russian protests in Georgia. The results were: hundreds of people were wounded; Irakli Kobakhidze, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, resigned; the Russian leadership responded by a ban on Russian airlines to Georgia, and Russian-Georgian relations reached a higher level of tensions.

The close affiliation of oligarchs in post-Soviet countries with politicians and authorities, under certain conditions, can lead to a sharp aggravation of the internal political situation. This happened in Moldova when, after the legitimate formation of a new government in June 2019, the Democratic Party of the Moldavian oligarch Volodymyr Plakhotnyuk organized mass protests, illegally demanding that the government would be dissolved.

Unresolved conflicts in the Black Sea region have become a source of criminality, which penetrates into the territories controlled by the national governments, including Russia, and is turning into international organized crime. At the same time, such a transformation is stimulated from the Kremlin under the slogan of "international cooperation" of unrecognized territories, in particular: in

³ <https://qha.com.ua/novosti/pyat-kirgizskih-deputatov-nezakonno-posetili-krym/>

January 2019, "Inter-Parliamentary agreements" on cooperation between the occupation authorities of Crimea and the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" were signed in Crimea; on March 15, the "DNR" and "LNR" delegations took part in a meeting of the Council of the State Duma of the Russian Federation in Crimea; in April 2019, the head of the Russian occupation authorities in Crimea S.Aksionov visited the manufacture exhibition of producers of so-called "DNR"; in May 2019 representatives of the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" and Abkhazia took part in the solemn meeting on the occasion of the end of the VI convocation of the parliament of unrecognized South Ossetia. Such contacts do not promote economic development, but allow establishing channels of illegal supply of goods. For example, the company "Vneshtorgservis", registered in South Ossetia, is engaged in deliveries of coal mined in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. One of the ways of supplying illegally mined coal passes through the port of Ochamchire in Abkhazia.

Military domain

Russia was and remains the primary military threat in the region after the occupation of Crimea. The annexation of the peninsula allowed it to use Black Sea Fleet as an instrument of increasing its influence throughout the region. Russia is trying to militarize the Black Sea - Azov region and turn it into its own Mare Nostrum. To do this the Kremlin uses the slogan "counteracting hostile NATO". "The illegal mounting military presence of the Russian Federation in Crimea and territorial waters of Ukraine represent the most serious threats to security and stability in the OSCE area," the OSCE Luxembourg Declaration states.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea has already received six submarines of the Varshavianka class, three new Admiral Grigorovich class missile frigates, and Vasil Bykov patrol corvettes. All ships are equipped with Caliber cruise missiles, capable of striking targets throughout the Black Sea region and parts of the Mediterranean. It is planned to commission three more Grigorovich frigates, six Vasil Bykov patrol corvettes, submarines of the 636 project, and small-scale missile ships of the Buyan-M and Karakurt types. In Sevastopol and Novorossiysk, two missile brigades of the coast guard are deployed, each with 3-5 divisions of the Bastion coastal missile system and 1-2 divisions of the Bal coastal missile system. The Crimean grouping of the Russian Armed Forces also replenished with new aircrafts, in particular, twelve aircrafts Su-30SM and a significant number of helicopters Ka-52 and Mi-28N. The RF Army in Crimea has been stepped up with 152-mm Msta howitzers and Tornado rocket launchers.

Such deliveries of weapons to the occupied Crimea demonstrate the development of the offensive function of the Russian Federation, which threatens not only Ukraine or Georgia, but also makes a potential zone of defeat of the European country (up to France). The formed naval grouping of the Russian Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean region extends the ability of the RF to operate in the Middle East. Its logistic support relies on the Black Sea Fleet.

One of the key challenges for the Black Sea region is the actual blockade by Russia of the Sea of Azov by creating an A2/AD (Anti Access / Area Denial) area there. There is a reasonable threat, because, as soon as the Sea of Azov is closed, Russia will switch all efforts to the Black Sea, starting from its northern part. So, in July 2019, Russia closed a part of the Black Sea area that resulted in the correction of the plan to conduct international exercises Sea Breeze 2019. Moreover, the Russian ship Smetlivyi on July 10 went to the restricted area of the exercises in violation of international norms.

The threat of Russia's deployment of nuclear weapons in the occupied peninsula, which was marked by the OSCE PA at its Annual session on July 4-8, 2019, exists. Volodymyr Yelchenko, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, warned about this threat, speaking at the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference on April 30, 2019.

Information and cyber threats

Russian activity in cyberspace is a serious challenge for the security of Ukraine and other Black Sea countries. Russia uses cyberspace for intelligence activities, as well as for secret access to cybersecurity networks of state administrations and establishment of remote control over critical infrastructure objects in order to cause maximum damage to Ukraine and other Black Sea countries.

Among the identified Russian groups working in the cyberspace, there were: "CyberBercut" (Sofacy / Fancy Bear / APT28) - attacks on sites of state bodies and public organizations of Ukraine and a number of Western countries; "SPRUT" ("System of counteraction to Ukrainian terrorism") - attacks on official sites of the leadership of regional state administrations, ministries, special services, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; Snake - attack on the office of the Prime Minister of Ukraine; Uroboros - attacks on web resources of state authorities, mass media, financial institutions; Black Energy - attacks on power systems.

In March 2019, during the presidential election campaign in Ukraine, a high-quality targeted phishing attack was recorded, and it was covered under the Center for Social and Marketing Studies (SOCIS). As a lure, "informational materials" on the socio-political situation in Ukraine were used. In July, a campaign to distribute versions of WinRAR, Winbox, and Internet Download Manager, which contained Trojan code, was detected. The APT StrongPity group was suspected in that, and this testified to the ongoing activity of the RF in the cyberspace.

Very dangerous activities are spoofing attacks on navigation systems, in particular GPS navigation, in the Black Sea region. Distortion of the signal may cause the system to mismatch the location of an object, and a ship or an aircraft cannot correctly determine its own location or lose access to the positioning system. The report by the American non-governmental organization C4ADS proves that Russia is using technologies that disorientate the GPS satellite navigation system, in particular in the occupied Crimea, which poses a significant threat to civilian GPS systems. There were 9 883 cases of Russian interference with GNSS in 10 locations, which affected the operation of navigation systems of 1 311 civilian vessels. Ukrainian and foreign users of GPS navigation devices repeatedly suffered from Russian intervention in their work in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. On June 22, 2017, 22 ships fixed naval navigation breakdown in the Black Sea. Spoofing attacks were felt by Ukrainian warships during the first passage of the Kerch Strait in September 2018. In February-March 2019 in the Sea of Azov, there were three cases of failures of the GPS navigation system and AIS marine system.

Russian information offensive against the Black Sea region continued with a rather high intensity. Among the most significant inform-companies of Russia, one can mention the following: the preparation of Russian TV channel RT and pro-Russian Ukrainian TV channel NEWSONE of teleconference in violation of Ukrainian legislation; the transfer of responsibility for protest provocations in Georgia to the western countries; the information company against conducting international exercises Sea Breeze 2019. In the context of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine, the Russian Federation disseminated information in support to pro-Russian political forces, first of all - the "Opposition Platform - For Life".

Economic domain

Since 2017, Russia has been blocking the Sea of Azov (creation of A2/AD zones), which is accompanied by permanent stoppings (for more than 30 hours) of Ukrainian and foreign ships sailing to Ukrainian ports on Azov. This damages the Ukrainian ports (first of all ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk) to billions of dollars. For example, the port of Mariupol is forced to switch to a four-day working week, and this loss accounts from 15 to 50 thousand dollars a day. At the same time, the "Kerch Bridge", built by the Russian Federation in violation of international law (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982), impedes Ukraine's economic development by limiting the size of ships that can enter the ports of Ukraine on the Sea of Azov. The consequences of such actions are: losses of Ukrainian and foreign shipowners; loss of European taxpayers due to the increased cost of transportation of goods; deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the Ukrainian territories along the Sea of Azov, which has a negative impact on the internal situation in this region.

The Russian Federation began to apply a similar strategy in the northern part of the Black Sea, where the sea transport corridor passes into the Odesa-Nikolaev port hub. To this end, Russia turned captured Ukrainian gas platforms into military facilities, with the creation of so-called "denied access areas" along them. As a result, the shipping corridor turned into a narrow 12-mile stripe. It also poses a threat to international maritime traffic along the Danube transport corridor (International Transport Corridor No. 7).

Russia seeks to integrate the occupied Crimea into a system of regional maritime connections, and captured Crimean resorts to the international recreational network. International non-recognition and appropriate sanctions create barriers to achieving this goal, but this challenge remains relevant. Crimea is excluded from many tourist databases, for example - Booking or Airbnb, but English-speaking TripAdvisor still provides information about hotels in the occupied Crimea, although without the booking option⁴. Foreign tourists, who, using such information, visit Crimea not from the Ukrainian territory by land, are breaking the legislation of Ukraine.

Energy domain

Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea turned the peninsula into an energy- and water-deficient region. In order to compensate for the electricity shortage in the occupied Crimea, in March 2019, new power units at Balaklavskaya TPP and Tavriyskaya TPP with a capacity of 470 MW were put into operation, where the German Siemens turbines were illegally installed, in violation of the EU sanctions and the contract of the Russian company Tekhnopromeksport. At the same time, the highest level of the Russian authorities asserted the German government that purchased German turbines would not get into Crimea, but the Moscow Court rejected a lawsuit of Siemens that marked the danger of economic cooperation with the Russian Federation.

At the same time, Russia's import of foreign energy equipment, which is subject to international sanctions (as in the case of Siemens), is used by the Kremlin to test the international sanctions regime and its monitoring system for durability.

Russia uses the energy of the occupied Crimea as a basis for increasing its dependence on Russian infrastructure and resources. The main consumers of energy in the occupied peninsula are Russian military facilities. Plans of the Russian Federation to increase electricity generation in Crimea to 2225 MW by 2020, while the maximum demand of the peninsula is at 1250 MW, indicates a further increase of the number of Russian military units in Crimea.

Russia continues construction of the TurkStream pipeline: after the completion of laying the first line of the gas pipeline, Russia announced the beginning of the construction of its second line; Turkey builds an underground infrastructure to extend the gas pipeline through its territory; Bulgaria agreed a contractor of works - the Russian company GDEB, to build a continuation of the TurkStream pipeline in its territory. As outlined in the OSCE PA Luxembourg Declaration, this project will potentially be used as a means of "the political or economic coercion of supply-dependent participating States (OSCE)".

Human rights

Since the beginning of the annexation of Crimea, and especially since 2016, the Russian Federation has been pursuing a targeted long-term policy of repression, intimidation of the local population in the occupied territories. The goals of the special services of the Russian Federation are not indifferent habitants of Crimea, patriots who did not accept the annexation, public figures, journalists, former officers of the Navy. According to the Crimean human rights group, the number of captives of the Kremlin in the occupied peninsula and those serving sentences in Russia is over 100 people. Most of them are representatives of the indigenous people of Crimea - the Crimean Tatars. They are baselessly accused of "extremism" and "appeals to violations of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation", "the creation of terrorist organizations".

Against the backdrop of a new wave of persecution in Crimea against dissenters, it becomes clear that the release of Ukrainian captives of the Kremlin, as well as 24 imprisoned sailors and prisoners of war in the ORDLO, is possible only in the case of consolidation of international pressure on the leadership of the Russian Federation, strengthening of sanctions precisely because of brutal human rights violations, repression and falsification of criminal cases. Such sanctions should be as rigorous and consistent as possible for the international community.

⁴ <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g313972-Crimea-Vacations.html>

3. Proposals for strengthening security and regional security cooperation

The consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has been going on for more than 5 years, for the Black Sea and European security are still not well understood and appreciated. Russia has become a source of hybrid threats not only for Ukraine but also for Europe as a whole, which needs to continue monitoring its actions to identify signs of new acts of hybrid warfare and to identify mechanisms for counteraction. For this purpose at this stage it is proposed the following:

1. It is necessary to withdraw the policy of pacification of the Russian Federation, which only leads to stirring up appetites of the Kremlin and its further aggression, as in the case of the restoration of Russia in the PACE. International organizations should clearly indicate the responsibility of the RF for violating international law and use all possible mechanisms for its return to the legal framework.
2. It is advisable to recommend to the North Atlantic Alliance to continue to build up forces and assets in the Black Sea region to confront Russian military aggression and secure the necessary balance of power there.
3. Given the restrictions on the permanent presence of NATO naval forces in the Black Sea, more attention should be paid to assist developing the naval forces of the Black Sea member countries, especially Romania, and partner countries - Georgia and Ukraine. The development of their naval potential and the active development of cooperation and interaction between them should become an effective lever in counteracting Russian military aggression in the Black Sea.
4. It is advisable to create a Black Sea regional platform for non-governmental monitoring of the security situation involving the largest possible number of non-governmental players from EU and NATO member states and partner countries.
5. Black Sea countries should refrain from implementing joint Russian infrastructure projects that Moscow uses to expand its expansion.
6. Ukraine, the United States, the EU and other international players need to establish a clear system of monitoring compliance with their sanctions against the Russian Federation and punishing their perpetrators.
7. The US should develop a system for monitoring spoofing attacks to detect the facts of interference with the operation of GPS systems and punishment of those responsible.
8. The countries of the Black Sea region should develop cyber security cooperation, in particular, with the exchange of information on cyber-attacks and the experience of countering them.
9. International tourist agencies and operators of tourist databases should exclude all tourist objects located in Crimea until it is completely de-occupied by the Russian Federation.
10. In order to consolidate international pressure on the leadership of the Russian Federation, international organizations, especially PACE and OSCE, should impose punishment against Russia precisely because of the brutal violation of human rights, repressions and falsification of criminal cases.