

SYNERGING



BLACK SEA SECURITY

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HIGHLIGHTS:

DUAL-PURPOSE
GAS PIPELINES

RUSSIA
IN THE SEA OF AZOV

U.S. POLICY





On September 19, 2018 in Bratislava, the Slovak Republic in the Main Square (Hlavné námestie), a sit-down protest for the release of Oleg Sentsov and the Ukrainian prisoners of the Kremlin, took place. The action was organized by the indifferent Slovak intellectuals, artists, human rights defenders with slogan “MY SME OLEG SENCOV” (We are all Oleg Sentsov). The participants of the 4th Slovak-Ukrainian Forum joined the protest. Photo by Jana Bučka.



President of the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI, Mykhailo Gonchar at the energy security discussion panel, the 28th Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdroj, Poland.

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**Members of the editorial board Oleksii Bessarabov
and Dmytro Shtybylykov are political prisoners
of the Kremlin. Since 2016 they have been kept
in prison by the FSB on the fabricated charges.**

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Dear Readers,

You keep in your hands the 32nd – since the beginning of publication – issue of the magazine *Black Sea Security*. The key topic is the use by Russia of civilian marine gas infrastructure for military purposes. It fits perfectly in the technology of hybrid warfare. In this case – at sea. Pipelines such as the Nord Stream, the Nord Stream 2, and the TurkStream can become long-range zones for intelligence operations against NATO in the Baltic and Black Seas. However, not only intelligence equipment can be installed there, but under certain conditions, considering the rapid development of robotization and compaction of the means of destruction, pipeline corridors could become a place of combat alert missions of submarine drones for offensive operations. To know more about what Russia is doing on the Black sea shelf at the seized JSC Chornomornaftogaz's infrastructure read research "Offshore Gas Infrastructure in the Russian Counteraction to NATO on the Eastern Flank: Potential for the Hybrid Use in the Black and Baltic seas," conducted by the experts of the Center for Global Studies "Strategy XXI" with the involvement of specialists and veterans of the Ukrainian Navy.

The U.S. policy on the Russian-Ukrainian war is in the focus of the research interest of Vitalii Martyniuk. Moscow tries to settle the Ukrainian issue at the level of face-to-face communication of Putin with President Trump, but the U.S. governing system is multi-dimensional, and its balanced construction guarantees sustainability of the American position. Washington has provided quite clear signals – Russia must admit its guilt for the war in eastern Ukraine and leave all the occupied territories.

The Western Balkans fell under the spotlight of this issue of the *Black Sea Security*. Vencislav Bujić, Head of the Serbian-Euro-Atlantic Cooperation from Belgrade and Denis Hadžović, Director of the Centre for Security Studies (CSS) from Sarajevo, described in detail Russian influences in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the mechanisms of spreading Russian propaganda and

anti-NATO and anti-EU activities. "Moscow was trying to expand its influence in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The purpose of Moscow is to stop them on the path to NATO membership", – notes Denis Hadžović. "The Serbian authorities have created favorable conditions for the Russian "informational propaganda tube" to freely fill the information space of Serbia. Serbia and its population are uninformed about Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, there is no information, and the information that comes is not enough ", – notes Vencislav Bujić.

A well-known Russian expert, Professor Yuri Fedorov, highlights Russian intervention in Syria, its impact on the Black Sea region and possible consequences. It is well-known that the "Syrian Express" is provided mainly by sea not from the Black Sea ports of Russia, but from the occupied Sevastopol. In the article "War in Syria and Security in the Black Sea Region," specially prepared for this issue of the *Black Sea Security*, Yuri Fedorov studied the possible scenarios of a new turn of the war in Syria in connection with the Idlib knot of confrontation between Russia, the USA, Turkey, Iran, Israel and its consequences for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions, as well as for Ukraine.

Head of the European Bureau of the BSS magazine Matteo Cazzulani in his article "Salvini – Orban Tandem: Alliance for Redesign of Europe à la Russe," highlights not only the prospects for a new political bloc to gain a positive result in following elections to the European Parliament that could lead to tectonic changes within the EU and affect its foreign policy. The author focuses on the specific relationship between Salvini and the Russian authorities, which was consolidated through frequent visits of Salvini to Moscow and gave rise to an agreement between the "Lega Nord" and Putin's "United Russia."

Professor of the University of Rennes 2 – Upper Brittany, Cécile Vaissié, specializing in Russian and Soviet studies, provided the magazine with interesting research on the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in France, the religious

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mechanisms for the spread of the "Russian world" and the use of compatriots as agents of influence in Western Europe.

In this issue, we paid attention to the south of Ukraine, in particular, the Odesa region "security passport," prepared by the Center for International Security and situation in the Sea of Azov. The Institute for Strategic Black Sea Studies, headed by Andrii Klymenko, provides deep and systematic monitoring of the Azov and Black Sea basins, as well as analysis of new round of hybrid aggression, which Russia have been waged against Ukraine for the last five years. Also, we traditionally paid attention to publications of foreign think tanks in different countries. Oksana Ishchuk has monitored foreign sources, on the basis of which it can be stated that the Black Sea has not yet turned into a Russian lake. The Kremlin's actions in the region, although they are not in the epicenter of Western attention, do not remain in the shadow.

What is not mentioned in the current issue, but still remains in focus of our attention and will be highlighted in the next issue of the magazine, is a problem of the Ukrainian prisoners of the Kremlin, including two members of the editorial board from Sevastopol, Oleksii Bessarabov and Dmytro Shtyblykov, who remain detained by the Putin regime. Dmytro Shtyblykov is in the strict-regime penal colony in the city of Omsk (Russia), where he is serving a 5-year prison term for a fraudulent "saboteur case". Oleksii Bessarabov together with

the other 'saboteur' Volodymyr Dudka have been detained in the pre-trial detention centre for two years. Oleksii rejects any allegations, insisting on fabrication of the case. According to our estimates, the FSB through the occupational "justice" prepared a "saboteurs' show," which collapsed though being fully controlled by the occupational court, since everything is *cousu de fils blanc*. The Kremlin regime, increasingly vulnerable to international pressure, especially in the face of the hunger strike by the "terrorist" Sentsov, will try to prove, in a peculiar propaganda way, that "saboteurs" are real, even in circumstances where no sabotage took place in the territory of the occupied Crimea and Sevastopol. We will keep you informed on the "extremists", "terrorists", "saboteurs", "spies" cases, fabricated by the Kremlin's repressive regime in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Finally, as a bonus to our readers, we publish the infographics of the global pro-Kremlin expert propaganda network of the new research of Dr. Kateryna Smaglyi, which depicts Kremlin ties with think tanks, universities and research centers, as well as Putin's kleptocracy in Europe and the United States.

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Offshore Gas Infrastructure in the Russian Counteraction to NATO on the Eastern Flank: Potential for a Hybrid Use in the Black and Baltic Seas

The negative attitude of Russia towards NATO is a well-known fact and the Russian leadership believes it is necessary to declare it, in any way possible. “NATO’s attempts to deploy new bases and military infrastructure near our borders pose a direct threat to us, and the reaction will be extremely negative,”- said Vladimir Putin at a meeting with Russian diplomats on July 19, 2018 [1]. Previously, at the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg on June 1, 2017, he warned Sweden on its possible attempts to join the Alliance: “If Sweden joins NATO this will affect our relations in a negative way because we will consider that the infrastructure of the military bloc now approaches us from the Swedish side. We will interpret that as an additional threat for Russia and we will think about how to eliminate this threat...[2].”

In fact, Russia won’t think as it has not only invented it all already, but has also implemented it. Putin’s declarations is the way to disguise what has already been done or is being done. Under the guise of propagandistic theory of the threat from NATO infrastructure expansion, which was actually provoked by aggression against Ukraine and saber-rattling near the Baltic States, Russia carries out a complex of measures aimed at deterring and defeating Alliance’s Eastern flank when necessary. The key to success is effective intelligence, in particular by applying signals intelligence (SIGINT) and even the use of unconventional methods.

In Europe, gas pipelines as the Nord Stream are only evaluated by the business coordinate system. However, Russian gas flows incorporate additional dimensions, i.e. corruption. There is also a military dimension, which fits in the technology of polyhybression of Russia – multi-frontal and multidimensional hybrid aggression the Kremlin maintains against Ukraine and the West including non-military means. It is written a lot about this legalized practice of exporting gas and corruption, notably in the Mirror Weekly (see “Victory of gazocracy over democracy or on Russian flows of European gas corruption” and “Kremlin’s Gas technologies: Nord Stream 2, Moscow – Salisbury, Zug – Berlin”).

The Baltics in focus

The southern coast of the Baltic Sea can be considered a NATO coast as all three Baltic States, Poland and Germany are its members. Even though Sweden and Finland stay neutral, they represent the Nordic part of the Western world, as members of the EU. Russia didn’t ignore NATO’s approaches, which were outlined at the July Summit in 2018 in Brussels and then determined in its Declaration [3]: “19. ...We are reinforcing our maritime posture and have taken concrete steps to improve our overall maritime situational awareness...Through an enhanced exercise programme, we will reinvigorate our collective maritime warfighting skills in key areas, including anti-submarine warfare, am-

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phibious operations, and protection of sea lines of communications...”

“52. The Alliance has developed mutually beneficial security cooperation with Finland and Sweden on a broad range of issues. We remain dedicated to further strengthening our cooperation, including through close political consultations, shared situational awareness, and joint exercises, in order to respond to common challenges in a timely and effective manner.”

It serves as the basis for Moscow to grow propaganda about “strengthening of NATO” as well as it explains the necessity for deploying their own intelligence capabilities. Per Kremlin’s logic, the Alliance is preparing for aggression against Russia and trying to engage neutral Sweden and Finland to create regional military-strategic advantages over the Russian Federation.

According to the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030, which were approved by the Russian President in 2017, it faces a range of threats as deployment (buildup) of strategic high-precision sea-based non-nuclear weapons systems and sea-based ballistic missile defense systems by foreign states in the waters adjacent to the territory of the Russian Federation. Therefore, every time the US Navy ship enters the Baltic Sea equipped with guided missiles and ballistic missile defense systems such as Aegis (ABMD) as well as Landing Crafts is identified by the Russian Federation as a threat to its sea lines of communications and the offshore energy infrastructure, in particular to underwater pipelines, oil, liquefied natural gas and petroleum products terminal transfer facilities, situated in the coastal zone of the Russian sector of the Baltic Sea.

In accordance with the policy documents of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, among others tasks the following are assigned to the Navy:

- creation and support of conditions to ensure security of the Russian Federation's marine activities in the world ocean;*
- identification of communications and equipment of the ocean and marine theaters in strategically important parts of the world ocean;*
- study of probable areas of combat operations and conditions of use of various types of Navy forces,*

- use of weapons and technical equipment;*
- exploration of the activities of foreign ships and aircraft.*

Paragraph 33 of the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030, states: *“With the development of high-precision weapons, the Navy of the Russian Federation faces a qualitatively new objective: destruction of enemy's military and economic potential by striking its vital facilities from the sea [4].”*

It is definitely worth paying attention to some blunt statements from Moscow. In particular, last year Kremlin’s chief foreign policy advisor Sergey Karaganov was quite frank in his interview with the German magazine, Spiegel: *“Now, fears in countries like Poland, Lithuania and Latvia are to be allayed by NATO stationing weapons there... In a crisis, we will destroy exactly these weapons. Russia will never again fight on its own territory! ... We currently find ourselves in a situation where we don't trust you in the least ... You should know that we are smarter, stronger and more determined [5].”*

These actions by Russia in line with “Karaganov’s scheme” require corresponding intelligence capabilities. They have long existed in the Baltics and are constantly being improved. In the context of post-Crimean realities for the Russian subversive activities in Europe, it is about their development, principally about the attack on the NATO forces. Evidently, the Baltic Operations Zone cannot be compared to the ocean theatre. Nevertheless, it more and more resembles a zone of confrontation with NATO as Russia identifies troops of the NATO member states that arrived in Poland and the Baltic States, as a threat. Elements of the anti-missile system represented by the land-based facility “Aegis Ashore” and the US Naval Support Facility in Redzikowo, Poland, as well as four Arleigh Burke-class destroyers based at Naval Station Rota, Spain, which are regularly on duty in the Baltic Sea, are constantly in the spotlight of the Russian Baltic Fleet Intelligence Service, aviation aircrafts and surveillance satellites. It is not yet known where the ‘Fort Trump’ will be located, but in any case, logistical support to the American base will be partly provided by sea through the Baltic using ports in Szczecin and Gdansk. Therefore, the routes to these ports will be in the focus of

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special attention of intelligence units of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Federation.

In the 2000's, during the Nord Stream design stage, Russia has already tried to increase its signals intelligence capabilities by using a unique chance to mask it out with "the civil infrastructure equipment." It was planned to construct a service platform within 68 km from the Swedish island Gotland. However, in 2006 the Swedish Defense Research Agency and the Ministry of Defense of Sweden made a timely assessment and realized the dual-purpose of the structure in the middle of the Baltic Sea, especially an opportunity to use it for deploying sea surface and underwater surveillance systems for the needs of the intelligence systems of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Federation. The construction of that service platform was declined

by Sweden that forced Russia to revise the gas pipeline project and adjust the route. That was a defeat for the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, but it did not stop the attempts to use civil marine and gas infrastructure to resolve military tasks, primarily for the signals intelligence.

Over 1220 km of the Russian four-branch gas pipeline corridor - the existing Nord Stream and the potential Nord Stream 2 – there is a chance for the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Federation to provide an advantage over NATO forces in the operational space of the Baltic. In essence, the gas pipeline corridor is a lengthy playground where Russia can hide additional mobile intelligence capabilities to scan underwater and surface environment along the entire coast of NATO.



Fig. 1. The corridor of Russian offshore gas pipelines Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 in the Baltic Sea
<https://bizresurs.com.ua/evropeyskaya-komissiya-utverdit-nord-stream-2.html>

When the United States this year emphasized that Russia can use the Nord Stream 2 to resolve tasks that are unrelated to the gas transportation, i.e. intelligence activities, it was perceived with skepticism in the EU. It refers to the statement made in May by Sandra Oudkirk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Diplomacy: "The planned Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Ger-

many raises U.S. intelligence and military concerns since it would allow Moscow to place new listening and monitoring technology in the Baltic Sea" and the following June reaction in Europe, that the U.S. exaggerated the situation. Amongst others, Claus Hjort Frederiksen, Danish Minister of Defence was very skeptical referring to Danish Security and Intelligence Service assessment.

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However, confidence in the US, that the Russian Federation might use civil infrastructure, in this case gas pipelines routes, to deploy intelligence equipment, has valid reasons. In order to find confirmations of aforementioned, it is worth looking into what Russia is doing in the Black Sea.

Situation at the Black Sea

The drilling rigs of the Ukrainian state-owned company Chornomornaftogaz (a subsidiary of

Naftogaz of Ukraine, 100 per cent of shares) were captured by the Russian Special Forces in March 2014, during an operation on the occupation of Crimea, became a proper playground for the Black Sea Fleet of Russian Federation to practice signals intelligence based on civilian marine infrastructure located in the north-western part of the Black Sea.



Photo 1. A ship of Russian Black Sea Fleet patrols near fixed offshore platform in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine.

The first step was to ensure the legal basis for military operation by issuing an order of the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation "On establishing the boundaries of the security zone around artificial structures located on the continental shelf of the Black Sea." The main purpose was to ensure security and safety of the captured objects of the Ukrainian company, in the exclusive economic zone of Ukraine, which was named State Unitary Enterprise of the Crimean Republic

‘Chernomorneftegaz’ (hereinafter SUE ChNG) after occupation and illegal annexation of the peninsula by Russia. Such artificial structures in gas and gas-condensate fields (GF and GCF) in the Ukrainian sector of the Black Sea are: fixed offshore platforms (FOPs, *укр. МСН*), jack-up drilling rigs (JDR, *укр. СПБУ*), wellhead platforms (WP, *укр. БК*), central processing platforms (CPPs, *укр. ЦТН*).

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Table 1.

Artificial structures	Regulatory range of security zone around the objects located on the offshore gas and gas- condensate fields (in meters) *			
	The Holitsynske GCF	The Shtormove GCF	The Arkhangelske GF	The Odeske GCF
FOP-2	555			
FOP-4	580			
FOP-5	570			
FOP-17		575		
FOP-18	570			
WP-1				520
WP-2				518
WP-10	530			
WP-11	510			
WP-13	580			
WP-23		518		
CPP-7			520	

* Sources:

Notice to Mariners No. 1402-1541. — С-Пб., March 19, 2016. — Issue 12 (9956.12) — p. 15-17.

Notice to Mariners No. 2105-2258. — С-Пб., April 23, 2016. — Issue 17 (9956.17) — p. 19.

Notice to Mariners No. 3924-4074. — С-Пб., July 23, 2016. — Issue 30 (9956.30) — p. 18-19.

Notice to Mariners No. 6878-7005. — С-Пб., December 17, 2016. — Issue 51 (9956.51) — p. 18-19.

The next step was the deployment of a comprehensive surveillance system for the surface and underwater conditions for detection of surface, underwater and low flying aerial targets.

During the third and fourth quarters of 2016, the SUE ChNH purchased and installed surveillance systems for surface and underwater conditions at jack-up drilling rigs and fixed offshore platforms. JSC Marine Complexes & Systems (St. Petersburg) became a supplier. The total value of the contract was RUB 39.469 mln.

Reference. Surveillance system for surface environment is designed to monitor the situation in areas of protected objects location, as well as timely radar detection and support of ships, vessels, low flying aerial targets. The system consists of the post of technical observation (PTO) - three units, local automated workplaces (AWP) - five units, equipment of the situational center for surveillance of the surface environment. The maximum number of PTOs and AWP in a complex can reach more than ten. Digital information in the system is displayed in real time at all automated workplaces simultaneously.

Surveillance system for surface environment – the NEVA-BS centimeter-wave radar was deployed on TAVRIDA jack-up drilling rig, FOP-17 (MCII-17) on Shtormove gas- condensate field, FOP-4 (MCII-4) on Holitsynske gas- condensate field in three sets. NEVA-BS radar provides automated detection and tracking of up to 200 targets simultaneously. The detection range of targets varies depending on their dimension and conditions for radio waves propagation: up to 30 sea miles (55.5 kilometers) for large targets (cruiser, tanker), up to 15-20 miles (28-37 km) for medium targets (missile and patrol boats, pilot boats), up to 8 miles (15 km) for ultra-small targets of boat type. In addition, the NEVA-B millimeter-wave radar and imagery system set were installed on JDR TAVRIDA (СПБУ «Таврида»). The mentioned radar has the following range of target detection: head of frogman – up to 0.5 miles (~1 km), ultra-small targets – up to 4.3 miles (8 km), small targets – up to 8 miles (15 km), medium targets – up to 13.5 miles (25 km), large targets – up to 24.3 miles (45 km).

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The radar data reception is implemented through the channels of the international automatic identification system of AIS (Automatic Identification System), the mode of selecting targets, automatic

sound alarm when transiting the border control zone. Radar has the ability to access optical-electronic systems [6].



Photo 2. The NEVA-type Radar.
Photo by TETIS Integrated Systems LTD



Photo 3. Automated workplace based
on NEVA-B Radar

Data transmission is run via radio relay channel provided by the set of digital radio relay stations. The real-time data is transmitted to the Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in Crimea and passes to the intelligence chain of the Black Sea Fleet of the Southern Military District of the RF. Thus, as shown in the Figure 2, deployment of the

surveillance systems for surface environment on the Chernomornaftogaz's objects, captured in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine, provides Russia with almost complete control over the traffic of commercial ships and warships that head to the ports of Ukraine and in the opposite direction.



Fig. 2. The places of deployment of the elements of the surveillance system for surface environment on the base of NEVA radar and the coverage range of the north-western part of the Black Sea.

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Photo 4. The NEVA-type radars installed on the TAVRIDA Jack-up Drilling Rig, captured as part of the Ukrainian state company Chornomornaftogaz on the Odeske gas field. The photo was taken during the joint monitoring raid of the Coastal Guard of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and Chornomornaftogaz company in 2017.



Photo 5. The Neva-type radar installed at the JDR Sivash and FOP-4 on the Holitsynske gas condensate field of the Ukrainian JSC Chornomornaftogaz, captured by Russia. The photo was taken during the joint monitoring raid of the Coastal Guard of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and the company Chornomornaftogaz in 2017.

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In addition to installation of radars for the surface surveillance, the sonar system for underwater environment surveillance was installed on the following SUE ChNG's objects (see Figure 3 below):

- FOP-4 (MCII-4) on Holitsynske gas field, located 61 km to north-west from the Crimean Cape Tarkhankut;
- FOP-17 (MCII-17) Shtormove gas field, located 72 km to west from Cape Tarkhankut;
- WP-2 (BK-2) on Odeske gas field, located 66 km to north-east from Snake Island.

In December 2016, the SUE ChNG purchased three sets of sonar system for underwater environment surveillance with a total value of RUB 67.684 mln. The supplier was the same - JSC The Marine Complexes & Systems.

Reference. Sonar system for underwater environment surveillance is designed to control the underwater conditions in the area around the SUE ChNG's facilities and timely detect moving underwater objects, identify their coordinates by bearing of movement parameters, convoy in the area of seized technical extraction structures in gas and gas-condensate fields. This system has an ability to connect in accordance with the information and logistics protocol with the system for surface environment surveillance. The sonar system kit consists of two underwater modules and two modules of interaction, a processing unit and a visualization unit with the corresponding software. The submarine module is placed under water at the depth as low as 30 meters. The search and detection of the targets is carried out automatically and controlled by the operator. Places for the installation of control equipment are JDRs, FOPs or aboard a ship. Range of detection is 900-400 meters.

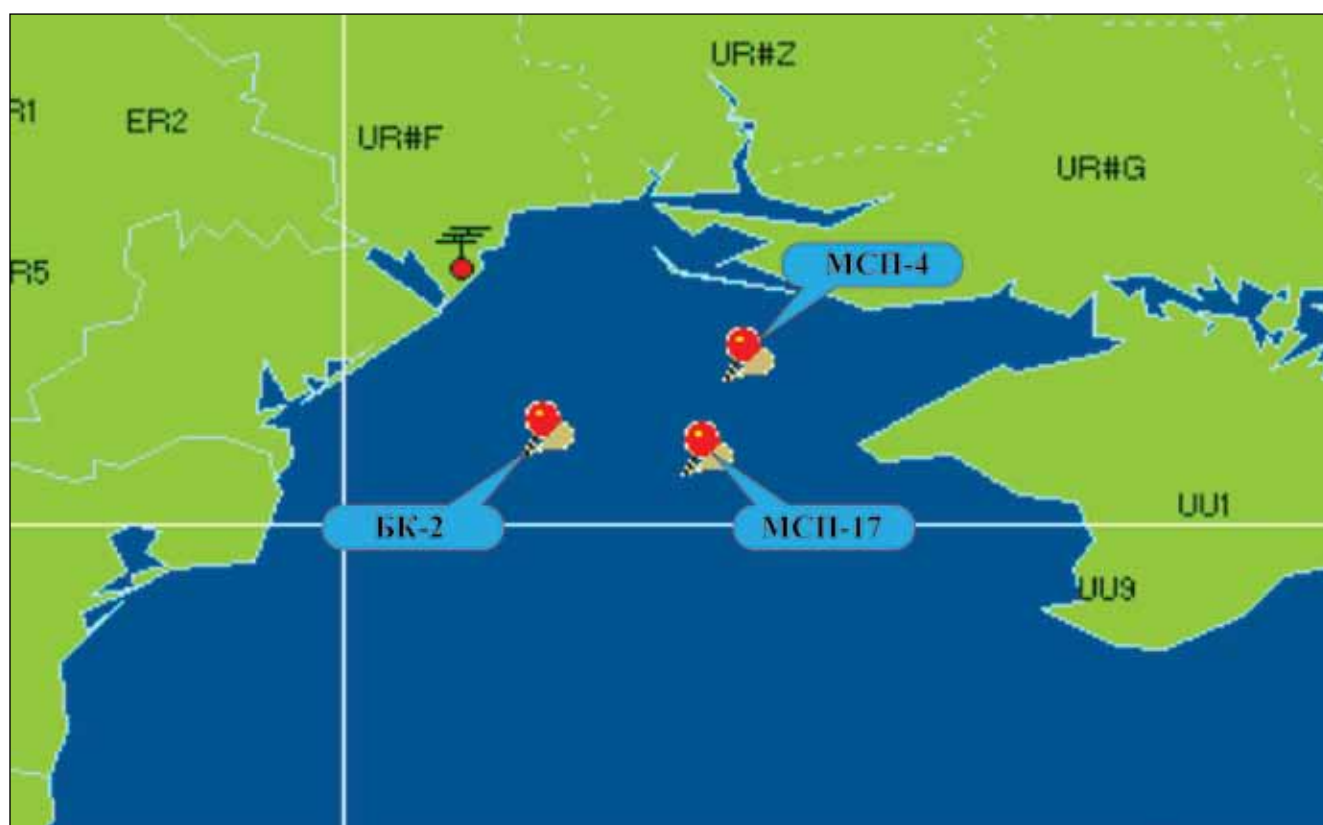


Fig. 3. The places of deployment of the elements of the sonar system for underwater environment surveillance

An inter-agency cooperation has been established within the framework of information exchange on the surface and underwater environment in the north-western part of the Black Sea, which through technical capabilities of SUE ChNG allows the leadership of the coastal guard of the FSB RF in Crimea and the command of the Black Sea Fleet of the Southern Armed Forces to accomplish following tasks in real time:

- comprehensive monitoring of the surface and aerial conditions on the Cape Tarkhankut – Snake Island line;
- control of international navigation;
- reconnaissance support of operational decisions to conduct warfare under supreme military command.

Based on the abovementioned, we can conclude that increasing the potential of the surveillance system for surface and underwater conditions by placing navigation radars on the stationary and floating marine infrastructure objects, allows not only to expand the radar-tracking field and ensure protection of these objects, but also to monitor international navigation and operations of naval vessels of other countries in the north-western part of the Black Sea and provide critical information to the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation to hold military operations in case of combat missions.

There is a question as to steadiness and systematic conduct of anti-diversion and anti-terrorism exercises particularly in the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla. In our opinion, they are obviously excessive in nature. It seems that some hybrid technology is being developed, in particular the creation of casus belli for a "preventive strike," which will be argued upon as "actions in response to attempted sabotage at the site." It means that under the cover of an artificially created emergency situation, for example, reception of a signal from the security system about the alleged penetration of the subversive group into the protected zone of the object, mobile forces can resort to offensive actions against the country "saboteur."

In this context, a military grouping of the Sea of Azov formed under the pretext of protection of a new hydrotechnical structure – a bridge crossing through the Kerch Strait against possible sabotage deserves attention as it impacts civil navigation and the economy of the "pirate state" – as Ukraine is described in Russian media. It should not be ruled out when the situation with sabotage or acts of terrorism on the objects of the marine infrastructure can be incited by Russia itself as a reason for further use of force. Special services of the Russian Federation have worked out technologies and experience.

Speculating on "the growing activity of NATO naval groups in the Black Sea," Russia is deploying "a military range" to conduct testing of the latest radio equipment of surveillance for surface and underwater environment around Crimea and in the Black Sea as a whole. The components of this regional system are the means deployed on the sites of the so-called SUE ChNG.

Mastering new forms and methods of conducting intelligence, forming of architecture of the system managing its forces and means in the operational space of the Black Sea at the base of civilian maritime infrastructure, can serve as an example for the Baltic Sea, since geographically these are two similar closed sea waters. In addition, the sea gas infrastructure of the Russian state-owned company Gazprom, which is a subject to protection on one hand, is located in the Baltic Sea. On another hand, it can be used as a platform for intelligence in the depths of NATO's response area, disguising the intelligence functions by performing a typical function of pipeline protection by signals intelligence capabilities.

On possible Russian approaches to signals intelligence in the Baltic in the context of the Nord Stream

The Baltic Sea, in contrast to the Barents Sea in the north or the Mediterranean in the south, does not play a strategic role either for NATO or for Russia on the whole eastern flank - from Norway to Bulgaria. But this is only at first glance. Geo-strategically, Russia believes that membership of the Baltic States in NATO and the deployment of the Alliance forces and facilities on their territory has created a "knife at the Russian throat" effect. Accordingly, in their opinion the threat requires a comprehensive neutralization. The goal of conducting task-oriented, continuous, active and covert intelligence is at the forefront.

In 2006, during the preparation for the construction of the Nord Stream, Russian President Vladimir Putin was quite frank about the tasks of the Baltic Fleet: *"The Baltic Fleet has a task to secure our economic interests in the Baltic Basin. We have enough of them there. The Baltic Fleet has a task to ensure security of marine communications... Now, you know, one of our major priority projects is the construction of a North European gas pipeline that runs along the Baltic Sea and to supply our energy resources directly to our main customers in Western Europe [7]."* Similar statements were alarmed at that time by many in Europe; however, this was not an obstacle to the Nord Stream project.

Intelligence forces and facilities of the Baltic Fleet of the RF are concentrated in the European enclave of Russia bested by NATO – in Kaliningrad

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oblast. In particular the 1st Radio Intelligence Unit of Special Purpose (military unit 81304) located in Zelenogradsk and the 72nd Separate Navy Intelligence Division (military unit 15130) located in Baltiysk. The division includes medium-size intelligence ships SSV-520 Admiral Fyodor Golovin, SSV-231 Vasily Tatishchev of 864 Design and small intelligence ships GS-19 Zhygulevsk and GS-39 Syzran' of 503M Design. All ships are equipped with Signals Intelligence (SIGINT): different radios, as well as Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) and Acoustic Intelligence (ACINT) – using surface radars and such sonars as the hydroacoustic complex Pamyat', Ros' - K for taking a bearing of sonar beacons, etc. The ships are able to accomplish installation or reinstallation of underwater special purpose equipment in the sea. All data from the ships and the coastal intelligence units is transmitted to the 105th Intelligence Command Centre of the Baltic Fleet located in Kaliningrad, at 24 Kirova Street. The final decryption and processing of all received intelligence information takes place there. Northeast Atlantic is the intelligence overview area of the Baltic Fleet. The Baltic Sea and the eastern part of the North Sea is the zone of detailed intelligence. Russian intelligence ships regularly appear in the Baltic Sea near the coasts of Sweden, Poland, Germany, the Baltic States, as well as along the corridor of the Nord Stream.

Russians have almost completed their "Unified State Surveillance System for Surface and Underwater Environment of the Russian Federation"¹ that started in the 2000s. Simultaneously, the development of the new and improved existing high-tech tools with the possibility of their practical testing on real marine infrastructure objects is considered as one of the priority directions to create advantages over NATO using a variety of civilian platforms. For example, in the Arctic, a global information net-centric system of underwater surveillance is being deployed on the basis of the latest 'Positioner' underwater communications and navigation system, which has a civilian purpose – offshore service of oil and gas production, but can also be successfully used for military purposes, and not only in the Arctic.

Marine gas transportation infrastructure (Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2) does not only perform business, but also geo-economic (providing the dominance of Russian oil and gas exports and infrastructure in the Baltic Sea) and geopolitical (military and political dominance under the guise of a thesis on the protection of its economic interests from encroachment by the non-European players) functions. Therefore, the issues of ensuring the security of marine gas transportation systems, including countering possible sabotage, will automatically lead to their military affiliations under the pretext of a threat from NATO. All this serves as the basis for defining security zones, as a guarantee of uninterrupted exploitation of the objects of the marine gas transportation infrastructure, with the aim of further deployment of dual-purpose security systems, including simultaneous activities of acoustic intelligence. This combination is a successful form of masking, that is, on the platform of security measures on purely civilian objects of the marine gas transportation infrastructure, intelligence activities in the operational space of the Baltic as a counteraction to NATO forces, will be carried out.

Prospective tools for acoustic intelligence can be robotic intelligence mini submarines of the Russian production, which are capable to immerse at depths as low as 300 meters and operate without human intervention for up to three months, providing a "vision" of the movement of underwater and surface objects from the underwater position that depends on their size, noise level and type of hydrology at a distance that can reach tens of kilometers. By the way, the route of the Nord Stream pipelines lies mainly at a depth of 80-110 meters. Such depths are "comfortable" for underwater surveillance equipment.

Also, it is possible to disguise combat equipment on the route of gas pipelines - underwater drones. The Russian media point to the "Russian revolution at sea" - the creation of a family of underwater drones 'Klavesin', 'Galtel', 'Chilim', which are in service of the Russian Navy since 2017.

¹ Translators' note: Non-official translation for the Russian «Единая государственная система освещения надводной и подводной обстановки Российской Федерации», (ЕГСОНПО)

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*Photo 6. Russian mobile underwater multipurpose complex Galtel-Alevrit.
Used in Syria in the Tartus Naval Facility Point of Russia*

Despite a significant exaggeration by the Kremlin propagandists of their combat qualities, as technical improvements of the first prototypes that are now undergoing exploratory exploitation in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea will take place, they will represent a rather serious challenge for NATO forces and capabilities at sea.

One of the most important components of marine surveillance is passive acoustic surveillance systems. They do not radiate anything. They monitor the sea from the underwater position. At the end of 2016, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation began deployment of the global underwater acoustic surveillance system. The goal was to detect and identify all surface and underwater objects, as well as low-flying aircrafts, in the key areas of the World Ocean, and to create databases and algorithms of recognition and classification of targets. Its main element is ‘Harmony’ – a network of underwater robotic systems that can deploy powerful automatic hydroacoustic stations at the bottom of the ocean, which collect information

and transmit it to the command intelligence post (KP-R). According to the Russian plans, Harmony should start working no later than 2020. For the Baltic region, this date is synchronized with the launch of the Nord Stream 2.

The basis of ‘Harmony’ is the robotic autonomous bottom stations (ABS). A special submarine or a surface ship (vessel) can invisibly install them at the bottom of the sea. ABS can conduct passive sonar surveillance, monitoring surrounding space. The station records specific noises of propellers, engines and other mechanisms of warships and vessels, as well as noise of low-flying helicopters and aircraft. The ABS may, if necessary, emulate a special active signal in the short pulse to classify surface and underwater purposes. Several ABSs can be integrated into a single complex and synchronize in a network to monitor the underwater and surface situation in an area of several hundreds of square kilometers, providing a simultaneous surveillance of large water areas [8].

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The declared architecture and principles of the Harmony system and its ABS show the need for special vehicles, the task of which will be delivery of ABS to the installation and alternation points. As part of the Navy, there are several submarines and special purpose ships that can be carriers. The most convenient ABS carriers are specially equipped submarines, which unlike surface water vessels have more opportunities for unnoticeable exit into a designated area with the further deployment of the ocean bottom stations. At the same time, a probable adversary would have a minimal chance of learning about the ABS location, so the installation points of the Harmony system will remain a secret. Nevertheless, surface carriers could conduct the task of the unnoticeable placement of the ABS openly, if the carrier will use the appropriately rebuilt civil vessel, which carries out regular flights in the waters of the Baltic Sea, for example, one of the tankers of the Russian-owned company, Sovcomflot, or an exploration vessel.

An advanced SIGINT system can include three contours: marine, space and coastal. The marine contour is a small-sized positional sonar station with a network of remote receiving sonar devices that scan the area and transmit data to satellites of the outer contour. From the outer contour the information is transmitted to the coastal circuit for processing and making further decisions.

As a conclusion, it should be noted that Gazprom is able to provide access to information from the security systems of its facilities in the gas pipeline corridor to third parties, first of all to the FSB of the Russian Federation for protection of the sea borders and monitoring of commercial traffic, to the Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Naval General Staff in order to use it in the Russian Unified State Surveillance System for Surface and Underwater Environment, etc.

In addition, the expansion of the intelligence system will allow the unloading of mobile (submarine, surface and aviation) intelligence services of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Federation, especially intelligence ships, which according to estimates by Russian military experts are lacking in the Russian Navy.

Swiss disguise for Russian intelligence in the Baltic region

Special attention should be paid to the general management system of the Nord Stream pipelines and how it is incorporated into the Russian intelligence contour in Europe. The main management centre of the underwater gas pipeline system is neither in Russia, nor in Germany, as one would assume. It is located in the Swiss Canton of Zug and is a subsidiary of Nord Stream AG, which is also registered there (see Fig. 4 and 5).

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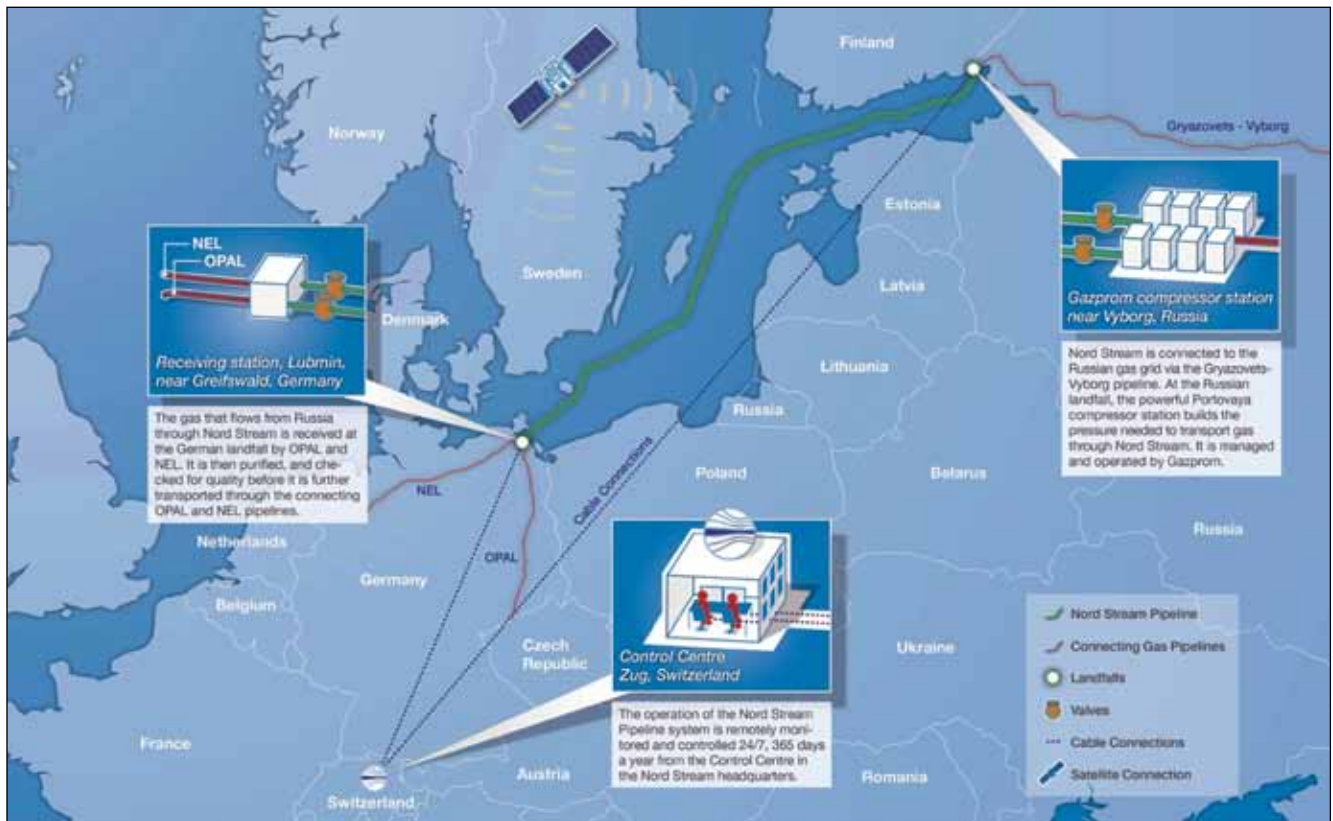


Fig. 4. General scheme of management of the Trans-Baltic gas transmission system with an offshore location of the Main Control Center in Switzerland, equipped with fiber optic and satellite communications.

https://www.nord-stream.com/press-info/images/nord-stream-operation-facilities-3244/?q=&category=115&year=all&page=9&per_page=12



Fig. 5. Schematic view of the Nord Stream Management Center in Zug, Switzerland.

https://www.nord-stream.com/press-info/images/control-centre-switzerland-3306/?q=&category=115&year=all&page=9&per_page=12
https://www.nord-stream.com/press-info/images/control-centre-switzerland-3262/?q=&category=115&year=all&page=9&per_page=12

According to the company's official information, a backup management centre in the bay of Portova on the Russian coast, has the same installed equipment as the main centre [10]. The exchange of information between the backup and the main control centers is carried out continuously in real

time via both the fiber-optic communication line and the reserve satellite channel. Thus, the backup management centre has access to all information that the main centre receives, including the information received from the underwater security system that scans the marine area. Information from

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the Nord Stream security system can be perceptible by the intelligence system of the Russian Baltic Fleet and the regional FSB structures through the contour of the backup management centre and the dedicated communication channel. The backup management centre can replace its status with the status of the main center on a given hour. It should be noted that the leading positions in the technical management of flows are occupied by Russian specialists. Matthias Warnig, a former officer of the East German intelligence service "Stasi" is accountable for the flows and will provide comfortable conditions and environment for his "partners." Thus, everything is well built and disguised, because intelligence activities are not conducted in Switzerland by the intelligence service of the Baltic Fleet, and the laws of the country are not violated. However, in reality intelligence in the Baltic region is carried out and is conducted from the corridor of "streams," which is being protected by the security system for ensuring safety of pipelines.

In practice, we can discuss a creation of a continuous hydroacoustic field around the corridor

of "streams" with the zones overlapping between detectors, which exclude presence of hydroacoustic "shadow". For example, ABSs located in the safeguarding zone of the "streams" will be able to analyze motion of targets, depending on their size, noise level and type of hydrology at a distance that can reach tens of kilometers from the corridor of pipelines that practically means control over international navigation to and from the seaports of the Baltic States, the traffic of ships and vessels of NATO countries in the framework of the Alliance's commitments to them.

Nota bene!

Therefore, Russian streams – and the existing Nord Stream, possible new Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream, will be used as platforms for enhancing Russia's intelligence capabilities in the Baltic and Black Sea regions in the context of its preparation for the warfare at sea. It is also logical to assume that on the eve of the "Time" in the corridors of gas pipelines as well as near them, facilities for defeat of the underwater and surface targets, in particular combat submarine drones, may also be hidden.

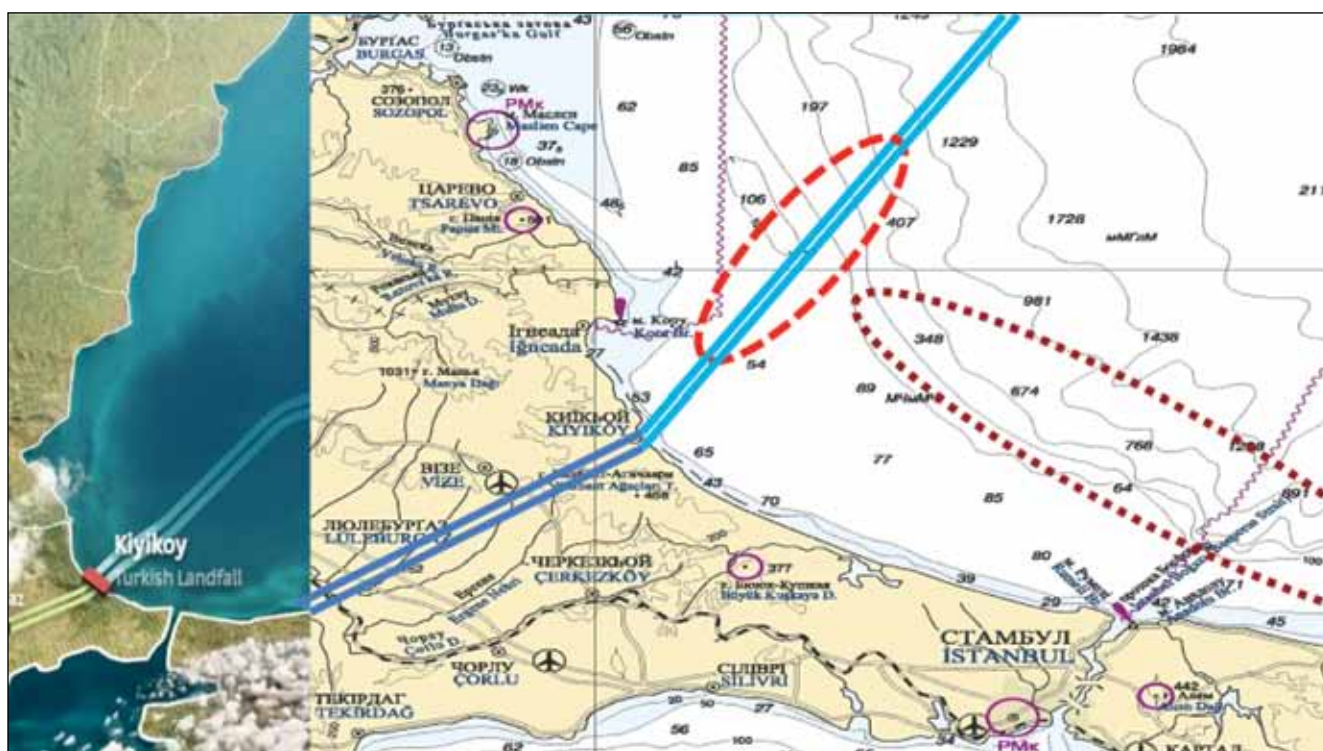


Fig. 6. Most likely zone of mobile ABS placement in the route of the TurkStream and the armed drones in the continental slope near the western coast of Turkey.

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It is also worth noting that the route of the TurkStream pipeline in the part that goes through shallow waters of the Black Sea near the Turkish coast, could be used as a platform for installing of intelligence equipment and facilities to control movement of NATO ships and vessels through the Bosphorus and their visits to the ports of Bulgaria, which is a NATO member country. The deep-sea zone near the continental slope of the Turkish coast could be an ideal combat alert zone for armed drones to intercept NATO ships at the entrance to the Black Sea after they pass the Bosphorus at the “Time” in accordance with the principle of "destroying the enemy on the far offensive" (see Figure 6). To accomplish the destruction task, there is absolutely no need to keep a Russian squadron near the Bosphorus. Underwater armed drones can be operated from an invisible civilian vessel, for example, a rebuilt tanker floating nearby (for the Black Sea Strait zone, intense tanker traffic to / from Russian ports is usual).

Since the Soviet era, the Russians have elaborated a technology for the use of civilian ships (research and transport) to perform special tasks for military purposes. The latest example of hybrid technology, which was documented by marine experts during "underwater activity" on October 3-18, 2014 in Swedish waters, - is the use by Russians of the NS CONCORD oil tanker of Sovcomflot company and the research vessel PROFESSOR LOGACHEV (FSUE "Polar Marine Geosurvey Expedition") in the central part of the Baltic Sea where they have been maneuvering for a long time that is unusual for commercial and exploration vessels. This only led the experts to conclude that the designated vessels were rescuing an ultra-small submarine, which crashed while carrying out a special task in the area of the Swedish coast [11].

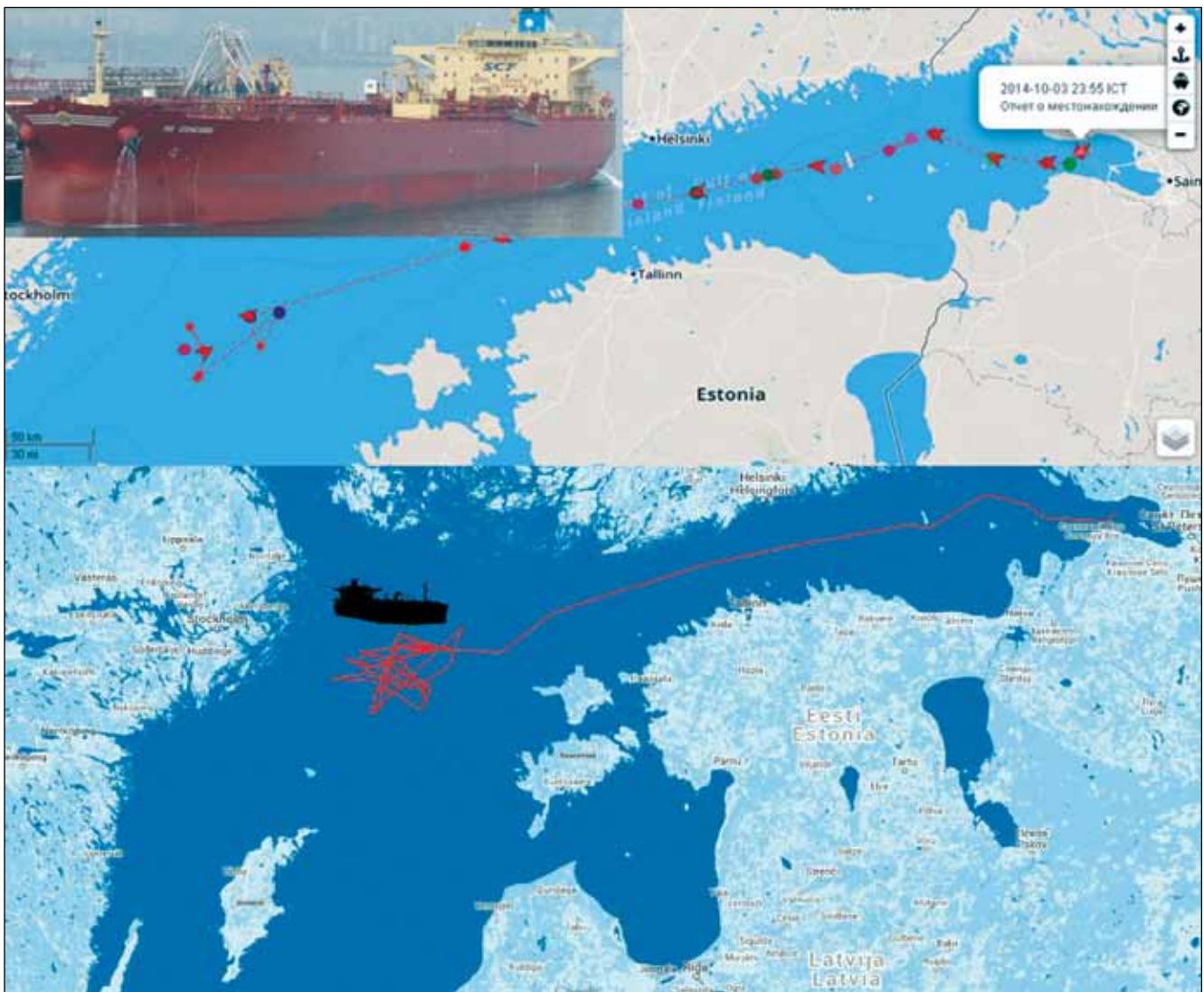


Fig. 7. Scheme of two-week maneuvering of the NS CONCORD tanker near the coast of Sweden in October 2014.
Source: <https://www.fleetmon.com/maritime-news/2014/5213/mystery-russian-submarine-swedish-waters-and-scf-t/>

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Another assumption is that this incident was the result of unsuccessful tests by the Russians of the hybrid intelligence system "civil ship-carrier - the ultra-small intelligence boat, as both the tanker and the exploration vessel several months before the incident were in the state of repair, which confirms the version about the appropriate refurbishment in order to perform tasks not related to their conventional use.

With the regard to the Baltic region, the above-described requires all Baltic Member States of the NATO and the EU to cooperate in overcoming threats from the sea, since the Baltic is primarily the territory of the EU and NATO, not the "Russian lake", which both alliances enabled turning the Black sea into. Obviously, on part of NATO it will be necessary to deploy along the route of Russian streams a system of radio-electronic and hydroacoustic counteraction, interference and hydroacoustic suppression.

Nevertheless today, it is already obvious that the best option for Europe is to reject Nord Stream 2, and in case of its implementation, require the Russian Federation to provide full and unconditional access to the pipeline route at any time by any means of control, as well as online access to information from the main and backup control centers over the streams. This requirement is well substantiated because Germany, France, and the Netherlands, whose companies have formed a partnership with Russian Gazprom and whose governments officially support the Nord Stream projects, are NATO members. The same approach should be applied to the Turkish Stream in the zone between the Strait of the Bosphorus and the Bourgas Bay where the depths of the sea range from several tens to several hundred meters and

are accommodating for the placement of mobile ABS and the means of destruction. The control over them could be carried out from the board of a civilian vessel in accordance with the hybrid technology of conducting a modern warfare at sea.

The construction of the bridge across the Kerch Strait was the reason to expand the list of tasks set by Kremlin not only to the Black Sea Fleet, but also to the Russian Aerospace Forces, the National Guard of Russia, the FSB, and intelligence services of the Russian Federation. It can be confidently stated that the construction of the Nord Stream 2 in the Baltic Sea and the TurkStream in the Black Sea will be used by Russia to justify the increase and diversification of its military presence in the waters of both seas as well as on the coastline. There is the need to protect strategically important offshore infrastructure, common and mutually beneficial Russian-German, Russian-Turkish and Russian-Bulgarian gas trade relations, as well as to neutralize threats posed by NATO, the USA, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States that in accordance with a Russian view are ready to resort to aggressive actions to block / destroy the new infrastructure, as they actively opposed it. According to this approach, the likelihood of a scenario of hybrid occupation of the Baltic States and an increase in forces in the Kaliningrad region under the pretext of establishing a security zone for greater securitization of the main Russian-EU and Russian-German gas trade route is sharply increasing. In this case, it can be expected that NATO members such as Germany, Turkey and Bulgaria may not be on the side of the Alliance, but vice versa. Therefore, again, the best option for Europe is to abandon the Nord Stream 2, and for the United States - to block it with all possible means.

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«Q: Who manages the operation of the gas pipeline?»
Vladimir Borovik: *The operation of the gas pipeline is carried out from the control center in the Swiss city of Zug. System components are also installed on coastal sites in Russia and Germany ...*
Q: What will happen if the equipment is out of control at the control center?
Vladimir Borovik: *As an additional protection measure, the control center is duplicated. The backup control center has exactly the same equipment installed - control and monitoring systems. The exchange of information between the backup and the main control center is carried out continuously in real time».*
Available at: <https://www.nord-stream.com/ru/ekspluatatsiya/dispatcherskoe-upravlenie/>
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The U.S. Position on the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

The key obstacle to the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in particular the aggression of the Russian Federation in eastern Ukraine, is that Moscow categorically rejects its involvement in the conflict, thus trying to bring the U.S., the EU and the international community as a whole to the false way, which, without doubt, will only postpone peace and security in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the United States define quite clearly the parties of the conflict and fix the development of the situation there, giving European countries an example of an adequate assessment of the situation in the Black Sea region. Despite the apparent "uncertainty" of U.S. President Donald Trump during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 16, 2018 in Helsinki, in general, the U.S. position remains clear: Russia is responsible for the war in eastern Ukraine. This position has been confirmed at many international formats and officially declared that allows us to shape concept on Washington's approaches to the conflict resolution.

Position of Russia and slow awakening of international community

The main goal of Russian leadership in the ongoing process of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is to insert this conflict into the format of the global confrontation between Russia and the West, diminishing its significance, going beyond the frames of a party in it and dividing it into two tracks – Russia-U.S. and Russia-EU.

Making an accent on the Moscow-Washington level of the conflict settlement, the Kremlin is simultaneously seeking to impose the myth, that there is a "civil war" in Ukraine and not Russia's war against Ukraine. The Kremlin still does not refuse this idea, although the ongoing Russian armed aggression against Ukraine in the East of Ukraine has been repeatedly recognized at the international level.

A rather vivid proof of this was a report by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) dated August 10, 2018 that the OSCE drones recorded four distinct electronic warfare systems of the Russian production (a Leer-3 RB-341V, a 1L269 Krasukha-2 and RB-109A Bylina, and an anti-UAV system, Repellent-1) [1]. All these systems have been produced in Russia in recent years, while Bylina has to be provided to the Russian army by the end of this year after field tests, which, as we see, are being conducted on the Ukrainian territory.

At another level in the OSCE, there was also more or less objective definition of the conflict and its instigators. Following the outcomes of the regular session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, held in Berlin on July 7-11, 2018, the final declaration states that the Assembly "*reaffirms its support for a settlement based on the Minsk Agreements in their entirety and the de-occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, including the full withdrawal of Russian military forces from Ukrainian territory.*" [2]

Earlier, other international organizations also made such declarations. Thus, in its Resolution 2198 dated on 23 January 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called the conflict "the ongoing **Russian war against Ukraine**, which is taking place in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions" [3]. The European Union even stated the terms of the beginning of the Russian aggression: "*We reiterated our strong condemnation of the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014,*" says the Joint statement following the 20th EU-Ukraine Summit held on 9 July 2018 in Brussels [4]. At the Summit, President of the European Council Donald Tusk clearly stated: "*We continue to demand the full implementation of the*

Minsk agreements, underlining Russia's responsibility for the war in eastern Ukraine". [5]

Despite the increasingly frank international rhetoric about de facto Russia's war against Ukraine, the Kremlin obviously does not have any other way to get rid of sanctions, which are fatal to Russia, but do not want to consider returning to international law. In this context, Putin's proposal to hold a referendum in the occupied territories of the Ukrainian Donbas, made at the meeting with Mr. Trump in Helsinki, looks like a further attempt to impose the idea of a "civil war in Ukraine" to the whole world.

The USA is in favor of clarity in definitions

Washington strongly rejected the Russian idea about the referendum. "The US administration is not considering supporting a referendum in eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, to organize a so-called referendum in a part of Ukraine which is not under government control would have no legitimacy," said National Security Council spokesman Garrett Marquis [6]. Confirmation that Washington did not perceive Putin's new idea as a step towards the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was the willingness of the United States to impose new sanctions on Russia.

It is worth to note that the U.S. is extending the sanctions imposed on Russia in response to violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, through other sanction packages caused by Russia's interference in the U.S. elections and the use of Russian chemical weapons in the UK. Recent sanctions against the Russian Federation were imposed at the end of August 2018, with the reference to the 1991 Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act. They deepen the negative consequences for Russia, because they can affect all state enterprises of the Russian Federation and demonstrate that the dialogue in July in Helsinki does not mean impunity of Russia for violation of the international order.

Washington continues to express its readiness to punish the perpetrator and insists that Russia should withdraw its troops and military equipment from the territory of Ukraine and return the occu-

pied territories. "There will be no relief of Crimea-related sanctions until Russia returns control of the Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine," said U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo speaking at Senate hearings on July 25, 2018 [7]. That is, **the key point of the US position on the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is complete restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea.**

In addition, an unchangeable position of Washington and its key signals were reflected in the speeches of senior U.S. representatives at the international level. Thus, on May 29, 2018, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley stated: "The United States is calling on Russia to recognize the reality - Russian soldiers are fighting in Ukraine and not for the protection of the Russian-speaking population, but for the control of Russia over Ukraine [8]." Of course, Russia's recognition of its direct involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine should start a real process of resolving this conflict. And it is Russia that should make the first step.

"Russia started this conflict. Russia sustains it. And it is Russia that must end it," delivered Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian to the OSCE Permanent Council on July 19, 2018. [9]

Recognition by Russia of the reality would mean its readiness to return to the framework of international law, and "this readiness must be demonstrated in Ukraine." These are the words from the Crimea Declaration of the U.S. Department of State of July 25, 2018 [10]. What should be a demonstration of this readiness? According to Nikki Haley, "*Russia must withdraw its troops and weapons from the territory of Ukraine to return to Kiev control over the entire Ukrainian territory, including Crimea.*" [11]

Considering the current lack of readiness of the Kremlin to resolve the conflict, Washington chose a way to exacerbate pressure on the Russian Federation. Until Russia returns all Ukrainian territories under Ukraine's control, the U.S. sanctions will continue.

Washington's position engages international community

The United States stands in the position of expanding the involvement of the international community in the conflict resolution by using the OSCE and UN mechanisms.

Since the OSCE is already present in the conflict zone with its Special Monitoring Mission, Washington insists on full implementation of the Mission's mandate. The U.S. official representatives in the OSCE constantly emphasize that the SMM should operate in the entire territory of Ukraine without restrictions in the Donbas areas controlled by Russia, as well as **in Crimea**.

At the same time, the United States continues to insist on the idea of launching a UN peacekeeping mission in the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine. As U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker plays a key role in this process, his statements and declarations can provide a format of this mission advocated by Washington:

- voluntary participation of the UN member states in a peacekeeping mission;
- mission should be responsible for security throughout the area covered by the conflict, including the control of the Russian-Ukrainian border;
- peace-building mission must provide control over the storage of heavy weapons;
- the UN peacekeeping mission should not include citizens of Russia.

Although today, discussions around the establishment of the UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine have somewhat subsided, but it can become another leverage of pressure on Russia in the international dimension, which Washington can engage. After all, if the United States, in cooperation with Ukraine and other partners, prepares a draft decision of the UN Security Council on a peacekeeping mission, and Moscow uses its veto, additional restrictive measures can be courageously applied to Russia.

Summing up, it is worth to note that the actions, taken by Russia to conceal and cover its involvement into the war in eastern Ukraine and divert the attention of international community from the actual process of conflict resolution, are becoming increasingly counterproductive, as the blame of the Russian Federation for waging this conflict is recognized more and more at the international level.

Moscow tries to settle everything at the level of face-to-face communication of Putin with President Trump, the U.S. governing system is multidimensional and its balanced construction guarantees sustainability of the American position. That is why Washington gave enough clear signals – Russia must recognize its blame for the war in eastern Ukraine and withdraw troops from all occupied territories of Ukraine. Only after that the negotiations at the international level with Moscow, as a more or less reliable side, are possible.

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Andrii KLYMENKO,
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Situation in the Sea of Azov: Blockade of Mariupol and Berdyansk by the Russian forces. New trends*

In the period from May 2018 to September 2018, perception of the crisis in the Sea of Azov has passed through several stages: from objections and doubts of the Ukrainian and foreign officials to recognition and formal reaction of Ukraine, the United States and the EU, and even the concrete measures such as strengthening naval presence of the Ukrainian Navy in the Sea of Azov.

The fact that Russia would use the Kerch Strait to cause damage to Ukraine was clear almost two years ago, when the Kerch Bridge's specifications became known. At that time it was clear that the

Kerch Bridge, so to speak, was the first filter. The bridge has 33 meters of clearance above the water to allow ships to pass. After the first announces, the maritime business began to look for another fleet, because the geometry of the construction had cut off almost half of those ships that passed through the Kerch Strait before. The ports found another fleet, and, having ground knowledge of the psychological portrait of our enemies, we are confident that this fact made Russia to apply new methods of economic blockade.

Slide 1. The technology of blocking the Mariupol and Berdyansk ports. Three regions of blocking



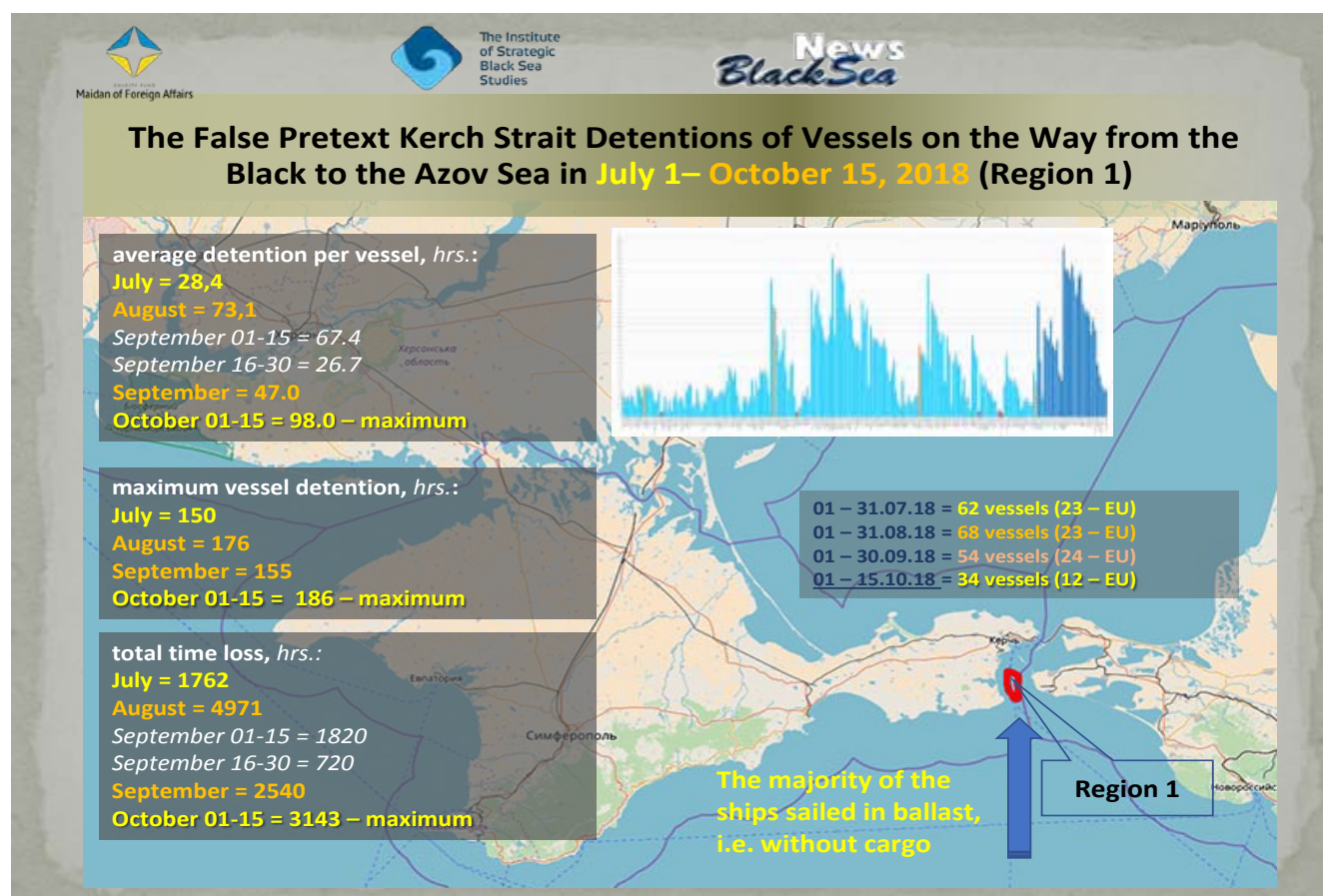
* All slides in this article were composed by the author - Andrii Klymenko.
In the slides and text of the article the author's terminology is preserved.

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Today, we have three regions, where the vessels, heading to Mariupol or Berdyansk, are stopped (see Slide 1). At first, they are waiting for permission to pass the Kerch Strait in the Sea of Azov. Here, we should emphasize that the Kerch Strait is a one-way street, that is, there is no two-way traffic: if there is a caravan from Azov to the Black Sea, then all who need to enter the Azov Sea are waiting. The next stage is a detention at sea. Further, the vessels take cargo in Berdyansk or Mariupol and head mainly to the EU countries. There are such "lucky ones," who are stopped for checking the second time, already on the way back with the cargo. And finally, after all this, the cargo vessel falls on stage number three – an anchorage in the Sea of Azov before obtaining permission to pass through the Kerch Strait and enter the Black Sea.

Now, we should go into detail how it looks like. Note that this procedure is applicable to all vessels without exception (about 60 vessels per month pass through the Kerch Strait), heading to the Ukrainian Azov ports. Thus, the delay of the ships sailing to Mariupol and Berdyansk through the Kerch Strait, when they enter the Sea of Azov, takes place. The research team, including the Maidan of Foreign Affairs Fund, the Institute of Strategic Black Sea Studies and the editorial board of BlackSeaNews (www.blackseanews.net) has been tracking this situation from the end of June, and we can say that the detention time is growing significantly.

Slide 2. The false pretext Kerch Strait detentions of vessels on the way from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov in July – first half of October 2018. Region 1



The false pretext detention of the vessels on the way from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov in July – the first half of September 2018 (Region 1) looks as follows (Usually, before detentions began, the

process took up to 4 hours. Most vessels went in ballast that is without cargo, see Slides 2 and Slide 3):

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Average detention for a vessel:

- July 2018 = 28.4 hours.
- August 2018 = 73.1 hours.
- The first half of September 2018 = 67.4 hours.

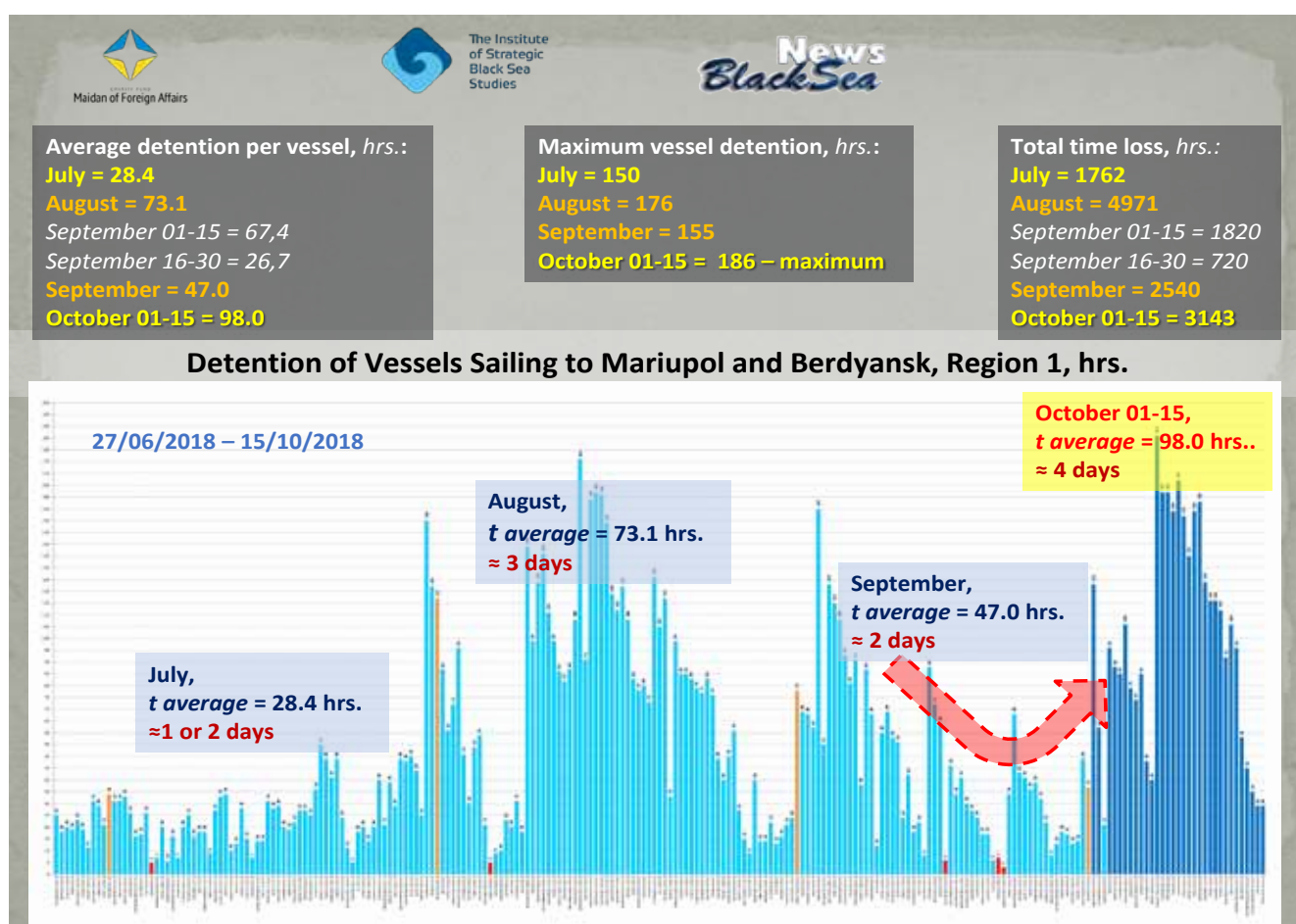
Total time-loss:

- July 2018 = 1762 hours.
- August 2018 = 4971 hours.
- The first half of September 2018 = 1820 hours.

Maximum detention for a vessel:

- July 2018 = 150 hours.
- August 2018 = 176 hours.
- The first half of September 2018 = 155 hours.

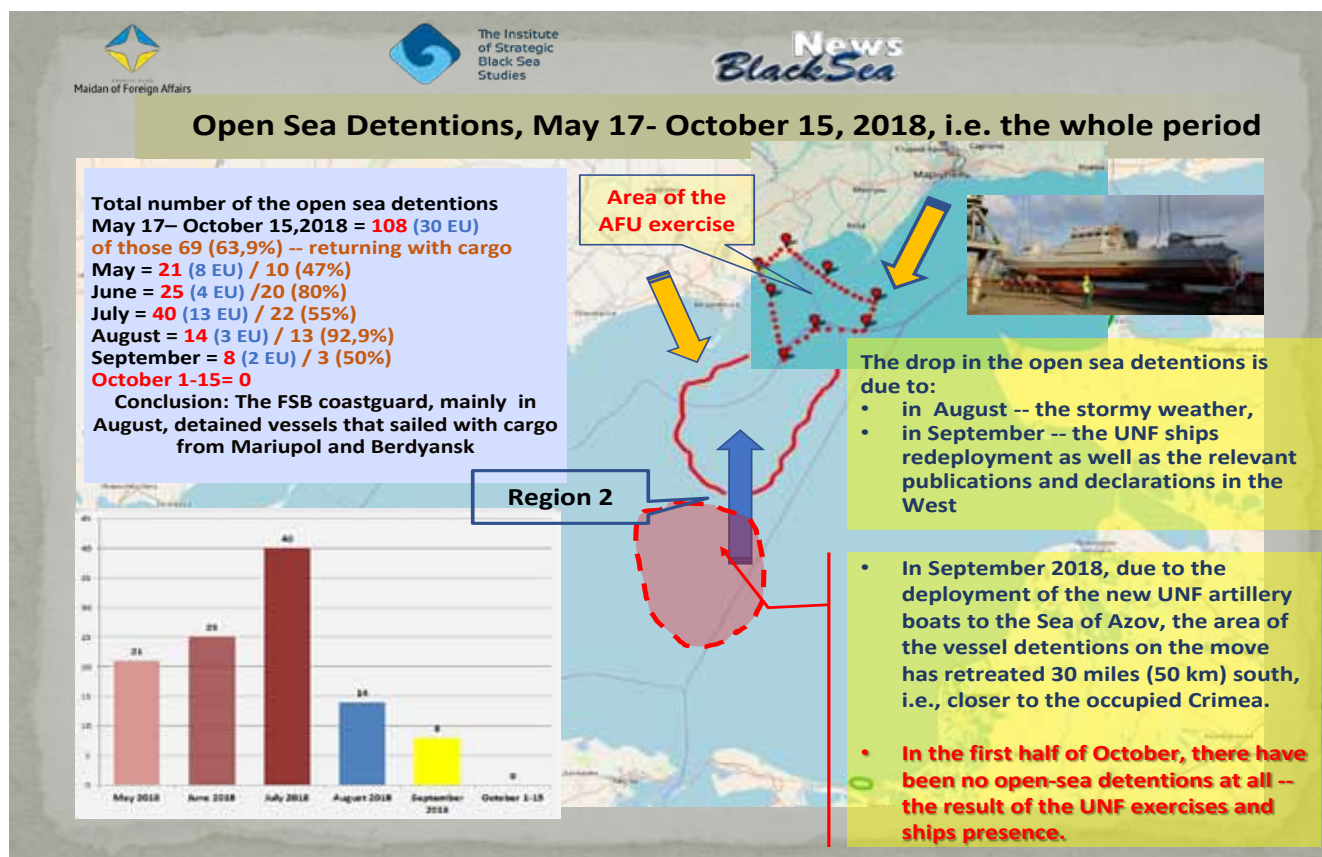
Slide 3. Detention of vessels sailing to Mariupol and Berdyansk, Region 1, hours



Next stage - detention at sea. They occur in approximately one area because it covers so-called recommended courses. These are routes recommended by the maritime services of Ukraine as

safe for deep-draught ships. Any vessel, no matter where it goes, does not pass by the so-called "Berdyansk turning circle," and it is there that the FSB's Coast Guard is constantly on duty.

Slide 4. Open-sea Detentions for the period of May 17 - October 15, 2018



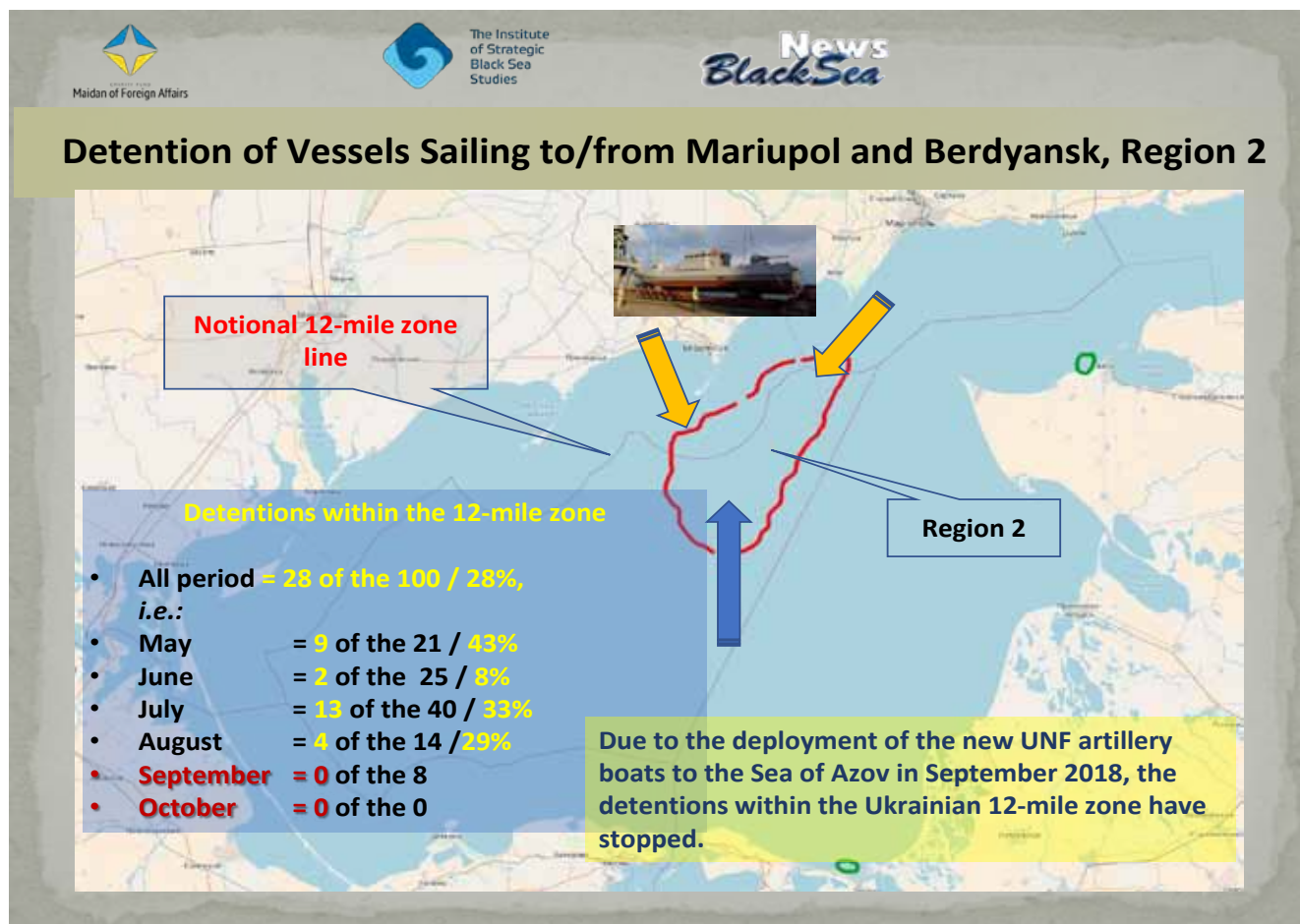
A boat or ship of the FSB Coast Guard appears, requires a stop, an inspection team raises aboard, carrying out its activities. It lasts on average two or three hours. But there is an essential nuance: the ship weighs several tens of thousands of tons. To slow down, it needs from 30-40 minutes to an hour, and then again it needs time to gain speed to cruising. That process generally lost 4-5 hours.

Since the first detention at sea on May 17, 2018 we have generally fixed 106 detentions: 21 in

May; 25 in June; 40 in July; 14 in August and 8 in September (see Slide 4). Why not all vessels are detained? Because there are winds, storms, fogs, and on such days, small boats or ships of the FSB Coast Guard Service simply cannot go out into the sea, while large cargo ships feel safe even in the two- or three-points storm. If the weather was fine, then every vessel would be detained. Also, we have fixed that no one was detained, for example, on the Day of Russia – then, apparently, all were on parades and celebrated.

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Slide 5. Region 2 of detentions at sea on the way to/from Mariupol and Berdyansk. Notional 12-mile zone line



It is noteworthy that 2/3 of detentions relate to vessels, which went with cargo on the way back, so more damage is caused to ship-owners.

As a separate paragraph we derived an indicator, which is conventionally called "the degree of insolence." We considered all the detentions and analyzed them according to the distance: how many detainees were closer than 12 miles to the Ukrainian coast. Why the very 12 miles? Because in the whole world that is a marine belt, that is that we lack due to the 2003 Agreement 'On the Common Use of the Sea of Azov'. Thus, these areas

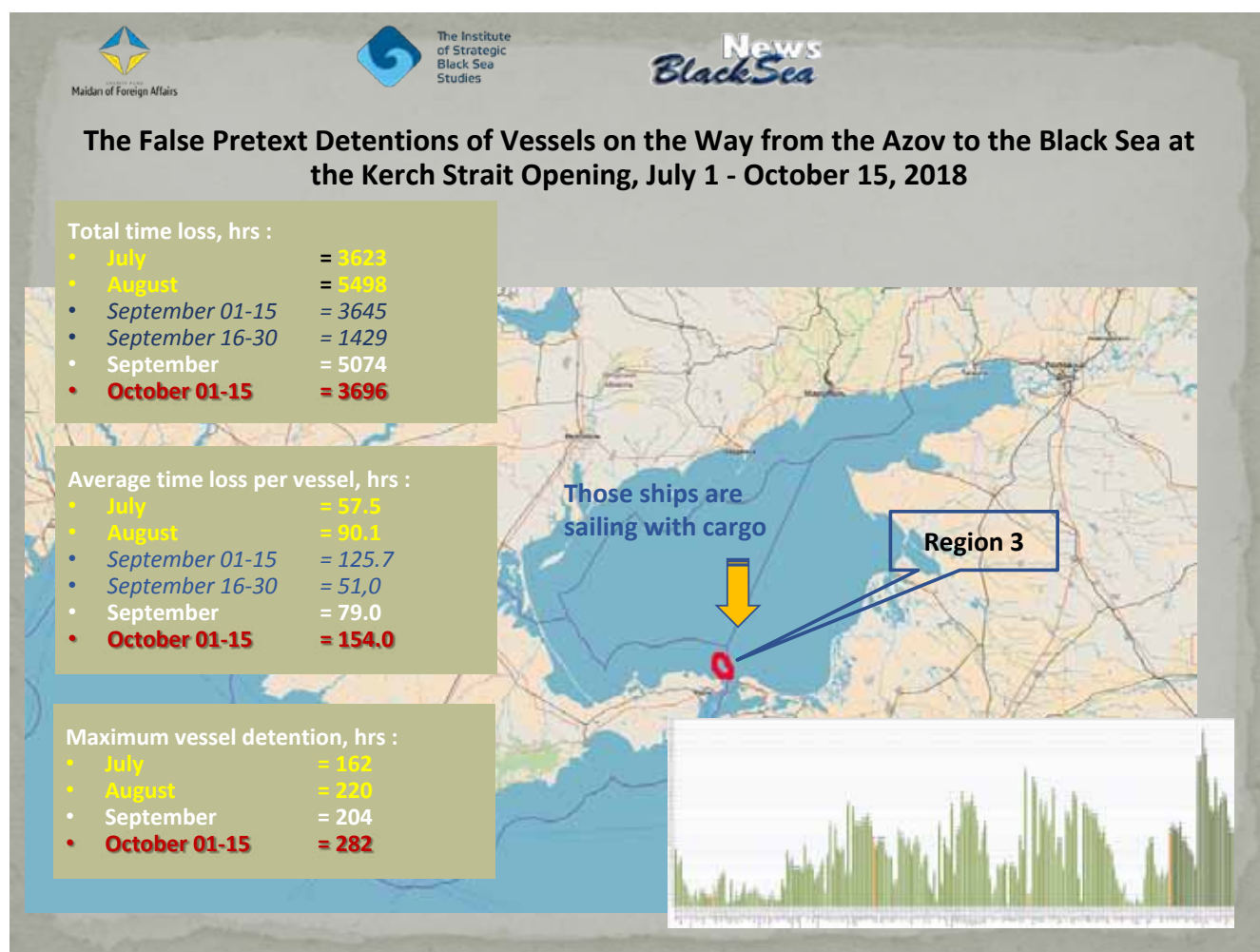
are the notional territorial waters. In May 2018, 43% of detentions, as well as in July – one third of detentions, were conducted at the distance of 12 miles from the coast. For better understanding, the maritime horizon is 30 miles and more. That is all this can be seen from our Azov coast with the naked eye. There were three-mile detainees, that is, 5.5 km from the Belosarai Spit, or 3.8 miles, that is 7 km from the Berdyansk Spit. That is almost on the beach. Due to the deployment of the new UNF artillery boats to the Sea of Azov in September 2018, the detentions within the Ukrainian 12-mile zone have stopped (See Slide 5).

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Now, a few words about the third stage. And this, in our opinion, is the most interesting – anchorage in the Sea of Azov before the Kerch Strait, when all

the vessels go already with cargo, usually before the blocking, it lasted only a few hours. For the detailed picture see Slide 6 and Slide 7.

Slide 6. The false pretext detentions of vessels on the way from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea at the Kerch Strait opening, July 1 – October 15, 2018. Region 3.



The statistics is as follows.

Average time-loss for a vessel:

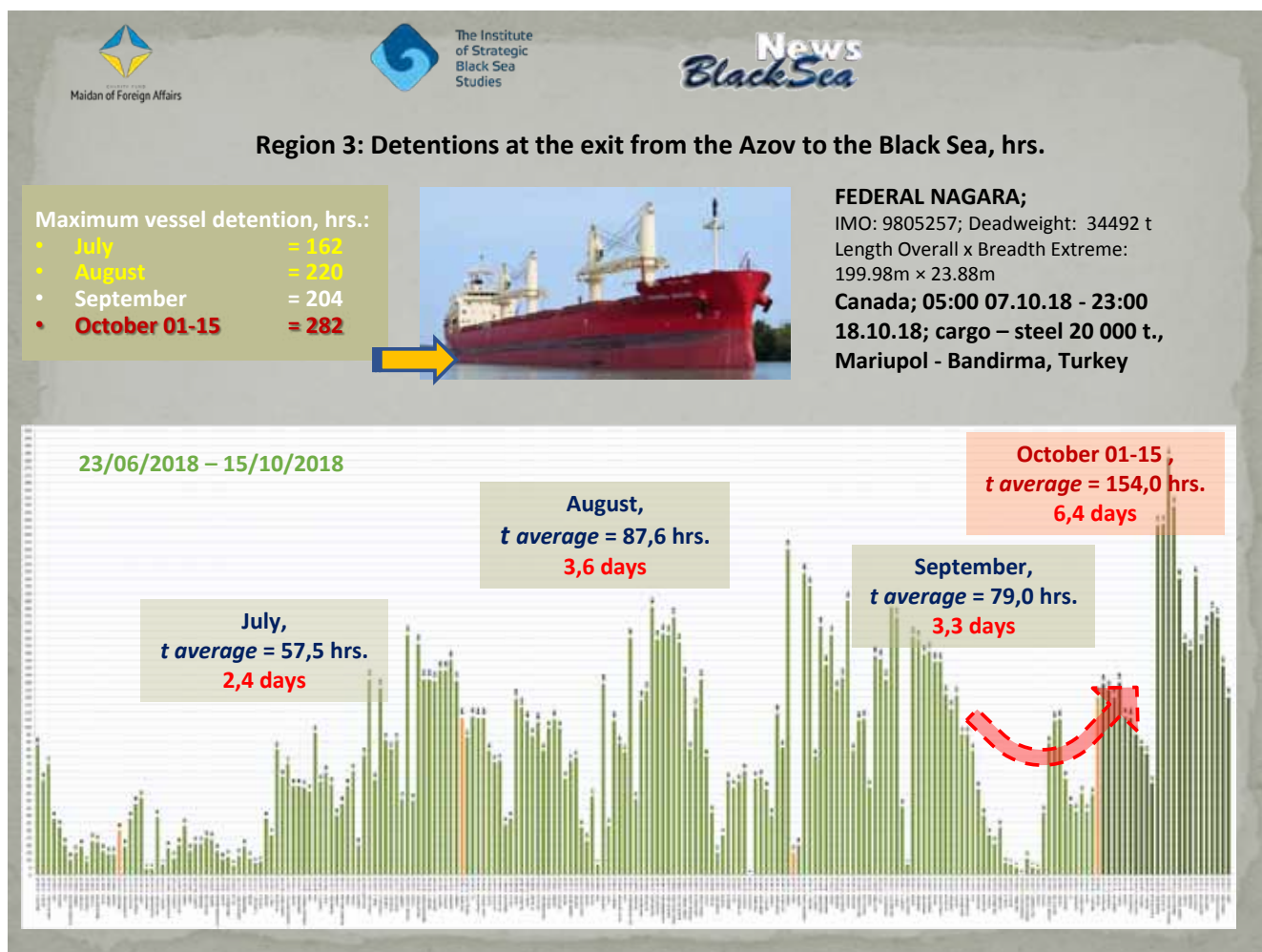
- July 2018 = 57.5 hours.
- August 2018 = 90.1 hours
- The first half of September 2018 = 125.7 hours

Total time-loss:

- July 2018 = 3623 hours
- August 2018 = 5498 (increase in 1.5 times).
- The first half of September 2018 = 3645 (forecast = $\times 2 = 7290$)

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Slide 7. Region 3. Detentions at the exit from the Azov to the Black Sea

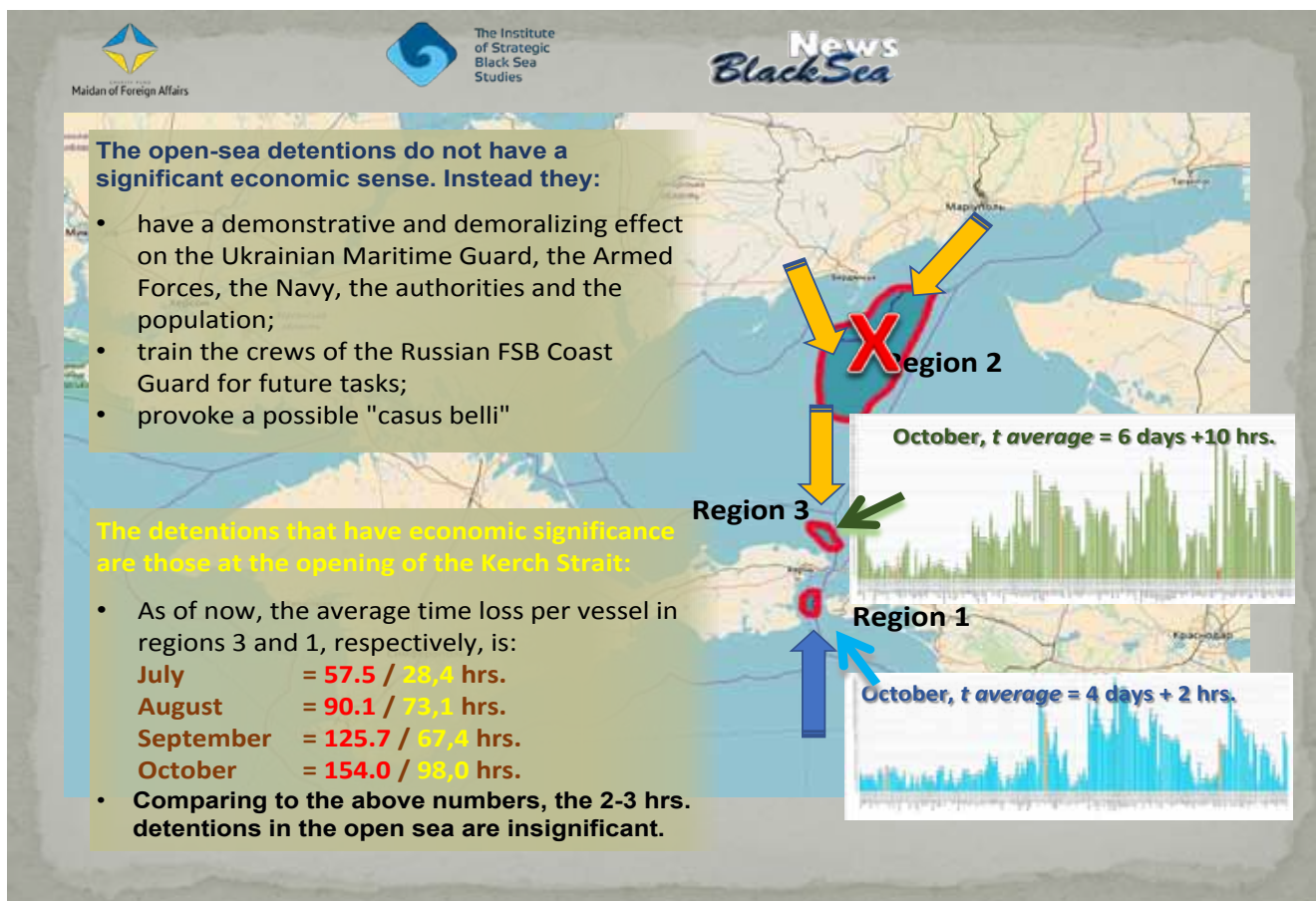


Meanwhile, the fee for the day freight and work team is charged. An important question – what are the damage costs? It depends on the characteristics of the vessel itself. The amount can vary from 5 to 50 thousand dollars per day. You can imagine the cost of fuel in a ship, 150 meters long with 30 thousand tons of cargo. In addition, the entire schedule of its work breaks.

In general, **the main economic sense of this blockade is realized not during the detention in the sea, but when a ship with the cargo for several days instead of several hours gets anchorage in front of the Kerch Strait.** On average, it stands at the entrance for 3 days, then another 5 days – at the exit, and therefore loses 8 days. These figures show that the Russians are increasingly using the key that fell into their hands after the occupation of Crimea and the seizure of control over the Kerch Strait.

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Slide 8. The main economic sense of the Kerch Strait blockade



The detentions also have a demonstrative effect: they are designed to demoralize both our military and the local population, as well as to bring hysteria to the crews of the vessels and their owners (see Slide 8).

Imagine that you are kept at the entrance to the Sea of Azov, and you see that the rest of the ships are heading freely to the Russian ports? Please note that you are not just alone - armed military FSBs are arranged on your board, inspect the ship, cabins, cargo, write protocols, and so on. Then the same procedure awaits you at sea and, finally, you stand for several days before exiting the Kerch Strait. Moreover, such a situation can provoke a casus belli. Imagine being clashed with Ukrainian border guards or someone else. However, it does not mean that Ukraine should only observe all this in a peaceful way.

Classic casus belli is the beginning of the Second World War - the Gleiwitz incident. The Germans were dressed in the uniform of the Polish Army,

and then they attacked a radio station in the German town of Gleiwitz. This became a formal reason for the invasion of Poland. If the Russians want to create a casus belli - they will do it. But even more demoralizing is the fact that the authorities do not do what they should do in this situation.

The question arises: what should the Ukrainian authorities do? For the first few weeks there was a silence in general. Possibly, if the media did not make the topic public, this situation has been ongoing. The dynamics of the reaction was as follows: first, within the limits of their authority, the military began to react. Demonstration exercises, planes over the beaches - all this happened because the commanders of the units, evaluating the situation, decided to react exactly like that. Representatives of foreign embassies responded to the situation the first - more than a dozen diplomats of a very high level passed through our office. They were the first secretaries of the embassies, the military attachés, even an ambassador, a deputy ambassador. They were

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embarrassed and tried to understand what was going on and why there was no response from the top authorities of Ukraine at the outset. We did not understand this either. The permanent representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, prof. Boris Babin, was the first to respond to this situation publicly. Note that he is not a professional official, but a scientist, specialist in maritime law, maritime lawyer, worked as head of the department at the Odesa Maritime Academy. Minister of infrastructure Volodymyr Omelyan has been supporting the situation from the very first days, this is logical, because his Ministry suffered from the blockade. The Ministry has a position on this issue and implements it.

Then, the afterthoughts appeared like: "at such a meeting, such an official had mentioned the situation in the Sea of Azov." The President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko wrote the post on his page on Facebook, adding that we would complain about the Russians during the European Union summit. In the resolution adopted on its outcome was the phrase "militarization of the Black and Azov Seas". So, the Sea of Azov for the first time fell to the EU resolution, that is very important. Foreign ambassadors have already visited Mariupol and Berdyansk, and finally, during the Sea Breeze exercises in Odesa, the president said about the disgrace in the Sea of Azov and assured that he instructed the leadership of the Armed Forces, the Naval Forces of Ukraine and the Border Guard Service to take responses - it is a question of strengthening the presence of the Navy of Ukraine, which began to take place in September 2018. Prior to this, the Ukrainian Navy was in the Azov region only in the form of the marines and coastal artillery, which are part of the Joint Forces Operation in the East of Ukraine.

Separately, I would highlight the position, more precisely, the absence of the position, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. They referred to the fact that "there were no complaints from the owners of the vessels, and the media had artificially created a problem." We openly said that we consider their position to be capitulatory one. Moreover, we could not put the interests of one trial, which will

end allegedly in five years, above the interests of the national security of Ukraine (it is referred to the lawsuit of Ukraine to international courts on maritime law). Many politicians and public figures have appealed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a demand to explain their position. While the ministry explained it in a document with the stamp "for official use." As openly stated by the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine have a lawsuit against Russia in the Maritime Arbitration in The Hague for the violation of The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 by Moscow. However, the lawsuit is about seizing the Black Sea shelf and ports in Crimea, the construction of the Kerch Bridge, but nobody has seen those declared documents. And a lawsuit had been filed before the crisis in the Sea of Azov began. So, we have great doubts about the fact that all the Azov lawsuit case will get to the Hague, as in 2003 Ukraine and Russia agreed that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea does not extend its important part to the Sea of Azov, calling the Sea of Azov the internal waters of Ukraine and Russia. Russia has already challenged the jurisdiction of the arbitration in the part of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, and it seems predictable. They saw that the case of the Sea of Azov, unfortunately for us, is difficult to bring to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Many people ask: how did we come to such an agreement about the Sea of Azov with Russia? It was concluded after the famous 2003 crisis with the Tuzla Island. But, we think that now it is not necessary to look far in the past and try to figure out what and why, historians will tell about it once. It's time to think about how to counter aggression.

We would like to say that we are almost sure that the Azov crisis was a workout. The question arises: what will be the real actions?

The main export routes of Ukraine are in the Black Sea. Nowadays all actions take place in the Sea of Azov, and if there were already more than 100 detentions, one can imagine how many Russian sailors and military officers on the coast guard service worked out their actions in such situations.

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Slide 9. The seized jack up drilling rigs as the military assets



Now, we should consider the case of the Black Sea, as there we have offshore oil and gas infrastructure (fixed offshore platforms, jack up drilling rigs, etc.) captured by Russia (see Slide 9). Odesa gas field - these are the famous "Boyko towers" It is closer to the coast of the Odesa region than to the occupied Crimea. In addition, there are the Golitsynske gas condensate, Shtormove gas condensate and Arkhangelske gas fields, which are located closer to the peninsula. On every fixed offshore platform and drilling rig, a defensive garrison of the Russian Special Forces or Marine Corps is deployed, as

well as radars for surveillance for underwater and surface environment. There are tens of such military assets there. If they were previously under the protection of the auxiliary ships - tugs, then **on June 1, 2018 the protection of Ukrainian marine gas infrastructure assets on the Ukrainian shelf was officially transferred to the 41st Cruise Missile Ship Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation. There is round-the-clock rotation of ships, including warships (see Slide 10).**

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Slide 10. The seized jack up drilling rigs under protection of the 41th cruise missile ship brigade of the RF

The slide features a map of the Sea of Azov and surrounding regions. At the top left are logos for 'Maidan of Foreign Affairs' and 'The Institute of Strategic Black Sea Studies'. At the top right is the 'News BlackSea' logo. A title box in the upper right corner reads 'The Sea Threats'. Two text boxes on the left provide context: 'Since June 1 2018, the 41st RF missile ship brigade started round-the-clock protection raids of the Ukrainian JSC Chornomornafrogaz's oil and gas fields, seized by Russia. Antiship missile boats rotate at bi-weekly basis.' and 'Immediately after the 2014 occupation, it was done by the FSB coastguard.' Two green arrows originate from the bottom left and point towards the center of the sea. Two red starburst symbols mark specific locations. Two small inset images show a coastal town and a large offshore drilling rig. A large green arrow points from the bottom right towards the center of the sea.

The Sea Threats

Since June 1 2018, the 41st RF missile ship brigade started round-the-clock protection raids of the Ukrainian JSC Chornomornafrogaz's oil and gas fields, seized by Russia. Antiship missile boats rotate at bi-weekly basis.

Immediately after the 2014 occupation, it was done by the FSB coastguard.

The Seized Jackup Rigs and the 41st Missile Ship Brigade of the RF

If I were in the place of the Russians, I would start to delay the inspection of the vessel going to or from Odesa. Why not? For example, the FSB reported that on one of the ships going by this route a sabotage group, which has a task to blow up the Boyko towers, is hidden. If they act this

way, then we can only imagine what will happen to the maritime traffic in the Black Sea. The traffic will decrease substantially, and this will be a very unpleasant situation (see Slide 11). This may not happen, but this scenario should be addressed.

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Slide 11. Sea traffic in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov



Also, it is necessary to work out variants with the troops landing. The war is not over. It is probably one of its first stages. In our opinion, Russians will not go further on Donbas by land. Firstly, they are afraid of new sanctions, the reaction of the international community, and great military losses. But, by sea... The Azov Sea is a 100 per cent Russian lake. They have an absolute advantage at sea there. In addition, they have an advantage on the East Bank of the Azov Sea. Rostov, Yeisk, Temryuk compose the Southern Military District, the most powerful in the Russian armed forces. It consists of the marine corps, aviation, special forces, which, in addition, constantly conduct training exercises. Also, during the years of occupation of Crimea, Moscow has strengthened the Black Sea Fleet. At sea, they dominate at times and, of course, consider options of how to use their force.

What is the feature of an airborne operation? Suppose that your response team is located on the

coast, and the enemy is in the center of the Sea of Azov. You do not know exactly where he will strike, because the distance to all possible points is approximately the same. Protection of the entire coast is simply impossible, and we will add disinformation among the population here and other factors. It is impossible to guess exactly where the airborne forces will strike. The entire Ukrainian coast in both seas is a dangerous area, where an airborne operation could take place.

What can we answer? **Until we develop the Ukrainian Navy, that is, the next two to three or four years, we can only reasonably ask NATO to have their warships in the Black Sea, as it was in 2014. This is a major deterrence factor. Since March 2014, almost 90 per cent of days before the end of the year, NATO ships were patrolling in the Black Sea. Due to this, in my opinion, on May 2, 2014, "The Odesa People's Republic" did not appear in Ukraine. The plan**

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was prepared: they singed, killed people and called Putin to save. And he would save, if not the NATO ships in the Black Sea. This is a very strong deterrent. Understanding the objectively low combat capability of the Ukrainian Navy, we need to negotiate with the Alliance about such alternation.

Putin understands it and tries to stretch NATO forces and divert them from the Black and Mediterranean seas to the Baltic. Our partners are worried about Russian activity in the north, but in our opinion, this is a demonstration designed to divert Alliance forces from the Mediterranean. This is a great military and political game and it must also be understood. We have no other options other than playing it. It is desirable to win.

What measures, symmetric or asymmetric ones, can we really apply? There are two or three very important aspects. Firstly, we need a sea border in the Azov Sea. What to do with the 2003 agreement? The niceties must be solved by lawyers - denounced, suspended, until relations with Moscow are settled in hundreds of years. Moreover, since the construction of the Kerch Bridge Russia itself has cynically violated it. Further, we must inform the world that the 2003 agreement on the Azov Sea is not in force, and therefore, according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, we declare the 12th zone of the Ukrainian territorial waters and we ask world to take this into account. Then, the Commander-in-Chief, the President of Ukraine, is obliged to give the Armed Forces an order to secure the protection of the border. This is a complex and large volume issue, but it needs to be done.

We have forces to protect this border, though they are weaker than the Russian ones. We have 18 "assets" - 2 ships and 16 boats in Mariupol detachment of the Marine Guard, and now they have already started to create the Azov naval base of the Ukrainian Navy. It is necessary that all sea battle-ship artillery boats are armed (now some do not even have a machine gun), and crews are motivated to defend their homeland, otherwise another homeland will come.

In addition to the maritime border, we need sanctions against Russia. We appreciate very positively that the Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine took on the idea that sanctions - economic restrictions should be imposed against the ports of the Russian Federation on the Black Sea and the Azov Seas. When he said about this for the first time, the hysteria began immediately in the Russian politics, because they are all businessmen, and from Rostov, Taganrog and Yeisk, across the Sea of Azov, there is a huge sea export traffic. It is about grain, gasoline, oil, sulfur. If the world only learns that Ukraine is going to bring them under sanctions, then it will be a very painful blow, because international partners will not provide them with loans, will not continue contracts, and so on. Business is very sensitive to such things.

Certainly, we need to further strengthen our maritime capabilities. We have a naval force and it works very well on the coast, but sailors must go to sea. I think the main task of the state is to provide Ukraine with the warships. The quicker, the better.

If one looks more broadly, the maritime policy of Ukraine should finally come to light. For now, Ukraine is a state with land thinking, although according to various estimates, thousands of Ukrainians work as the sailors all over the world. What does land-based thinking mean? It means to be afraid of the sea horizon, while looking on it. And if you look through the websites of coastal cities, you will find out that there is almost no marine news. We have to shape sea thinking in the country, but it is a long process. The Ukrainian economy as a whole depends on the export of grain, sunflower oil and metallurgy products. And all this export is provided by sea.

The partly loss of the marine export is a real threat to the Sea of Azov, and a potential threat to the Black Sea. It would cause a huge crisis for economy of Ukraine. The safety of marine traffic is the matter of national security. The State, the Commander-in-Chief, the Armed forces, the Security Services should prioritize this threat.

In this context, it is time to immediately rethink the role of the occupied Crimea in these processes. It is Crimea that now threatens not only Ukraine but the whole Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Crimea and Syria are already

inextricably linked, and this node will intensify even more after the full commissioning of the Kerch Bridge. For four years, grain and military equipment from Crimea have been supplied to Syria. When the railroad part of the bridge will work, all Syrian transit will pass to Crimea, because the port of Novorossiysk does not want to get into the Syrian list of American sanctions.

Europe will need time to understand that Crimea is a powerful military base that has no analogues in Europe. From there you can cover, for example, London and the Mediterranean up to Spain. It has several types of sea, land and airborne cruise missiles. All of them can carry nuclear warheads and have been tested in the Syrian war. New ships, submarines, small rocket ships with Kaliber missiles know the taste of blood - they shot the same "Kaliber" at real targets in Syria. When the submarine commander presses the Start button, not for the first time, he doesn't care where the target is located - in Syria or in Europe. Russia has the troops that are ready for war with anyone.

In addition, during the occupation of Crimea, Russia began to build corvettes at two Crimean plants - in Feodosia and Kerch. Ten next corvettes will be built there. And this will further increase the level of threat represented by Crimea to the entire European continent. In our country, and beyond, we must say that Putin will not stop. He is already a Tsar, not a President.

Putin will attack. He has no other option. Russian economy is not so good, so he needs an external factor to unite around him the brainwashed victory-seeking population. He is currently playing with Trump, Macron, Merkel. When they finally understand this, Putin will not have another instrument to dominate in his own country, as well as in the neighboring states, except the nuclear threat and cyberwar. The aggressive nature of the Putin regime has not changed - it will only intensify. So, we can congratulate ourselves on the fact that we will live in extremely interesting times. **In our opinion, the theme of "Novorossiya" is not written off, and we will see it either in a military form, or in the political - in the spring, before the 2019 elections. Thus, it is extremely important to elaborate countermeasures.**

Let's imagine that in the elections in Azov and Black Sea regions, the notional "Party of Regions" wins the elections, and with the methods they are accustomed to, although now it's not 2012. Let's simulate the situation: conflicts between supporters of the "Russian world" and Ukrainian patriots begin, several people appear who allegedly belong to Ukrainian army and fire is open. The casus belli appeared. **Thus, the option of the land corridor to Crimea, the Russians announced in 2014, remains in the agenda in the Kherson region, as well as in Berdyansk, Mariupol and Odesa. We should prepare ourselves to this. The countermeasures should be elaborated by the security services, as well as by the local authorities, to not start from a blank slate.**

Putin needs Ukraine. He also needs Moldova, where elections will be held soon ... We should prepare for the fact that this year will be very difficult. As, in principle, the next, and many years in general. Note that for the authoritarian leader of the Russian Federation, dictator if you want, the cycle "problem-solution-implementation of the decision" takes very little time. Democracies and international organizations such as NATO or the EU, which consist of almost three dozen countries, even theoretically cannot act so quickly. So, the dictator always operates more quickly.

As for the civilized world, it seems that over the years of relative prosperity, when the economies were successful, and the incomes of citizens grew, the values for which both NATO and the EU were created, were forgotten. Being observers of international politics today, we realize that many leaders of states, which we considered to be proponents of values, are increasingly leaning towards Realpolitik, that is, the policy of the XIX - early XX century. This is a very difficult stage and Putin understands this. Russian elites and special services operate competently and consistently. That is, if they decided to put the end to Mariupol and Berdyansk, they would do so systematically and gradually. They will come to where we let them go. If they decide to turn Crimea into a military base and understand that the Crimean Tatars and an active part of the population are a threat to this goal, then they will simply squeeze out those who interfere with them. We and the Crimean friends are joking: if the Russians have not yet arrived to you, then this means that they just have no time, but they have not forgotten.

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Russia will attack on all possible fronts in Ukraine, Europe and the whole world as long as it is not stopped. Unfortunately, we have to live at such a time.

I think that in the next few years it is not worth to count on the fact that the Russian economy will not survive militarization. There is a very large margin of safety. **We estimate that economic sanctions related to the occupation of Crimea cost Russia about 1 per cent of GDP. It's a lot, but more needs to be done.**

In our view, **Ukraine should establish something like the Ministry of Economic War, as Brit-**

ain did in 1940. It analyzed what was German in their territories and all this was arrested, stopped trade between the British territories and Hitler's Germany, etc. This is a complicated issue for Ukraine, because we still have a large presence of Russian capital in all spheres. Sanctions, arresting assets - is an element of economic warfare. **We have no other way out - there will be either a hot war or a quiet economic one.** However, a possible option is both wars simultaneously. But we understand that Ukraine will not surrender, even if during the parliamentary elections there will be an attempt to revenge Yanukovich's forces. **The only question is at what boundaries we will stay.**

Prof. Yurii FEDOROV,
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Columnist of Radio Liberty,
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War in Syria and Security in the Black Sea Region

Having intervened in the Syrian civil war in the fall of 2015, Putin created a serious threat to international security in the Black Sea region. In November 2015, a Russian Su-24 front bomber was shot down over Turkish territory, which immediately turned into a sharp crisis in Russian-Turkish relations, fraught with armed conflict. Moscow threatened Turkey with a nuclear strike. If hostilities between Russia and Turkey had unfolded, which was quite likely, their theatre would be first of all the Black Sea basin, with all the ensuing consequences for coastal states. In April 2018, the prospect of a military clash between Russia and the United States, connected with the American missile and air strike on the military facilities of the Assad regime after the use of the latest chemical weapons, appeared. In both cases, the worst possible scenario was avoided. However, these events highlighted the two most likely scenarios of an escalation of the war in Syria, including the spread of military operations in the Black Sea region.

Scenarios of escalation

The first scenario is a clash of Russian and American armed forces in Syria or adjacent areas of the Mediterranean, escalating into a war between Russia and the United States. Made in the eve of the US assault on Assad's forces in spring of 2018, the rigorous statement by the head of the Russian General Staff, Valerii Gerasimov about "retaliatory measures both on missiles and the carriers that will launch them" when there is a threat to the life of Russian soldiers, then turned out to be a blank sound [1]. Most likely, the Russian generals agreed with their American counterparts, where exactly the trajectories of their cruise missiles should go in order not to fall into the area of responsibility of the Russian air defense. But there is no guarantee that next time such an agreement will be reached.

Meanwhile, the crisis generated by the possible use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and the reaction to this by the United States and their allies, may be repeated. At the end of August 2018, United States National Security Advisor John Bolton warned Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of Security Council of Russia, of attacking Assad's forces and a "powerful military operation" if the latter would use chemical weapons in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib [2]. In response, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov warned Americans "of new, reckless moves." The Russian Ministry of Defense, in turn, argued that anti-Assad forces were preparing a "staging of a chemical attack that would serve as an occasion for rocket attacks by the United States and their allies [3]." This is usual Russian reaction to the forthcoming use of Damascus chemical weapons, which it either endorses, or is unable to anticipate.

If chemical weapons are used in Idlib or, possibly, Russian bombs will cause massive casualties of the civilian population, the United States can indeed "strike off," which can affect Russia's military facilities or Russian military personnel in Syria. This will put Moscow ahead of the dilemma: either to hide the losses and pretend that nothing has happened, or to enter into an armed conflict with the United States. In the first case, a severe blow against the reputation of the Kremlin is inevitable, in the second - the escalation of hostilities.

The successes of Putin and the Russian military, undoubtedly, include the organization of complex logistics operations for supplying the expeditionary corps. However, Russia's military presence in Syria is negligible compared to American forces located in the Mediterranean Sea, or those that can be quickly deployed there. Theoretically, up to five carrier carriers of the 4th, 5th and 6th US Navy can participate in combat operations in the Eastern

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Mediterranean. In practice, in the Mediterranean rotation-based aircraft carrier strike group consists of an aircraft carrier carrying up to 90 combat planes, two the Ticonderoga class guided missile cruisers, two the Arleigh Burke class destroyers, one or two nuclear submarines and other ships. In addition, the 60th US Navy squadron, consisting of four destroyers of the Arleigh Burke class, is based in Rota, Spain. Also, we need to add the naval forces and aviation of the NATO Allies, as well as US Air Force deployed in Italy, Turkey and bases in the Persian Gulf.

From the Russian side, these forces resist a maximum of 50 planes at the Khmeimim Air Base; two or three frigates, two to three Varshavianka-class submarines, several small rocket ships (corvettes) and support vessels deployed in the Mediterranean Sea. According to estimates of western experts, most of the planes - 44 units, were located in Khmeimim in early 2016. In 2017, there were 33 combat aircraft [4]. It is impossible to increase twice the Russian air presence in Syria without the large-scale expansion of the air base in Khmeimim or the construction of another similar facility. Neither one nor another is planned. The naval presence of Russia near Syria may be increased as a result of the transfer of additional ships from the Northern, Baltic and Black Sea Fleets. Thus, at the end of August 2018, the Russian missile cruiser *Marshal Ustinov*, the large anti-submarine ship *Severomorsk* and the large sea tanker were deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean [5].

However, the possibilities for strengthening the Russian naval grouping in the Mediterranean are limited. In one case, the ships will have to pass through the Straits of the Bosphorus- and Dardanelles, in the other - to make a long-distance passage around Europe, while remaining almost all the way without airborne cover. In addition, Russia's 720th Logistics Support Point in Tartus is still not capable of receiving gross tonnage ships. Moscow intends to modernize it and turn it into a full-fledged naval base capable of servicing the ships of the first and second classes. However, it is unknown when it will be done.

There may be several specific scenarios of the escalation of the Russian-American conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean and the expansion of hostilities to the Black Sea basin. But they all include the following elements:

- Russian military facilities or soldiers fall under the American missile retaliatory strike on the Assad's troops;
- Russian air defense assets in Khmeimim blow up one or more US aircrafts and / or Russian aviation and Navy clash with the American air force and fleet;
- As Russian Navy and air forces is weaker than US air forces in the Mediterranean Sea, the group of the Russian navy and aerospace Forces could be defeated;
- Russia threatens to use the Crimea-based Tu-22 bombers against the American squadron in the Eastern Mediterranean and cruise missiles against the US bases in Al-Udeid (Qatar), Incirlik (Turkey), Al-Tanf (Syria) and other bases in the region;
- For deterrence or retaliatory strikes, the United States could introduce a navy to the Black Sea, where it enters an armed confrontation with the main forces of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. It is unknown whether it would be possible to stop the further escalation of the conflict in the Black Sea, up to the rise of a military operation covering the whole its basin

Another scenario of the 'horizontal escalation' of the war in Syria correlates closely with the clash of the Russian and Turkish armed forces in that country. There could be several specific scenarios of the beginning of such a clash. Russian air defense could shoot down a Turkish aircraft, including over Turkish territory; Turkish ground troops in Afrin or Idlib may fall under the strike of the Russian aviation, or the latter operating in Idlib and adjacent areas of north-eastern Syria, may suffer from Turkish warplanes or air defenses, including MANPADS. However, whatever the initial phase of the conflict would be, it will most likely be followed by:

- closure of the Bosphorus and Straits for Russian military and, possibly, merchant ships;
- Russian ultimatum demanding the opening of straits, demonstration of military preparations in the Black Sea basin;
- a reciprocal Turkish ultimatum threatening to destroy the Russian military contingent in Syria;
- the outbreak of hostilities in case of political solution to the conflict cannot be found.

The real prospect of vertical and horizontal escalation of the war in Syria is determined by three factors. **The first** is the vulnerability of the Russian bases in Khmeimim and Tartus; the inability of the forces stationed there to confront the US and Turkish Air Force and Navy in the event of a large-scale armed conflict; the critical dependence of the Russian forces in Syria on communications passing through the Black Sea straits or enveloping Europe, which Russia cannot control. **The second** is the high probability of Russia's use in the event of an armed clash with the United States or Turkey of bomber aviation and / or cruise missile deployed in Crimea, which will mean the transition to the next stage of escalation and the inevitability of a reciprocal or pre-emptive strike on military objects in Crimea or on the east coast of the Black Sea. **The third** is Russia's inability to fully control the actions of Assad and the Iranian forces in Syria.

In open publications, the Russian military disagrees in assessing the outcome of the armed conflict in the Black Sea. Some believe that in the event of a war with Turkey, "by the end of the first week of hostilities, the loss of the Turkish Navy can reach a critical size, while the Russian Black Sea Fleet, also suffering serious losses, will largely maintain its combat capability." But if a NATO group of more than 2-3 surface action groups including a cruiser and the Arleigh Burke class destroyers will enter the Black Sea, which will be supported by the aviation forces of two or three aircraft carrier groups from the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as by 60 to 70 US aircraft tactical aircraft from Turkish air bases, the Black Sea Fleet will lose its meaning as an operational union. After this, the enemy will be able to accomplish a task of tactical and even operational landings on the Black Sea coast of Russia [6]. There are also more optimistic estimates: it is sometimes argued that if the Black Sea Fleet is successfully completed, by 2022-24 it can successfully resist the US Navy in the Black Sea. This, however, raises serious doubts: the main impact of this fleet will be 6-7 frigates of the Admiral Grigorovich class and 6-7 submarines of the Varshavianka class, which clearly yield in their combat power to two aircraft carrier groups of the 6th US Navy Fleet.

A Syrian Trap

Politically, the possibility of spreading the war in Syria to the Black Sea region is linked, among other things, to the fact that Russia fell into the "Syrian trap". Although in the summer of 2018, Damascus has got control over the southern regions of the country along the border with Israel, the strategic objectives of Assad and the Kremlin were not achieved. At the same time, Moscow will not be able, firstly, to withhold Assad from an attempt to eliminate the concentration of opposition forces in the province of Idlib and, secondly, to refuse the Syrian regime in the air support of this operation. Accordingly, the prospect of a collision between the Russian and Turkish troops in this zone was identified. Finally, there is no need to talk about a political settlement in Syria.

Starting a military operation in Syria, Putin pursued some far-reaching strategic goals:

- to retain power of the Assad / Makhoul clans in Syria [7];
- turn Syria into a Russian military and political bridgehead in the Middle East;
- relying on the influence in the region to force the West to come to a strategic agreement with Russia on a wide range of issues, the so-called "new Yalta";
- to prevent the emergence of route of communications outside of Russia's control, connecting China, Central Asia and the Middle East with access to the Mediterranean.

By the end of summer 2018, Damascus, with the help of Tehran and Moscow, established control of about 60 percent of the country's territory; liquidated the pockets of resistance in the provinces of Daraa and Al Qunaytirah. At the same time, the idea of the "new Yalta" has no chance for realization. In the foreseeable future, Western leaders are ready to talk to the Kremlin only on specific arms control issues, the situation in Donbas, the prevention of clashes between Russian and American aircraft in the Baltic, Black Sea and Mediterranean regions, as well as the settlement in Syria.

Despite victories in the south, Assad's armed forces are weak. According to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Syrian Arab Army has no more than

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40,000 combatant soldiers and officers, and its Air Force almost does not exist. The main strike force of Damascus is 40,000 (according to other sources - up to 60 and even 80,000) soldiers of the Iranian The Quds Force – a part of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and militants from Shiite armed militias from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Hezbollah detachments as well as the Russian air group [8].

The pro-Assad militias (The National Defense Forces, the NDF), formed mainly from religious minorities - Alawites, Shiites, Christians and Druze, is intended to maintain security and punitive operations in areas rebuffed by the opposition. The mobilization potential of the Alawite minority, which is 10-12 percent of the population, is largely exhausted, and Sunnis called to the army are generally not sufficiently loyal (or generally disloyal) to the Alawite regime top officers. A key role in the fighting is played by the support of the Syrian and Iranian units from the air by the Russian air group, which performs three main tasks:

- destruction of ammunition depots, support points, live force and equipment of the enemy on the battlefield, demoralization of its personnel;
- destruction of communications (roads, bridges, etc.) and the destruction of convoys to disrupt the supply of armed opposition groups;
- destruction of infrastructure related to oil extraction, processing and transportation in areas controlled by the opposition in order to deprive it of its most important source of income.

The effectiveness of Russian air support is due to the fact that the landscape in the war zones largely consists of plateaus and semi-deserts, as there are few natural shelters, as well as the absence of aviation and air defense assets in the enemy's disposal. Russian airplanes and attack helicopters, carrying massive attacks on the armed opposition and the population of the areas under its control, operate with impunity. Usually used are not high-precision ammunition, which are acutely lacking in Russia, but free-falling bombs. Their low accuracy compensates for a large number of ammunitions per unit area, causing serious accompanying damage, including the death of the civilian population. The Russian command,

the Iranian advisers, and the Assad government see this as a definite positive moment: the Sunni population, most of which is negatively referring to the Assad regime, is convinced that the support of the opposition turns into grave consequences.

After driving out the opposition from the southern provinces, Syria was divided into five parts:

- territory under the control of Damascus, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah;
- Idlib Province, where large forces of the armed opposition and about 1.2 million refugees from other parts of the country are concentrated. In the summer of 2018, from 15 to 30 thousand opposition activists from the suburbs of Damascus, the Rastan enclave, the provinces of Daraa and Al Qunaytirah, were displaced to Idlib, according to various estimates.
- the areas of northern Syria (Afrin, Jarabulus, Azaz), occupied by Turkey as a result of the "Euphrates Shield" operations in 2016-17 and the "Olive Branch" in early 2018, which have a population of about 1.5 million people [9];
- the regions of the northeastern Syria, inhabited by the Kurds, where the power belongs to the alliance of political and military groups of Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by a multinational coalition headed by the United States;
- a small, but strategically important, Al Tanf area under the control of the United States.

During the meeting with Bashar Assad in Sochi on May 17, 2018, Putin stated that "after the military successes, undoubtedly, additional conditions were created for the resumption of a full-fledged political process" [10]. In other words, "mission accomplished" and it's time to move on to a political settlement. The latter would indeed be the best way for the Russian leadership if, of course, it would be possible to preserve the power of Assad or another figure acceptable to the Kremlin, save the bases in Tartus and Khmeimim, and ultimately turn Syria into its geopolitical and strategic ground. This would allow Moscow to transform military successes of 2016-18 into a political victory or at least to solemnly declare it.

However, in the foreseeable future, there are no prospects for a settlement in this country. There

is no prospect of a mutually acceptable solution to two fundamental questions. The first is the future of Bashar Assad, his clan, controlling the army, state security organs and key segments of the economy. The second is the solution of the contradictions between different religious groups (Sunnis, Alawites, Shiites, Druze, Christians) and national (Arabs, Kurds, Turks).

The armed opposition of Turkey, the Arab and Western powers demand the removal of Assad from the post of president as a condition for the start of the transition process. For Assad, this is unacceptable. Losing power at best will turn into emigration to Iran or Russia and the prospect of appearing before an international court on charges of war crimes. Moscow and Tehran, theoretically, can agree to replace Assad with another figure from his clan. However, the removal from the power of the current ruling elite would mean a serious political defeat both for Russia and for Iran. The huge amount of political and material resources that they have spent on Damascus support will simply disappear. The cessation of the war also deprives Iran of the bases for the preservation of its armed formations in Syria. And the withdrawal from the power of the Alawite clans will set a cross on the prospects for creating a "Shiite arc" from Iran to Lebanon, which is Tehran's strategic goal [11]. Bashar al-Assad and his entourage do not want a settlement, although they are compelled to admit it declaratively. In fact, Damascus requires a war until the victorious end, of course, assuming the Russian armed forces participate in it. The possibility of settling the relations between religious and national groups is not viewed. The Kurds who created the Damascus-independent power structures in the northeast are unlikely to voluntarily return in the composition of a single Syrian state. At best, we can talk about a very weak confederation. In an extremely difficult and dangerous situation, there will be Alawites and other religious minorities that are the backbone of the ruling clan. The liquidation of the Assad regime will lead to a massive invasion of the Islamic radicals of the Sunni term in the territories inhabited by them with severe consequences.

The cessation of the Russian military operation in Syria will significantly weaken Damascus and its Iranian allies, may lead to a new series of defeats of the regime. It is unacceptable for Putin and

his entourage "loss of face". At the same time, the continuation of the war, anticipated attempt of Damascus to establish control over Idlib, where more than a million refugees are located, will inevitably turn into a serious humanitarian catastrophe and will lead Russia to an uncontrolled situation, the duration and consequences of which is almost impossible to foresee.

Fight for Idlib

In the fall of 2018, one can expect a sharp escalation of the situation in and around Syria, including the spread of armed confrontation in the Black Sea region. Idlib is the main area of concentration of the armed opposition, both moderate and extremist. Damascus and Tehran insist on a large-scale military operation aimed at destroying opposition forces. In Moscow, it seems, there is no single point of view yet. Part of the ruling elite advocates such an operation. So, in the beginning of August, the online military magazine "Military Diplomat", which usually reflects the point of view of military intelligence, wrote: "... further, it seems, will come the turn of Idlib, where all this time the combatants from the other Syrian provinces were discarded as in the dumping ground. Although there is a de-escalation zone, it seems that Damascus and Moscow are not going to endure this viper until infinity or just a few years. Indeed, on the one hand, it is necessary to give the human garbage that was brought there to be sealed and pounded, that is, to wait until the people are tired of the abundance of "sharia defenders", and conflicts between the groups will intensify, and on the other hand – it is no need to do this ". The authors of the article admitted that "there will not be an easy walk as there are many gunmen there," but "given a fact of the 'steamroller' of Russian aerospace forces that are able though the hundreds of air strike to roll out any enemy, the 'bearded men' have no chances for the successful fight. It is the matter of time when they will be destroyed [12]. Similar theses are repeated in many publications related to Russian military circles.

At the same time, there are also relatively moderate figures in Russia's top, apparently self-aware, that Russia's participation in the operation in Idlib will lead to a serious complication of relations with the West and Turkey.

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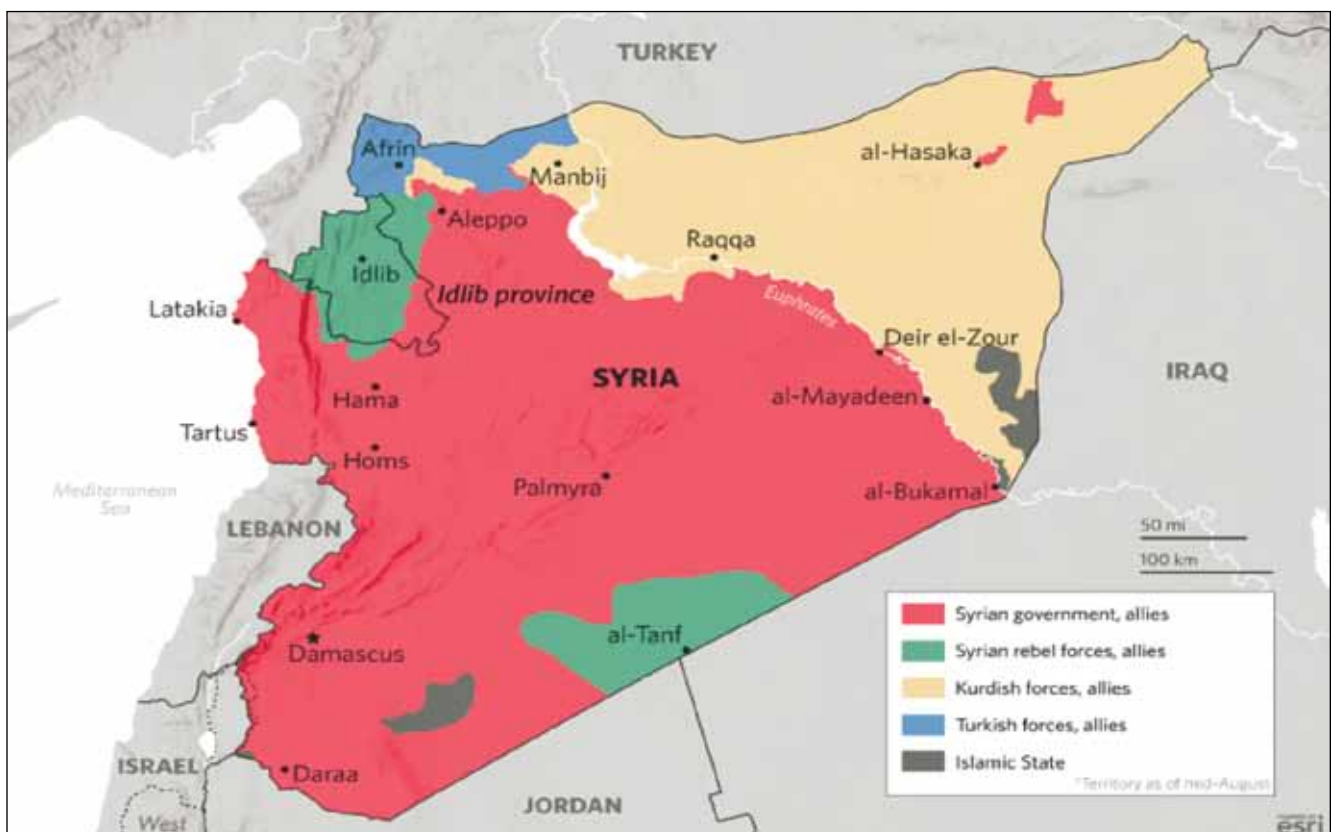
They are trying to find some kind of political solution to the problem, but unsuccessfully. Damascus insists on the disarmament of opposition groups and the establishment of full control over the province. Opponents of the Assad regime require the change of leadership of the country as a necessary condition for resolving the situation. As a result, the "fight for Idlib" is becoming more and more likely. Its humanitarian consequences will be catastrophic, and responsibility for this will be not only on the Assad troops, but also on the Russian aerospace forces 'steam roller.'

In Idlib there are large anti-Assad forces. Among them are, above all, the detachments of the Syrian National Army (SNA), numbering 35,000 troops in the summer of 2018 [13]. It includes most of the 2012 Free Syrian Army (FSA), from the outset oriented to Turkey and involved in operations "Shield of the Euphrates" and "Olive Branch". About a year ago, Ankara "reformatted" the FSA, creating a more combat-capable formation. Another group of anti-Assad forces was formed in August 2018 under the name of the "Front of National Liberation", which included numerous Islamist organizations oriented to Saudi Arabia and other states of the Persian Gulf. The main force of this group is Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, The Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, parts of the

Free Syrian Army, not included in the SNA, and about fifteen smaller groups [14].

On the whole, there are between 85 and 100 thousand armed soldiers and officers in the SNA and the groups included in the "Front of National Liberation" [15]. Along with them, in Idlib, al-Qaeda-affiliated Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which refused to enter the "Front of National Liberation" but is extremely hostile to the Assad regime, numbering from 7 to 11 thousand militants, operates [16]. These figures, although they are provisional, indicate that the military operation of Damascus in Idlib will not be an "easy walk" and without massive Russian support from the air will end with a failure. But at the same time, there is no certainty that Moscow will be able to keep Assad from such an operation. If it starts, Russia will inevitably engage in it and, accordingly, will be responsible for civilian casualties. This will turn out in a sharp exacerbation of Russian-Turkish relations. Ankara resolutely opposes military operation in Idlib and makes it clear that if such a rush takes place, relations with Russia will be radically ruined. "A forceful decision in Idlib will undermine trust between Russia and Turkey," said the Turkish Foreign Minister Chavushoglu at the talks in Moscow in the end of August 2018 [17].

Fig.1. Military and Political Situation in Syria as of August 2018



Conflict in the Black Sea. Risks for Ukraine

There may be plenty of scenarios for the escalation of armed action in Syria to the Black Sea region. It is very difficult to foresee the development of the military-political situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, if possible at all. However, if the fighting between Russia, on the one hand, the US, Turkey or NATO, on the other hand, begins, then there will be two groups of consequences for Ukraine, as well as for other coastal states. The first is the cessation of all sea cargo and passenger traffic through the Black Sea. This will mean blocking Ukraine's foreign trade with the countries of the Black and Mediterranean Seas, including the states of Southern Europe; China; the states of Africa, the Middle East, North America and other regions of the world. The closure of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits will be practically inevitable. It is very likely that they will damage their infrastructure, flood their ships there, which for a long time will overturn the movement. Even the potential prospect of an armed confrontation in the Black Sea basin is complicated by Ukraine's connection to the 'One Belt, One Road' communication system connecting Europe with China, as well as the implementation of this strategic concept as a whole. One of the important goals of the Kremlin is to exclude Ukraine from potential participants in this project, as it can become a serious competitor to Russia.

Another complex of negative consequences of the armed conflict in the Black Sea for Ukraine is the possibility of its involvement in military action. This may prove to be an unintended consequence of the collision of circumstances, the emergence of the confrontation of the belligerent parties.

But, rather, drawing Ukraine into conflict can happen due to the planned actions of Moscow. The Russian military-political leadership can well take advantage of the situation and strike a series of blows on Ukrainian military and naval sites in coastal regions, port facilities, transport nodes, and so on. The plan is understandable: to cause the maximum possible economic damage to Ukraine and to destabilize the political situation.

Finally, it is impossible to exclude the expansion of armed confrontation in the Black Sea basin to the nuclear stage as a result of the defeat of the Russian Navy and the Aerospace Forces in a conventional warfare. The consequences of even limited use of nuclear weapons for the region are generally certain: it will turn into a kind of "black hole" of a global economy with a damaged social infrastructure.

Thus, having intervened in the war in Syria, Putin created a military and political threat of the global scale. At the same time, he made a typical mistake: he did not assess the consequences of his decision. As a result, Russia got in a strategic trap. Putin cannot leave the war - it will turn into an intolerable loss of face for him. The ability to influence the development of events there is very limited. The probability of involvement in the "fight for Idlib," fraught with escalation of armed confrontation with Turkey and the United States, is very high. Finally, even if one succeeds in avoiding the worst possible scenario, the Kremlin faces the need to find, at the expense of the Russian population, several hundred billion dollars needed for the initial restoration of Syria. But this is a problem for Russia, and not for Ukraine.

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Russia's Impact on the Republic of Serbia: Consequences and Ways of Overcoming

The use of pro-Russian forces, propaganda and energy tools by Russia aims at strengthening its influence in Serbia that is extremely dangerous for the region and Europe as a whole. That is why it is necessary to inform the population in Serbia and other Western Balkan countries about what is really happening in Ukraine.

Russia's malicious influence on energy security of Serbia

In 2008, Russian Gazprom actually bought the leading Serbian company - the Oil Industry of Serbia (Naftna Industrija Srbije, NIS). [1] Russian influence on energy security of Serbia has actually started at that time.

This company is the most profitable enterprise in Serbia, but the profits of NIS are obtained by the method of robbery, from which the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian people suffer. The fact that NIS pays taxes at a preferential rate - instead of 7% of taxes on the rent of areas with extractive resources, as provided by law, NIS pays only 3%. This has happened in the result of concession of the current corrupt regime in Serbia, which for some reason willingly provided Gazprom with such preferential conditions. In addition, NIS does not pay "ecological tax" at all (harmful oils, waste, etc.). [2]

NIS practices a dishonest policy of employment. It dismisses employees who work on a permanent basis and hired employees on a temporary basis through employment agencies. If the salary of employees on a permanent basis is around 78,000 dinars (650 euros), then employees on a temporary basis earn only 25,000 dinars (208 euros) per month, but at the same time, they work the same time and carry out the same amount of work.

Until 2012, 11,000 employees were employed on a permanent basis in NIS, but only 3,891 employees left by the end of 2016. Thus, due to impoverishment of the people of Serbia, NIS gets high profits. All this exaggeration of NIS, headed by the leadership appointed by Gazprom, is provided under the good title of "social program of Gazpromneft".

If there were not such extortion and avoidance of previewed by law taxes, NIS would have earned 6 billion dinars (about 50 million euros) per year less, and all these funds would go to employees and the tax system of the Republic of Serbia.

The share of Gazprom in NIS just after the acquisition of the company in January 2008 amounted to 51%, and now, since 2011, it is already 56.15%. [3] All this is under the management of general director of the company Kiril Albertovich Kravchenko, who has been in office since 2009.

The fact is that NIS not only expands its network of robbery and influence on Serbia, but also, like a cancer, begins to expand its activities to neighboring countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.

The peak of hypocrisy is that the leadership of NIS (the Kremlin's servants) opened the NIS office in Brussels in 2011 in support of the European integration of Serbia. This is a demonstration of an answer to the question whether the Kremlin supports the European integration of the Balkan countries, which are not yet members of the EU. If the "Kremlin gang" receives profits, they support it, and they can obtain money from the EU countries. The main thing for them is that NATO does not expand beyond what they see as a threat to their power.

It is worth to pay attention to the fact that the Russian oligarchy (NIS, Gazprom) enhances its energy presence in countries that are in a peculiar environment (like in a bag) of powerful oil and gas pipelines, but in fact they remain isolated. In such a situation, a Kremlin firm ("Lukoil" or "Gazprom") rushes on them and begins to expand within these countries, and then begins a robbery similar to what is described in the case of NIS in Serbia.

A tangible consequence was the increase of fuel prices by NIS². Like in Bulgaria in 2011, Serbian protests against high fuel prices took place in Serbia. [4] If Lukoil raised prices in Bulgaria, in Serbia, it was Gazprom as the owner of NIS that did that. The Serbs went out on the street, arranged actions on cars and motorcycles, and blocked roads to stop traffic, causing heavy traffic jams in various cities and towns of Serbia.

The protests began on June 8, 2018, they were held almost every day, and the main protest action took place on June 28. [5] However, it is noteworthy that pro-Russian organizations of Serbia have become the most active protesters that indicate provocation of this situation the Russian side with the aim to destabilize the internal political situation in the country.

Pro-Russian organizations of Serbia at the service for the Kremlin

Besides Russophiles from various pro-Russian organizations actively incited the Serbian population to protests, consolidation of their activities is also marked, when some relatively small organizations or movements begin to unite in a larger joint movement.

One of the most vivid examples is the group of intellectuals, which united around Dr. Dusan Dundier on June 13 (5 days after the start of "fuel protests"). President of the Economic Movement Branko Dragas, Political Advisor of the movement "Rod" Dr. Dragan Petrovic, Director of the Center for Anti-Terrorism and for the World Order Voislav Milosevic, Professor Dragan Skobal and

² In June 2018, NIS increased fuel prices that caused protest actions.

Director of the movement "Fatherland" Dr. Mila Aleckovic joined the association.

All mentioned persons are conscious Russophiles with many years of experience, but Dr. Dusan Dundier deserves special attention. He does not even conceal that he has excellent connections with senior officials from the Kremlin, and even on the contrary - boasts of them. So, on February 10, 2014, he was appointed "Vice President of the Association for the International Cooperation of Non-Governmental Security Structures for South Eastern Europe." In a public video of June 2, 2014, it is evident that Dr. Dusan is in the company of "high authorities of the Russian Federation", and specifically with President of the Committee on Defense and Security of the Federal Assembly V.Ozerov and President of the Committee on Defense and Security of the city of Moscow S.Yurianova.

All members of the newly formed by Dr. Dusan group speak publicly for "overthrowing the powers of the betrayers" in Serbia as a whole, as well as individual officials separately. Dr. Dusan also appeared for more massive "fuel protests," and called on the people to participate more actively. Other members of this group also called for protests and overthrow of the power. This group is just one example.

The analysis of the pro-Kremlin groups in Serbia shows their obvious separation on the criteria of attitude to the current government of President Aleksandar Vucic - there are groups that support him, or at least avoid open criticism, but there are groups that strongly oppose them. The above group of Dr. Dusan is among the latter ones.

Let give examples of several groups, which support and/or don't express criticism to Aleksandar Vucic.

"National Avangard". The founder and engine of this sharply pro-Kremlin group is Nenad Uzelac, a Serbian student who graduated from the master course in Moscow. On his FB page, he boasts photos of the Russian Ambassador to Serbia Chepourin, Alexei Pushkov and Kostiantin Kosachev, that confirms his native acquaintance with senior

officials in the Kremlin. Nenad Uzelac distinguished himself by the fact that in 2016 and 2017 he promised that "in Serbia would soon be a powerful Russian weapon." "National Avangard" regularly holds conferences, seminars, the number of which grows.

"Srpska Desnica" (Serbian Right) is created and headed by Misa Vacic, about which rumors have been heard in Belgrade that he is a man of Aleksandar Vucic, for whom he performs "dirty deeds". "Srpska Desnica" was finally formed at the Congress, which was held at the Sava Center, the most expensive and largest conference room in Belgrade. Leonid Savin, right hand of Dugin, was among visible Kremlin men at the Congress. "Srpska Desnica" frankly supports the President Aleksandar Vucic.

"Zavetnici" - a sharply pro-Kremlin group, they were personally hosted by Sergei Zheleznyak and other Kremlin officials in Moscow. [6] They are neutral to President Vucic at first sight, at least they never criticize him, even if there is a clear disagreement with him. "Zavetnici" differ from other pro-Kremlin groups as they sharply oppose the EU and NATO. They constantly compare themselves with the "traitors" who support the EU and NATO. In Serbia, all those who support the EU and NATO are so-called "anti-national traitors of the Motherland", at least 95% of citizens perceive them in such a manner.

In fact, they all demand Serbia's recognition of Kosovo independence, their NGOs are only involved in the investigation of war crimes of Serbs during the 90's war, require the introduction of sexual education for children at school and in kindergartens. They have a negative attitude to all traditional and family images and history of Serbia - so, for the vast majority of citizens of Serbia, their activities are perceived as "anti-Serbian". Meanwhile, leaders of such groups are usually elderly women with a sharp character, which pushes interlocutors. Since these groups still actively advocate for the EU and NATO, all this negative effect from their other statements, affairs and appearance are transferred to the idea of Serbia's accession to the EU and NATO.

Such a clear division of the Serbian political non-governmental sector into "young patriots who are

for traditional values, and for the preservation of Kosovo as part of Serbia," on the one hand, and, on the other hand, "old, angry women who oppose the whole Serbian, are accused the Serbian people for all harms, for the separation of Kosovo from Serbia", is artificial, intentional and violent. In establishing such a sharp division, the executive role is played by the Serbian special services, and the "Deep State" of Serbia stands behind all this³. Such a division can only please the Kremlin oligarchy, and the results of such a division are evident - in 2000, even immediately after NATO bombing Serbia and Montenegro, 38% of citizens expressed their support for the country's entry into NATO, and in 2018, they are only about 12% that evidences the current decline in Serbs' confidence in the EU and NATO.

The Serbian leadership has created favorable conditions for the Russophiles and their organizations to flourish in Serbia. Being pro-Kremlin, the Deep State controls the political processes in Serbia - parties, organizations and elections, so that no truly pro-Western candidate has even a theoretical chance to be elected to the state bodies. It created all conditions for pro-Western politicians and activists to be perceived by Serbian citizens as "traitors to Serbia", and all pro-Kremlin forces - as "patriots of Serbia and Orthodoxy".

Russian propaganda in Serbia and ways to overcome this problem

Serbia and its population do not practically know Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. There is no informing campaign, and the information that is coming in is not enough. On the other hand, there is a flow of dirty propaganda against Ukraine and Ukrainians, which are shown as "banderivtsi", "fascists", "antichristians". Russian propaganda says that it is impossible to speak Russian on the streets of Ukrainian cities; otherwise, an angry crowd of fascists may just crumble, and it actively spreads similar fakes. [7]

At the same time, the Serbian authorities created favorable conditions for the "tube of information propaganda" from Russia to fill freely the information space of Serbia.

³ The term «Deep State» corresponds to the term «a state in a state».

What a common Serbian should do if he, on the one hand, is generously "fed up" with such a disgusting anti-Ukrainian propaganda, and on the other hand, there is no "antidote" in the form of truthful information about Ukraine and Ukrainians. It is clear that the "Deep State" of Serbia is involved in this, and all this happens only to the gladness of the Kremlin oligarchy.

The ways to overcome this problem are to initiate a large number of acquaintances, deeper communication between Serbs and Ukrainians, true media coverage of events in Ukraine, especially through the Internet, learning of Serbian language at Ukrainian universities and the Ukrainian language at Serbian universities, organizing joint conferences and seminars, student exchanges, creation of communities of Ukrainian-Serbian friendship.

In addition, the EU and the U.S. should refrain from providing additional credits and subsidies to the Republic of Serbia until Serbia accedes to the EU sanctions against Russia, removes the favourable conditions for the spread of Russian propaganda and prosperity of the pro-Kremlin organizations, creates favourable conditions for dissemination of truthful information about Ukraine and Ukrainians, expresses a clear desire to lead Serbia to transatlantic integration. Because such financial support for Serbia does not yield any results, and even on the contrary, it is perceived by the current Serbian leadership as a certain reward for the fact that the country is moving proactively to the European integration, although in reality this way leads to nowhere.

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Russian shadow over “European Union’s” Western Balkans*

A decade and a half after the Thessaloniki summit of 2003, the newest events at the Sofia Summit once again reaffirm the EU perspective of the Western Balkans. In a meanwhile, some other major global powers, such as Russia, Turkey, China, used their “long-awaited momentum”, to get closer to the region. In the row of events, during the EU hesitance to develop a clear perspective for the Western Balkans, Russia got more space to spread its interests. Throughout the last 10 years, after the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 and putting parts of Georgia into the Russian area of interest, Russia mastered the art of soft power, adapting it to its political structure. The historical events testify that the Russian interest in the region precedes ideologically flourish, initially Pan-Slavic and Orthodox and after that a socialist and communist past. However, the Russian interest and domination in the region can vary from country to country. Within the Western Balkan only in Serbia and Republika Srpska, one of the entities in BiH, is there a wide spread political support for Putin, seeing him as a strong leader and a friend, while in the other countries it is more divided with one side supporting him and the other perceiving his leadership as a form of authoritarianism.

As aforementioned, references to the common Orthodox and Slavic roots are at the core of Russian strategy in Serbia. The Russian way to exploit soft power in Serbia is driven by different measures: intensive bilateral relations at the highest level, strong cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian one, media outlets, etc. These relations are specifically represented through different organizations such as the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Niš, south-

ern Serbia, which was set up in 2012 as a non-profit organization. However, the EU sees it as a spy nest, especially since last year when Russian officials launched an incentive to give the staff of the center a diplomatic status. Trade relations were also used as an indirect way of influence on the Serbian politics. Joint military exercises entitled “Brotherhood of Aviators of Russia and Serbia” and “Slavic Brotherhood” have been held in 2015/16/17. In 2016, Russia provided Serbia six MiG-29 aircrafts, thirty T-72 tanks, and thirty BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance vehicles. Russia is the dominant gas and oil supplier in Serbia led by Gazprom and its companies. They cover a relevant role in the economic term in the area strongly affecting Serbia’s economy and dependence. Nevertheless, Serbia, while keeping good diplomatic relations with its strategic partner, is still looking towards EU membership. In regards to relations of Serbia with NATO, Aleksandar Vucic, Serbian President and former Prime Minister, has many times declared of not being interested in a possible Serbian NATO membership, even though Serbia is a member of the Partnership for Peace Program. Those statements were sometimes severe and recalled the bombing experience of 1999 when the Alliance intervened harshly against Belgrade.

Back in 2006, Montenegro was advertised as a desirable destination for Russians because of its geographical position, Orthodox Christian origin, and especially because the Russian businessmen invested and spent a lot of money on the Adriatic coast. Montenegro took a huge step towards integrating with the West when it became the 29th member of NATO despite Moscow's strong opposition. Before the Montenegrin entrance into NATO, on the day of the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Montenegrin authorities stopped an alleged coup plot to violently remove the acting then Prime Minister, currently President Milo Djukanovic. Serbian and the Russian authorities were accused by the security services of Monte-

* The article is based on the report by D.Hadzovic at the international conference “Russian Neo-Imperialism: Sources, Genesis and Consequences for the countries of South East Europe”, held by the Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI” and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung on 18 June 2018 in Odesa.

negro of setting up a criminal organization in the territory of Montenegro aimed at carrying out a terrorist attack. Obviously, those accusations were strictly denied by the Russian and Serbian sides, which clearly neglected any involvement in the coup against Milo Djukanovic. However, after a short period of time Djukanovic's rhetoric testifies that unfortunately there has been unnecessary deterioration of relations between the two countries, due to the fact that after the restoration of independence, Montenegro, in which the Russian leadership made a big contribution, made a strategic choice in favor of membership in NATO and the European Union.

The closest force to Russia in Bosnia and Herzegovina is represented by Republika Srpska (RS), due to more specifically Moscow's fruitful relationship with Dodik, a long-lasting relation, considered in the international political arena as destabilizing for BiH stability and integration. The relations boomed when Milorad Dodik began his political ascent, first as a Prime Minister (2006-2010) and then as a President of RS. The main idea of Moscow was to replace the OHR with the EU representatives and the strategy from that moment mainly concerned the autonomy of the Serb-dominated part of BiH, Republika Srpska. This strategy entails that Russia provides support to Dodik's political decisions and sides his position against the West, such as during repeated claims made by Dodik to hold a referendum for independence of Republika Srpska. As in Serbia, Russia also opened Russian Centres in the RS. The Republika Srpska and Moscow axis can seriously jeopardize BiH affiliation to the West, threatening its European integration and future NATO membership. This latter is particularly obstructed by Banja Luka which, as mentioned, last October voted a resolution against NATO membership of BiH claiming its neutrality consequent to the Serbian one. Anyway, Republika Srpska is not the only Russian ally in BiH. The Bosnian Croat leadership maintained good relations with Russia. In this way, they can avoid backing Bosniaks and Serbs trying to earn more concessions from the central state. Last year, Covic, the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH and Member of the Presidency of BiH, stressed how the Croatian community in the country needs to deepen and strengthen its ties with

Russia, and claimed the relevance of guaranteeing equality to the three communities in BiH political system. The dualist Russian interest in BiH devoted to strengthening Serbs and Croats and pursue the self-determination path for them risks compromising BiH alignment with NATO and the EU. The convergence between an increasing Russian interference and the elections in October 2018 could really bring more destabilization to the already divided country.

Because of the divided and fragile ethnic society, Macedonia is an easy target for Russian influence. As in the other Western Balkan countries, intensive cultural influence is also noticed in Macedonia through the opening of Russian centers and Orthodox Churches in Russian style. On the other hand, the Russian political influence in the country is a lot more intensified. Personnel from the Russian security service and Russian diplomats have been involved in a long-term mission to spread propaganda and provoke discord in Macedonia, according to a flow of classified information from the country's intelligence agency. The documents demonstrate that Moscow has been trying to spread its influence all across the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Moscow's goal is to stop them from joining NATO. The leaked documents also suggest that there were efforts to push Macedonia away from the West and contribute to the country's long-running political and ethnic crisis. Simply, by using the assets and methods of so-called soft power, as part of the strategy of the Russian Federation in the Balkans, the goal is to isolate Macedonia from the Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Kremlin's aim is to control "strategic energy resources through partnership with the Balkan countries" and to make Macedonia exclusively dependent.

The two other countries of the Western Balkans, Albania and Kosovo⁴, have somewhat managed to be spared of Russian influence. The population of these two countries is a majority of Albanian ethnicity, thus there are no Slavic or Orthodox connections, which could be used to have an influence. Even though there are Serbs living in Kosovo, Kosovo is not recognized as an independent state by Russia, but still as a part of Serbia. Re-

⁴ Ukraine does not recognize self-proclaimed in 2008 independence of Kosovo – Editorial Board.

garding this issue, Russia is representing Serbia's interest in the international field and is seen as the protector of Serbia by a majority of the population, which in turn allows it to have a bigger influence in Serbia.

In the end, the Balkans is an area of Russian influence, through which Russia can play games to oppose the West in the geopolitical rivalry. The Russian goals in the area are mainly classifiable as attempts to slow and obstruct democratization processes or to exploit the weak existing democratic institutions. Russia can both play the card of self-determination and Slavic brotherhood relying on political and social structures which lend themselves well to manipulation. Clearly, the EU still hasn't found a mechanism how to redirect its attention to the Western Balkans. Taking into consideration that the European Union does not have installed mechanisms for active push-back against Russian propaganda, it is unreal to expect that the Western Balkan countries will find their own

mechanisms to resist. British authorities pointed out clear warnings and concerns that the Russian and other foreign power intelligence tactics should be timely identified and countered, and this should be used as a preemptive measure for any future interference of other actors.

On the other hand, the race to join the EU is one of the main Russian fears. With the Western Balkans accession, the only buffer zone remaining in the West will be lost and the maneuvering field of Russian influence will be reduced. Russian ability to exploit weaknesses, vacuums is not debatable and hard to quantify. This makes the situation more complex and implies a possible rise of its influence. But it is necessary to clarify that this does not represent coming back to the cold war, the international relations panorama is quite different from that period, less permeated by ideology and more dominated by practical interests.

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Security Passport of Odesa Oblast: Regional Dimension*

Odesa Oblast is one of the largest regions in Ukraine – more than two million people live there. Due to its geographical position, the region has a number of characteristics that significantly distinguish it from other regions of Ukraine and form the features of its political and socio-economic development. The region can be divided into three parts – Odesa city as it is with the Black Sea ports, the mostly pro-Ukrainian northern part, and the western part of the region where pro-Russian sentiments prevail. The specifics of the security situation in the Odesa Oblast are stipulated by the common border of the region with Transnistria (unidentified Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic), the traditional area of influence of the Russian Federation, the region's vulnerability to acts of social destabilization and the intensification of social tensions (especially after the events of May 2, 2014).

Social and Economic Development of the Odesa Oblast

Odesa Oblast is characterized by inconstancy of economic development – in contrast to the prosperous region of the Black Sea ports, the western part of the region demonstrates low economic results. At the same time, statistics of 2016-2017 show the growth of industrial production in the region (in particular, the construction and food industry). In the circumstances of decline of Russia's role as one of the key trading partners of the region, there is a diversification of markets for products targeting Asia and the Middle East (India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt), as well as some countries of the European Union (Spain, Italy). Since the an-

nexation of the Crimean peninsula, tourist flows to Odesa Oblast have increased, as 2.5 million tourists visited Odesa last year. [2] Among the negative trends, there are decrease of freight transportation figures (compared to 2013-2014), the chemical industry production, a low level of quality of tourist services provision, energy saving and energy deficit in the region because of the lack of own power generating capacities.

The standard of living remains stable in recent years in the region. The Odesa Oblast shows low unemployment (0.8% of the unemployed people among the working age population – in rural areas, and 0.5% – in urban settlements) [3] and average wages [4] compared to other regions of Ukraine. Within the framework of price policy in the region, there is an increase of prices for food products, transport and health care, as well as increase of utility tariffs. [5] The significant part of the population engaged in unskilled work, while most of the young people leave the Oblast and move to other regions of Ukraine or abroad because of more attractive working conditions and accommodation (priority countries for migrants are Poland, Czech Republic, Russian Federation). Migration flows currently affect both remote parts of the Oblast and Odesa city, affecting the demographic situation in the region and the balance between active and inactive groups of the working-age population.

Social and Political Dimension of Problems in the Odesa Oblast

The ethnic composition of the Odesa Oblast is represented by a large number of ethnic minorities (Russian, Bulgarian, Moldavian, Gagauz, Armenian, etc.) and diasporas (Syrian, Afghan, Viet-

* The article is written within the framework of the project "Security Passport of Ukraine-2018: National and Regional Dimensions" with the support of the NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Ukraine.

name, etc.). The Turkish, Romanian and Bulgarian social structures work in the region; also, there are three Islamic centers and the organization “Shield”, which coordinates the activities of Muslim organizations. At the same time, statistics show numerous diasporas in the region are virtually absent that complicates the assessment of possible social risks.

The population estimation of local authorities' activity is quite high as the level of satisfaction of mayors' activities is 68% [6], in contrast to the low evaluation of the activities of the local deputy corps, as well as central authorities. High ratings of the Odesa mayor are explained by investing resources in the improvement of the city (infrastructure, construction of playgrounds), the health care system and certain monopoly on local media presence in the information space. The overall level of confidence to the regional authorities is unstable because of the lack of unity and common interests among the residents of a certain district. The similar situation is observed with the level of confidence to the civil society sector, which is very fragmented (there are only two thousand civil society activists in Odesa) and ineffective in public control over local authorities. There is no unity between Odesa activists on the issues of further internal and foreign policy of Ukraine, which promotes the use of certain representatives of local radical organizations (for example, C14) for carrying out political provocations. The level of protest behavior of the population of the Oblast center is one of the lowest in comparison to other cities of Ukraine. [7]

General Security Issues of the Odesa Oblast

Despite the historical background, geographical location and economic factors, the Odesa Oblast witnesses a significant decrease in crime rates and an increase in the number of cases of crime detection. Basically, the security perception level in Odesa is estimated as a high [8], while people concern separate incidents and attacks on public activists, which have wide media coverage (attack on a former leader of the local center of the organization "Pravyi Sector" ("Right Sector") Serhii Sternenko, activist of local "AutoMaidan" Vitalii

Ustymenko, representatives of "Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy" ("People's Movement of Ukraine") Mykhailo Kuzakon and Hryhorii Kozma and others). Moreover, the significant increase of risks of crime commitments is observed in the period of seasonal tourism (in particular, in summer), as well as on May holidays (first of all, because of memorial events on May 2). May's dates are used for oppositional (to some extent, pro-Russian) provocative actions, but without threatening to grow into a real protest. To prevent crime in the Odesa Oblast, the “Scandinavian system” (groups of preventive communication) and the tourist police are used. In summer, the National Guard is additionally involved in patrols of the Oblast center and resort towns of Koblevo and Zatoka in order to protect the public order. In addition, the law enforcement functions are carried out by various public formations, in particular, the “Municipal Guard” operates under the municipal council.

Threats of terrorist acts and activities of sabotage groups (because of increased conflict sentiments and vulnerability to hybrid forms of the Russian aggression after the events of 2014-2015) remain crucial for the Odesa Oblast. Among the objects of the most risk, there is the regional transport infrastructure, which includes not only seaports, but also the Odesa-Reni highway and Odesa-Izmail railway, connecting the remote coastal areas, located to the southwest from Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy. The Dnister Estuary cuts off geographically this part of the region – the connection is only through two bridges, which are vulnerable to sabotage.

Odesa Oblast remains an important transit hub for heavy drugs through container shipping in seaports. Mostly, the transit of heavy drugs is directed to the north-west of Russia (St. Petersburg) and the European countries. The situation is complicated by close location of the region to the pro-Russian Transnistria, namely the common border of 200 km, through which the contraband flows go to both sides. Because of this, the EUBAM mission functions along the border between Ukraine and Moldova, and under its mediation there is a preparation for a complete joint Ukrainian-Moldovan customs control at the crossing points “Platonove”, “Palanka”, “Kelmentsi”, “Mamalyha”, etc.

Russian Factor Influencing the Security of the Odesa Oblast

Odesa Oblast is a traditional object of attention and sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. The southern parts of the region demonstrate a gradual, systematic growth of pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views. The popularity of Russian mass media among the local population contributes to this tendency. Statistical surveys show that 20% of the region's population and 13% of the population of the Odesa city watch Russian television [9], however, in practice this level is higher. Satellite television and the work of the towers from the territory of the unrecognized Transnistrian region give the population of the Odesa Oblast an access to Russian media resources. The situation is complicated also because of the lack of coverage by the Ukrainian channels – there is no broadcast of the First National Channel farther 40 km from Odesa. There is an increase of the level of aggression against ATO veterans in the areas, which are under influence of the Russian media.

Russia inspires hidden fake interethnic conflicts (for example, by using facts of oppression of the Bulgarian minority), promotes enhanced propaganda through the local population (including representatives of the Russian diaspora) and indirectly – through Russian media. Moscow has “frozen” the projects of the “Bessarabian People's Republic”, “Bessarabian Republic of Budjak” (in the composition of the Bolhrad, Izmail, Tatarbunary, Tarutyne, Reni, Artsyz, and Biliaivka districts of the Odesa Oblast and Gagauzia), and “Odesa People's Republic”. However, in favorable conditions, there is a risk of restoring of the Russian interest and support to such separatist projects in the region.

Other areas of threats from the Russian Federation include the presence of Russian military units (more than 1000 people) in the neighboring territory of Transnistria; the risks of penetration of Russian sabotage groups from the sea, in particular on the Snake Island and the areas of the coast, the landscape and topography of which allow assault operations (for example, on resort locations of Odesa). Russia regularly arranges provocations at sea with anglers, who approach the Ukrainian territorial waters and fish flounder illegally extraction of natural gas on the Ukrainian shelf, provoc-

ative actions of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation, which regularly arranges military trainings near Ukrainian territorial waters.

The Russian factor, influencing the security and information space of the Odesa Oblast, in some way, determines the foreign policy views of the local population, which demonstrate a low level of support for the European integration and the Euro-Atlantic policy of Ukraine. [10] However, it should be noted that the formation of geopolitical preferences also affects the traditional low level of political participation and interest of the inhabitants of southern regions of Ukraine, distrust in politics and political institutions of the state, close economic and historical ties with Russia in the past, low level of civil society development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To overcome the negative impact of the above-mentioned factors on the social, economic, political and security environment of the Odesa Oblast there are the following proposals:

- Re-orient the production distribution to the domestic market, further diversification of foreign markets for goods due to the use of natural logistical advantages (the seaports);
- Improve the quality of tourist services by stimulating the growth of competition and development of local small and medium enterprises in tourism, development of regional tourism business strategies because of the increase of tourist flows to the Odesa Oblast after the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation;
- Stimulate the formation of civil society; increase the local population's interest in politics, raising public confidence to local and central authorities within the framework of the Regional Target Program for the Promotion of Civil Society Development in the Odesa Oblast for 2018-2020;
- Intensify interaction and a dialogue between local authorities, law enforcement agencies, public activists by using the experience of cooperation of the National Police Office in the Donetsk Oblast with civil society organiza-

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: SOUTH OF UKRAINE

tions and establishing of the “Young Policemen League” based on the example of Kramatorsk;

- Create and disseminate qualitative information content, aimed at countering Russian propaganda in information space of the Odesa Oblast (social networks and the regional Internet resources);
- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of security factors and their vulnerabilities to the electoral

cycle in Ukraine in 2019 (as well as in Moldova in autumn of 2018) by representatives of both local and central authorities and the law enforcement agencies; develop preventive measures to eliminate possible political and military provocations of the Russian Federation;

- Adopt the Maritime Doctrine of Ukraine with a comprehensive assessment of current risks and threats in the naval field.

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Salvini – Orban Tandem: Alliance for Redesign of Europe à la Russe

If a politician aims at launching a new political movement in Italy, Milan is the city needed to "conquer" in order to make the political plan succeed. As well as Paris in France, Warsaw in Poland and Kyiv in Ukraine, Milan is, in fact, one of the epicenters of European politics. For instance, Italian dictator Mussolini launched his fascist movement in Milan in 1919. In the 80s, the Socialist Party of Italy increased their power in Milan, eventually growing at a national level and, finally, affirming as the main political force with which any other party had to negotiate to form a government.

For all those reasons, the decision of the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini to launch a nationalist alliance along with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán during an institutional event in Milan, on August 28, clears the real aim of the two politicians, as well as their intention to create an organized alliance of right-wing forces facing the next elections for the European Parliament.

Even though both Salvini and Orbán refused to announce the creation of an institutionalized alliance between their political parties, the League and *Fidesz*, the two politicians presented a common manifesto based on far-right values and ultra conservative slogans, such as the rejection of all initiatives aimed at welcoming and redistributing, in the European Union, migrants from the eastern and southern banks of the Mediterranean Sea.

In order to provide their political manifesto with additional strength, Salvini and Orbán even identified a common, main enemy: French President Emmanuel Macron. Salvini and Orbán, in fact, painted President Macron as the leader of a pan-European movement of moderate forces that promote a stronger internal integration of the European Union, a

strengthening of the Eurozone, and an open-door policy with respect to migrants and refugees.

From his side, President Macron seemed more than happy to be identified as the main rival of the Nationalist alliance of Salvini and Orbán. On the occasion of a visit to the Prime Minister of Denmark, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, the day after the meeting between Salvini and Orbán, President Macron declared himself ready to unite behind himself a "progressive" coalition that rejects all kind of nationalist slogans and aim at committing to a stronger and more united Europe.

The political challenge that Salvini and Orbán launched to President Macron *de facto* made clear a huge change within European and global politics, where the difference between Left and Right-wing parties seems to have left place to a new polarization between "Progressive moderates" and "Nationalists". This political polarization, for instance, is evident in the United States, where the "Nationalist" front is embodied by President Donald Trump and his entourage, whereas the "Progressive Moderate" bloc is composed by the Democrats and moderate Republicans in the Congress.

Nationalists vs. Progressive Moderates all across the EU

With respect to Europe, a radicalization of the two fronts begins to be evident in some of the main countries of the European Union. Starting from the homeland of President Macron, France, the Progressive Moderate front is represented by Macron's *La République En Marche* movement, along with the moderate wing of the conservative Republican Party and the socialists. On the other hand, the Nationalist bloc is embodied by the National Front

of Marie Le Pen: a far-right movement that shares many of the ideas voiced by Salvini and Orbán in Milan.

In Italy, the Nationalist front is embodied by Salvini's League and the right-wing part of the populist 5 Stars Movement (the coalition partner of Salvini's League within the Italian government), as well as the post fascist Brother of Italy party. The Progressive Moderate bloc, on the other hand, is made of center-left Democratic Party of former PM Matteo Renzi, the conservative *Forza Italia* party of former PM Silvio Berlusconi, and other, minor centrist forces. In Hungary, Orbán's *Fidesz* party is in open competition with far-right *Jobbik* party to represent the Nationalist bloc, whereas the Progressive Moderate front is represented by the weak socialists.

A similar division into the blocs is also evident in further important EU countries. In Germany, for instance, the Progressive Moderate front is embodied by Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU moderate party, the social-democratic SPD, the liberal FDP and the Greens. The Nationalist bloc, on the other hand, is to be formed by far-right AFD party and the CSU: the conservative sister partner in Merkel's government.

From an ideological point of view, it is not difficult to try to identify what are the main proposals the two blocs will propose to the European Electors on the occasion of next EU Parliament elections. The Progressive Moderate bloc will support a more integrated Europe, with more powers for the European Commission (and hopefully to the European Parliament) and more benefits for those countries who are both EU member states and members of the Eurozone.

The Progressive Moderates, moreover, will support initiatives aimed at fighting against climate change. They will also commit to preserve the Iran Nuclear Deal, and will promote free trade agreements all across the globe. The Progressive Moderate bloc is also likely to support President Macron's plan for a common EU defense policy as complementary to NATO (if not alternative to the Atlantic Alliance should U.S. President Trump further weaken the

organization). With respect to Ukraine, the Progressive Moderate parties declare themselves in favor of Ukrainian territorial integrity and the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The Nationalists, on the other hand, will oppose any kind of tighter European Integration by supporting the evolution of the European Union into a "League of Nations" in which the national governments of the EU member states have a full control on the European Commission. The Nationalists will also propose the restoration of controls at the borders of all EU member states. They will fight for protectionism in economy by rejecting all kind of free-trade agreements, and even proposing initiatives aimed at supporting national products and "protecting" their national economies from globalization.

The Nationalists also avert to consider Climate Change a priority in their political agenda. From the defense point of view, the Nationalists are openly skeptical of NATO and propose the establishment of tighter relationships with Russia by considering Russian President Vladimir Putin a partner rather than a potential threat. For this reason, the Nationalists are indifferent with respect to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in the Donbas region and Crimea.

The political journey of Mr. Salvini

In order to better understand the huge political potential that the Nationalist coalition might have within the European political scenario, it is useful to analyze the political evolution of Mr. Salvini. As a young, charismatic member of the Northern League, a separatist movement that proposed the secession of Northern Italy (a self-proclaimed state named "Padania") from the rest of the country, Salvini became the leader of the youth organization of the Northern League. He also acted as the leader of the Northern League at the Milan City Council as part of a government coalition along with Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* party and the post-fascist party "National Alliance". Salvini was the main representative of the communist internal stream within the Northern League, eventually leading, in 1997, the communist faction on the occasion of the legislative elections of *Padania*: a sort of primaries that

Northern League First Secretary, Umberto Bossi, orchestrated to measure the influence of the internal factions within his political movement.

Salvini, enjoying a growing reputation as a rising political star within the party, shifted right and led the Northern League on the occasion of the European Parliamentary election in 2004 in the North-West electoral district, eventually becoming one of the main representatives of his party at the European Parliament. Salvini distinguished himself as a hawkish opposer to both a tighter EU integration and all initiatives aimed at enlarging the European Union to the Balkans, Ukraine and Georgia. Salvini, who had a poor record of presence at the European Parliament, also criticized NATO enlargement and Euro-Atlantic integration. He also considered Russia a necessary partner with which, in his opinion, the European nations should collaborate in order to fight illegal immigration and defend the Christian values.

In 2013, Salvini overwhelmingly defeated the historic leader of the Northern League, Mr. Bossi, in an internal vote to design the new Secretary of the party. In order to distance himself from the previous leadership, Salvini provided the Northern League with a national dimension, replacing the secessionist rhetoric with slogans against the Eurozone, the European integration and all form of migration. Salvini also established tight ties with other European far-right parties, such as French National Front and Dutch Party of Freedom. Under Salvini's leadership, the Northern League increased pro-Russian rhetorics through the activity of several regional associations, such as the Cultural Association Lombardy-Russia, to spread a pro-Russian vision of geopolitics in Italy. Those associations, according to an analysis appeared on the Italian media, are considered a powerful means of influence that Russia utilizes, not only in Italy, to establish a direct relationship with far-right parties in some of the member states of the European Union [1]. The special relationship between Salvini and the Russian government, consolidated through frequent trips Salvini realized to Moscow, also originated an agreement between the Northern League and United Russia, the Russian ruling party of President Putin.

With respect to internal politics, Salvini presented himself as the main opposer to the center-left government of PM Renzi. Once renamed his party "The League", he led a right-wing coalition to win the 2018 legislative elections along with populist 5 Stars Movement, with which he eventually formed a government coalition. Appointed the Minister of Internal Affairs, Salvini started acting as the Italian PM *in pectore*: he provoked a diplomatic crisis with France with respect to migrants, and established an "anti-migration axis" along with Austrian PM Sebastian Kurz and German Minister of Internal Affairs, Horst Seehofer.

As his ties with political leaders of the far-right demonstrate, the capability to establish international cooperations and coalitions is one of the main skills Mr. Salvini has been able to utilize, along with the capability to play with the angers and fears of the Italians to boost his political notoriety. Following the creation of the Nationalist bloc along with Orbán, Salvini, nowadays, placed himself as the moral leader of a pan-European coalition that aims at taking power in Europe.

The real chances for the Nationalist bloc facing next European Parliamentary elections

The possibilities for Salvini's Nationalist bloc to get a positive result on the occasion of next European Parliamentary elections is quite high. On the one hand, almost all the parties of the Nationalist bloc are gaining consensus in their countries thanks to a rhetoric based on anti-migration and anti-EU slogans. In particular, the League in Italy is quoted at an extraordinary 40% of consensus rate, whereas *Fidesz* in Hungary also keeps a high consensus rate. In Germany, the AFD is boosting in popularity by presenting itself as the lone credible opposition to Chancellor Merkel. In Austria, PM Kurz has a solid support, whereas far-right populism is growing fast also in Sweden, Finland and France.

The Vysehrad group is another region where the Nationalist coalition is supposed to consolidate its predominant role within European politics. In the Czech Republic, a newly formed government led

by Populist Andrej Babiš shares the anti-immigration rhetoric of Salvini and Orbán. Czech President Miloš Zeman, a former socialist in good ties with Russian President Putin, supports the anti-NATO and euro-skeptic message of the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs and the Hungarian PM.

A bit problematic, for the Nationalist coalition, might be the situation of Poland, where the ruling party, the conservative PiS, has proven tight ties with Orbán with respect to the migrant crisis and the struggle against EU integration. Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki and PM Orbán did establish an alliance aimed at mutual protecting Poland and Hungary from any sanctions that the European Commission might apply on Warsaw and Budapest due to a presumptive case of violation of the division of powers in the two countries. On the occasion of the recent International Economic Forum in Krynica, Poland, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Gliński and Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijártó provided evidence of strong solidarity and mutual understanding with respect to EU affairs.

However, the participation of Polish PiS into Salvini's Nationalist bloc is less probable due to Foreign politics issues. The strong support to NATO that both Polish government and Polish President Andrzej Duda are actively demonstrating - a support that Warsaw considers the most effective manner to ensure both Polish national security and the security of the whole Central Eastern Europe against Russian warfare in former USSR - does not match with Salvini's pro-Russian vision.

A "Putin-International" favored by Trump

Given the difficulty to preview the exact amount of votes that the Nationalist bloc might obtain on the occasion of next EU Parliamentary elections, it is, however, worth to underline who are the main geopolitical players who consider the coalition of Salvini and Orbán in a favorable manner.

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First of all, the main political stakeholder interested in a victory of the Nationalist bloc is Russian President Putin. According to several studies and analyses, Russia did likely support many of the far-right and populist parties listed within the Nationalist bloc by providing them with financial and logistical support.

This led to the creation of a "pro-Russian International" composed by parties, such as Salvini's League, Orbán's *Fidesz*, the French National Front and German AFD, that do openly propose the dissolution of all Euro-Atlantic institutions and agreements, and voice the necessity to overcome NATO throughout a strategic alliance with Putin's Russia to face migrants, the Syrian crisis and further global issues.

US President Trump, who seems interested in deepening divisions among the EU member states, might also favor a good electoral result for the Nationalist bloc on the occasion of next European Parliamentary Election.

President Trump and Mr. Salvini, in fact, mutually supported each other on several public occasions, such as during the Republican Party Primary election, when, during a public event in Philadelphia, Trump met with Salvini and called him "a good future PM for Italy".

President Trump also praised the strong opposition to all pro-migration policy performed by Salvini and Orbán. He also shares economic protectionism: a measure that Salvini does propose to help support the Italian economy.

Moreover, as demonstrated on the occasion of the Helsinki meeting with Putin, President Trump provided evidence to share the consideration of Putin as a partner that Salvini does advocate.

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French Descendants of White Russian Émigrés and Russian Authorities

On October 11, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople adopted a number of decisions concerning the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In particular, the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate has lifted the anathema from leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), Filaret, and declared the annexation of the Metropolitanate of Kyiv in 1686 to be illegal.

The Russian Orthodox Church and its Ukrainian branch of the UOC-MP have repeatedly argued that they are the islands of the "Russian world" and "Putin Orthodoxy" in Ukraine, the leaders of the propagandist imperial policy of Russia, if not the separate structure of Russian special services. Evidence of this is the numerous cases of disclosure of "dual-purpose priests", the refusal to sing Ukrainian ATO soldiers, the facts of hiding weapons, ammunition and militants in the Sviatohirska Lavra in 2014.

Volodymyr Legoida, the representative of the synodal department of the Russian Orthodox Church for society relations and the media, reacted: "The appointment by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of his representatives in Ukraine is considered by the Russian Orthodox Church as an invasion to the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate. Such actions will not remain unanswered."

Interesting is the fact that the ROC itself is a schismatic autocephaly, self-proclaimed in 1448 when Moscow independently appointed Metropolitan Ion without the permission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Orthodox Church of Russia has never been given Tomos about autocephaly, while absolutely all modern autocephaly, except the ancient patriarchs, was created by the Tomos of the Church of Constantinople.

In the context of the prospect of granting the Autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarch to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Russian special services are preparing an operation to break the creation and establishment of the United Ukrainian Church by incitement of conflicts between its supporters and opponents. Creation of the Unified Ukrainian Church entails a number of logical property issues: the ownership of existing churches, church lands leased, the return of the confiscated by Soviet authorities religious property, etc.

It is noteworthy that the ROC serves as the important agent of the FSB not only on the religious front in Ukraine, but also in other countries, in particular in France. Here, the editorial board conveys its gratitude to professor of the University of Rennes 2 – Upper Brittany, Cécile VAISSIÉ, also known in Ukraine for her book "Les Réseaux du Kremlin en France," who has kindly offered her article to Black Sea Security.

The conflicts around the possible recognition, by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church show that the Moscow Patriarchate is also an instrument used by the Russian political authorities to assert the proclaimed reality of a "Russian world" dominated by Moscow, and to spread the Kremlin's narratives. In France, an Orthodox Church cannot hope to play a dominant role; furthermore, the State and the Churches are clearly separated, in law and in fact; however, the Moscow Patriarchate, with the help of the Russian authorities, does not remain inactive even in France.

Since 2014, a new "Russian" church is being built in Strasbourg, where part of the European institutions is located. Furthermore, in 2016, a "Russian" cathedral was inaugurated in the heart of Paris, and is endowed with a "cultural center"

that is to attract more diverse groups of society and not only parishioners. However, if the Russian authorities decided to finance the construction of this cathedral in Paris, it is because they had not managed, after several years of crises and conflicts, to take control of the cathedral, built during Alexander II's reign on Daru Street. For several years, they have indeed launched fairly aggressive actions in France and in Western Europe, to get the control of churches where French descendants of "Russian" émigrés go and that depend from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The Instrumentalization of "compatriots"

France has hosted since 1917 several waves of Russian-speaking emigration, but the "first wave", the one that followed the revolutions of 1917, has been the most valued in Russia since the end of the 1980's. Russian authorities under Putin intensified a policy of "reconciliation" – others speak of "control" – and in October 2001 a first World Congress of "compatriots" was held in Moscow, where Vladimir Putin called for the consolidation of the Russian diaspora and its links with Russia. As a result, an International Council of "Russian compatriots" was registered in 2003, the year when Russian authorities started having a much more active policy towards the French descendants of White émigrés. Furthermore, the "Russian World" organization, created in 2007 and led by the grandson of former Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, has been acting to consolidate this "Russian world", with the help of the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency that, founded in September 2008, depends from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [1]. A new conception of "compatriots" was elaborated: according to the law of 23 July 2010, this term designates present or past Russian citizens, but also former Soviet citizens, and foreign – including French – citizens whose ancestors lived on Russian territory and who "made the free choice to have a spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian Federation [2]".

In France, the first Forum of "Russian compatriots" took place on September 17, 2011, in the Russian Embassy [3], in presence of the ambassador. This policy has paid off: in December 2014, some Western descendants of White émigrés signed a collective letter to support the Kremlin in its war against Ukraine [4].

Published in France on an obscure site, this petition was immediately published or summarized by major Russian media: the RIA Novosti press agency[5], the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* [6], the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* [7]. But all the French descendants of White émigrés are far from sharing this support to Vladimir Putin, and their different positions vis-à-vis the Kremlin are also reflected in the conflicts around the "Russian" churches in France, as it appears in the example of Nice.

In Nice, two "Russian" churches and one cemetery

The privileged Russians who started visiting the French Riviera in the second half of the nineteenth century [8] built in Nice the Russian Orthodox church of St. Nicholas and St. Alexandra, consecrated in 1860 on Longchamp Street, then, in 1867, the Russian cemetery on the hills in Caucade, and finally the cathedral of St. Nicholas, inaugurated in 1912. The territory on which the cathedral was built had been bought by Alexander II and inherited by Nicolas II who, in 1909, conceded it, with a lease of 99 years, to the diocese of St. Petersburg, in order to build a cathedral [9].

After the October 1917 revolution, the Russian community in Nice grew much larger and much poorer [10]. These emigrants who had lost everything got into the habit of seeing each other, in Nice as elsewhere, in and next to the Russian Orthodox churches, which were places of worship, but also of sociability, assistance and teaching, and allowed therefore to keep alive an identity shaken by the forced departure of the native country. In 1923, in accordance with the French legislation on associations, Russian émigrés created ACOR-Nice (Russian Orthodox Religious Association in Nice), which became responsible for maintaining the two churches and the cemetery.

The parish was placed under the authority of Metropolitan Euloge who had been appointed head of the Russian parishes in Western Europe and to whom the Moscow Patriarch Tikhon had entrusted all powers to act abroad. In 1927, since the situation of believers worsened in the USSR, Metropolitan Euloge transferred the property of the Russian Orthodox Church in France to local religious associations, like ACOR [11]. In 1930, he

asked the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to take the Russian churches in Western Europe under his jurisdiction [12]. Therefore, these churches have been able to develop, especially in France, an orthodoxy that, based on the 1918 Moscow Council, is much more open, tolerant and intellectually stimulating than the orthodoxy within the Moscow Patriarchate that was and remains largely infiltrated by KGB agents.

Claims from the Russian Federation

However, on February 7, 2006, when the end of the lease signed in 1909 was approaching, the Russian authorities sent a judicial officer who announced that Russia claimed ownership of the Nice cathedral. According to Moscow, the territory belonged before 1917 to the Russian Empire of which the Russian Federation is the heir and continuation [13]. A fierce fight begun, punctuated by several trials. On May 22, 2009, the daily *Monaco-Matin* reminded: "This is David's fight against Goliath. For the past three years, a religious association in Nice has been fighting against the Russian State. The largest country in the world (17 million km²) covets one of the smallest territories in the world: the tiny enclave of the Orthodox cathedral in Nice [14]"

For ACOR-Nice and its supporters, what is at stake is, above all, the identity, the memory and the history of a community that was driven out of the Russia Empire by violence and has strived to preserve the Russian culture and traditions in France. It is also the kind of practiced orthodoxy. Another question is implicit: who is the "heir" of pre-revolutionary Russia, the diaspora or the post-Soviet Russian authorities? And this raises questions about the identity of today's Russia.

However the Russian Federation won after several years of conflict. The cathedral was thus sent back to the control of the Moscow Patriarchate and, after renovation, it was officially re-opened on January 19, 2016. Aleksander Orlov, then Ambassador of the Russian Federation in France, Pavel Fradkov, graduate from the FSB Academy and deputy head of the Presidential Administration, and Christian Estrosi, mayor of Nice, attended the ceremony [15]. The involvement of the Russian State in issues related to the Moscow Patriarchate was thus demonstrated.

Several descendants of Russian émigrés, and not only in Nice, remain convinced that the transfer of the Nice cathedral to the Moscow Patriarchate was explicitly demanded by Vladimir Putin, then Prime Minister, to his French counterpart of the time, François Fillon; they say that this request was expressed aloud and unambiguously at an official banquet in Rambouillet. They therefore speak of possible political pressure on justice and recall the context: the growing putinophilia of the French President Sarkozy; the sale to Russia of the Mistrals and of the territory necessary to build the new cathedral in Paris; the presence of many wealthy Russian oligarchs on the Riviera, which generates significant revenues for the region and the city of Nice.

The scandal of the Caucade cemetery

But the conflict did not stop there. At the end of 2014, ACOR-Nice had discovered that some cadaster records had been modified and that the Russian Federation claimed thus the ownership of the church on the Longchamp Street and of the Russian cemetery in Caucade [16]. On April 24, 2015, ACOR-Nice therefore sued the Russian Ambassador and a Nice notary [17]. The court case is still ongoing, but some of ACOR's supporters speak of "forgery" and "bribery".

Things went worse on the afternoon of February 18, 2016: some ACOR's members discovered that the gate locks of the Caucade cemetery had been forced, a padlock installed and a sign affixed, that asserted that the cemetery was a property of the Russian Federation. The men who did that are known: a "fiercely pro-Moscow French engineer" and Igor Sheleshko, assistant of the priest in the Nice cathedral [18]. When Sheleshko was killed in the July 14, 2016 terrorist assault in Nice, he turned out to be "a Soviet Army veteran [19]". On February 19, ACOR had the lock removed by its locksmith and placed on the graveyard gate a new sign that did not stay there very long: "Stop here, Mr. Putin. We are neither in Crimea nor in Ukraine. Let our deceased loved ones rest in peace [20]!" Representatives of the Russian Federation, including the cathedral priest, arrived immediately. After a day of "confrontation [21]", both parties got a key of the padlock, but the sign proclaiming that the cemetery belongs to the Russian State remained on the gate [22]. The scandal was so great

that it was reported not only in the local press, but also by some Russian opposition media [23].

Since then, the situation has little changed. Henceforth, another question has been added to those raised above: what do a “Russian” cemetery and a “Russian” church mean in France, when the conflict is unleashed between some French citizens of Russian descent and the Russian post-Soviet authorities? On 29 February 2016, ACOR-Nice assured that “the term ‘Russian cemetery’ does not imply that the deceased resting there were Russians”. The French association denies thus the very concept, coined in the Kremlin, of “compatriot” and asserts that “the Russian religious character of ACOR-Nice does not imply that the State organs of the Russian Federation may direct or control ACOR-Nice and its activities in any ways [24]”.

However, other descendants of White émigrés approve of Russia’s desire to take over the cemetery, and they do not hide their major argument: there will be money. They are all the more convinced since, as they often recall, the Russian State has already financed the maintenance of the graves in another Russian cemetery, in Sainte-Geneviève des Bois, near Paris.

This scandal in Nice – or in Paris, or in Cannes, or in Biarritz, etc. – has thus brought to light and aggravated the disagreements existing between some of the French descendants of the White émigrés and the representatives of the Russian Federation, but also among the descendants of these White émigrés. It raises many questions about the practices used by the Russian Federation in France and confirms the geopolitical role that the Moscow Patriarchate tries to play: in France, as in Ukraine, identities are at stake, and religious influence is thought by the Kremlin as a powerful tool.

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Forget Javelins. What Ukraine Needs to Get Putin's Attention

*By Stephen Blank,
the Atlantic Council,
September 7, 2018.*

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/forget-javelins-what-ukraine-needs-to-get-putin-s-attention>

US Ambassador Kurt Volker recently told The Guardian that the United States was prepared to offer Ukraine new weapons to defend itself. There is no doubt that Ukraine needs these weapons; in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, Moscow is waging a simultaneous military and economic war against Kyiv. It has blockaded the Sea of Azov to Ukrainian ships, demands the right to inspect “foreign” vessels, and has extended a maritime exclusion zone all the way to Odesa. **Moscow possesses the ability to launch an amphibious operation on Ukraine's coast to isolate Mariupol and the southern Ukrainian coast all the way to Odesa from Ukraine. It did this by steadily reinforcing its ground, air, and naval forces in and around Crimea.**

An amphibious operation could easily entail ship-based massed fire strikes upon land-based targets. Another possibility is the use of Russia's airborne forces alone or in conjunction with an amphibious operation or a naval operation based on fire strikes from ship to shore. The fact that Moscow's entire airborne force is participating in the Vostok-2018 operation in the Far East may suggest that Moscow is preparing to use those forces in a future “desant,” which is an airborne landing, usually as the first phase of a combined arms attack, on Ukraine's Black Sea coast.

Moscow's blockade of the Sea of Azov appears likely to extend to the coast of Ukraine, including Odesa, and may also be directed at seizing energy deposits that still remain under Ukrainian control on the Black Sea (the seizure of energy facilities was a primary goal of the initial Crimean operation in 2014). Russian operations should be seen as both straightforward military coercion and

economic warfare. Without firing a shot or acting in an ostentatiously illegal manner, Russia has managed to deftly combine military and economic pressure together, a sure indicator of maritime or naval hybrid warfare.

There is a compelling need to offer weapons to assist Ukraine now. There is no sign that Volker's talks with Moscow emissary Vladislav Surkov will resume soon or that Moscow has new ideas about ending this war. In fact, Volker thinks that Moscow won't make any major overtures before Ukraine settles on a new president and parliament, slated for 2019, and he's probably right.

What would be the fastest way of getting Ukraine weapons to counter a Russian offensive from the sea? Sending anti-ship missiles available from or through the US-AGM-84 Harpoon Block II, AGM-158C LRASM A, and the Norwegian Naval Strike Missile. But Ukraine would also need a viable launch platform and a targeting system, particularly a radar.

Turkey and Black Sea Security: Ten Years After the War in Georgia

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August 8, 2018.*

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/turkey-and-black-sea-security-ten-years-after-the-war-in-georgia>

The 2008 war between Georgia and Russia was a critical test for Turkey. It highlighted Ankara's delicate balancing act between the West and Russia, one that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is still pursuing today.

The conflict presented a formidable challenge. Georgia was not just another neighbor for Turkey – the two countries had built robust diplomatic and commercial ties since the collapse of the Soviet Union. But Russia, too, had become a leading

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commercial and political partner for Ankara. Turkish policymakers viewed Russian pushback against the West in the Black Sea as a serious threat and sought to mitigate the conflict.

When asked about Russia's incursion in 2008, then Prime Minister Erdoğan responded, "it would not be right for Turkey to be pushed toward any side. Certain circles want to push Turkey into a corner either with the United States or Russia after the Georgian incident. One of the sides is our closest ally, the United States. The other side is Russia, with which we have an important trade volume. We would act in line with what Turkey's national interests require."

On 12 August, the Turkish prime minister travelled to Moscow to pitch the so-called Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact, which was little more than a statement of neutrality. To accommodate Moscow, Turkey was adamant that American military ships delivering humanitarian aid to the Georgians must abide by a special provision of the 1936 Montreux Convention, in effect barring two large American hospital vessels, USNS Comfort and Mercy. Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs assured Moscow that the smaller ships the United States dispatched instead would depart before the expiry of the treaty's mandated twenty-one day period.

This tilt towards Moscow did not go unnoticed in Washington. Turkey was excluded from Vice President Dick Cheney's tour of regional allies, which included stopovers in Tbilisi, Baku, and Kyiv. At the same time, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov came to Istanbul, on 2 September 2008. Back in 2005, American diplomat Richard Holbrooke had written about "a little noticed charm offensive [by Moscow] to woo our all-important (but deeply alienated) ally Turkey into a new special relationship that would extend Russia's influence." The war in Georgia made everyone notice.

The lessons of 2008 are still relevant today. Russian-Turkish security cooperation, having taken a downturn in 2015-2016 over Syria, is now blossoming, just as Turkey's ties with Western allies, the United States first and foremost, are at an all-time low. Putin and Erdoğan have become something of a double act in diplomacy, no matter if the issue at hand is the war in Syria, energy, or

multibillion dollar defense trade. There are more than a few, in Washington and in big European capitals, who fear that Turkey has jumped ship, and scrapped NATO in favor of a partnership with Putin. Such concerns are amplified by what goes on inside Turkey, where Erdoğan's unqualified dominance over the country feels like a replica of the Kremlin's system of governance.

Turkey, however, is at best a fellow traveler rather than an ally of Russia. Erdoğan is pursuing a multi-vector policy in the Black Sea region. Far from aligning fully with Russia, he has also been nurturing ties with pro-Western countries such as Ukraine and Georgia and keeping options open. Three-way cooperation between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is growing stronger. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway became operational in October 2017 and in June this year the Transanatolian Pipeline (TANAP) started pumping natural gas from the Caspian Sea to Turkey.

Ankara has been supportive of NATO's tailored forward presence in the Black Sea. Even if NATO allies and foreign policy experts bemoan Erdoğan's embrace of Putin and fear that Turkey is no longer an outpost of the West in the neighborhood, the Turkish government continues to back the Alliance's enlargement. At the recent NATO summit in Brussels, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu argued that NATO should extend membership to Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to Macedonia, which received an invitation to launch accession talks. At the end of the day, NATO remains an insurance policy rather than an unwanted burden for Turkey, escalating tensions with the Washington aside.

It is therefore premature to speak of a Russian-Turkish entente now, as much as it was in 2008. The war in Georgia came as a sobering reminder to Turkey that it plays second fiddle in the South Caucasus compared to Russia. The March 2014 annexation of Crimea only reaffirmed this conclusion when it comes to the Black Sea as a whole.

Ankara's response: a strategy of soft balancing and hedging through NATO. The trouble is that the "Make Turkey Great Again" foreign policy pursued by Erdoğan is both nationalist in content and unilateralist in method. From a Turkish

perspective, the transatlantic alliance is merely an instrument to further national objectives, rather than a community of values.

Russia's 'Boa Constrictor' Strategy in the Sea of Azov: A Prelude to Amphibious Landings?

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<https://jamestown.org/program/russias-boa-constrictor-strategy-in-the-sea-of-azov-a-prelude-to-amphibious-landings/>*

Russian activity in the Sea of Azov has been ramping up considerably in recent weeks. After the official opening of the Kerch Strait Bridge, on May 16 (see EDM, June 1), Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) started carrying out systematic boarding and inspections of vessels in the Sea of Azov traveling to and from the Ukrainian ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol. Some of these incidents (38 to date, as of May 17) occurred only 5–7 miles from the Ukrainian coast and lasted up to 8–10 hours before the vessels were allowed to depart on their way (Blackseanews.net, June 7). Moreover, Russian maritime security activities in the area have greatly lengthened the amount of time merchant vessels must wait before obtaining permission to pass through the Kerch Strait on their way to Mariupol and Berdyansk—this downtime can often last a day or more. In early June, the ship *Selekta*, which was traveling to Mariupol, had to wait 38 hours for permission to pass through the Strait (de facto controlled from both sides by Russia since the 2014 illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula). This vessel was then stopped again in the Sea of Azov by an FSB boat, boarded, and subjected to an inspection that lasted an additional three hours. Such delays and inspections only appear to impact vessels entering or leaving Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov (Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, June 9).

Russian naval forces as well as maritime assets of the FSB coast guard operating in the Sea of Azov have increased many-fold since earlier this year, and they continue to grow (Glavnoe.ua, June 6). Additions to the region have notably included artillery boats and small missile ships redeployed from the Caspian Flotilla (Hromadske Radio, June 5; see EDM, May 31). Indeed, the appearance, in the Sea of Azov, of two small missile ships armed with Kalibr long-range cruise missiles has tellingly boosted Moscow's ability to rain high-precision strikes on the entire depth of the territory of Ukraine from two offshore operational zones simultaneously—on either side of the Kerch Strait (Topwar.ru, June 6). Moreover, the Russian Black Sea Fleet has dramatically augmented the number of its joint amphibious drills (TASS, March 21, 2017; Kafanews, March 20, 2017), including massive exercises involving aviation and air defense forces (Interfax, June 5, 2018).

Also notable has been the growth of Russian oceanographic fleet assets, with capabilities to conduct “hybrid” (“New Type”) naval operations (see EDM, January 23). These ostensibly civilian Russian vessels are manned, at least in part, by what might be termed “little blue sailors”—individuals who are not exactly uniformed personnel (Usni.org, December 2016). In addition to installing various oceanographic equipment in the area, including near underwater communications cables, their activities have been significant for the growing use of unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV) (Vesti, July 13, 2012; Sudostroenie, March 22, 2018; Azniir.kh.ru, Ssc-ras.ru, accessed June 11, 2018). Currently these vessels are involved in complex oceanographic expeditions in the Sea of Azov (Azniir.kh, accessed June 11).

Furthermore, Russian “hybrid” maritime activity in the Sea of Azov appears to involve the use of Electronic Warfare (EW). Andrii Klymenko, the head of the supervisory board of the non-governmental organization Foreign Affairs Maidan, noticed that, for several days in May–June 2018, the Automatic Identification System (AIS) for live tracking of maritime traffic appeared not to function over the main navigable areas of the Azov Sea (Facebook.com, June 3). One possible reason for this outage could have been a malfunction at the receiving station in Temryuk, Russia. However, there have been no Navigational Area

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(NAVAREA) warnings issued about repairs or an emergency situation at Temryuk station. Moreover, throughout the outages, the station remained color coded as “green” on the AIS online marine traffic maps, meaning it was in working condition. Yet, the station’s apparent temporary shutdown suggests the AIS outages were intended to hide Russian ship traffic. According to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS 74/88), such activities can be classified as a threat to navigation. Additionally, one year ago, AIS transponders of at least 20 vessels were affected by GPS spoofing attacks in the Black Sea, near the Russian coast—the likely targets of a Russian cyber weapon being tested (Newscientist.com, August 10, 2017).

Russia’s strategy in the Sea of Azov seems designed to take control of the waters all the way up to the Ukrainian coast line, thus putting pressure and additional costs on Ukraine-bound maritime shipping traffic. In fact, like a boa constrictor, it aims to economically strangle southeastern Ukraine’s industrial seaport areas and destabilize the social situation there. And the broader implications of this strategy become clear when lessons of Crimean annexation are juxtaposed against evidence of Russia’s growing regional amphibious potential and the apparent directions of its offensive training drills. As such, it is important not to forget about Moscow’s naval probes in the Black Sea, testing Kyiv’s responses to its activities near Odesa and Snake Island (Dumskaya, June 7). In other words, the threat of a Russian amphibious operation to seize additional southeastern Ukrainian coastal territories is growing. And against the backdrop of water shortages in Crimea as well as other factors, it should not be ruled out that Moscow may still be contemplating wresting a land corridor to the peninsula (Apostrophe, June 7) or at least trying to force Kyiv to open Dnipro’s water supply to the occupied territory (Segodnya, June 2).

Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Olena Zerkal, commenting on the rising tensions in the Sea of Azov, noted, “Russia seeks various ways to provoke Ukraine to react to this or that situation in a way that [...] will prevent consideration by the [United Nations] tribunal of the issue of Russia’s violation of our sovereign rights.” She stressed the need for a “peaceful and legal settlement,” which is “optimal and effective” (Dzerkalo

Tyzhnya, June 9). However, historical experience shows that so-called “soft” power without “hard” power is rather impotent. Sudden crises require a rapid and comprehensive multi-dimensional assessment and response, particular under the conditions of “New Type” warfare. Undoubtedly, Moscow will continue to use “hybrid” forms and methods of warfare to achieve its goals, with the Crimean annexation serving as a useful blueprint (Obozrevatel, May, 26; Voice of America, June 1; Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, June 9).

Russia’s Primary Targets

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September 7, 2018*

<https://www.cepa.org/russias-primary-targets>

President Vladimir Putin’s falling popularity amidst widespread opposition to raising the retirement age may convince the Kremlin that society must be distracted and mobilized against a supposed foreign adversary.

External assertiveness often serves as an effective diversionary maneuver to dampen domestic turmoil by acting on the deception that Russia is under threat.

Moscow’s tools of aggression against neighboring states rely on stealth and surprise. This was most evident during the attack on Ukraine in 2014 and the takeover of the Crimean peninsula. Russia’s rulers camouflage their aggression or divert attention to other potential conflicts. This strategy generates confusion, undermines a coherent Western response, and maximizes Kremlin capabilities. To avoid being caught off-balance once again, it is worthwhile for U.S. and NATO policymakers to assess each of the potential targets along Russia’s long borders, pursue deterrents where feasible, and prepare for the military and diplomatic consequences of Moscow’s intervention.

From the Baltics to the Caucasus, Moscow has a number of latent conflicts that it can reanimate. Estonia and Latvia have been in Russia’s crosshairs since Putin assumed power almost twenty years

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ago. Their economic and political successes upon leaving Moscow's orbit contrasts most starkly with Russia's failures. They have been consistently attacked for allegedly repressing their Russian-speaking population even though international watchdog groups dismiss such disinformation. While Moscow is unlikely to stage a full-scale invasion and confront a concerted NATO response, it can provoke conflicts in parts of both countries that have a sizeable Russian-speaking population, including the Latgale region in eastern Latvia.

Further south, the Suwalki Corridor between Poland and Lithuania remains vulnerable to Russian penetration. The Kremlin's land forces operating from the Kaliningrad exclave and Belarus are in a position to close the Suwalki Corridor and impede NATO as a security guarantor to its three Baltic members.

Belarus may be another target for Moscow to raise nationalist temperatures and subdue a potentially wayward ally. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is steadily improving relations with the West in order to help shield Belarus from Moscow's pressures. Such moves have stirred fears in the Kremlin that Minsk will eventually seek membership of Western institutions. **The recent appointment of Putin's confidant Mikhail Babich as the new Ambassador to Belarus indicates that the Kremlin is increasing its pressures on Lukashenka to allow for Russian bases closer to the Polish and Lithuanian borders. Babich may also threaten Lukashenka's position by assisting pro-Russia factions opposed to closer relations with the West.**

Ukraine remains prone to further destabilization. An escalating flash point is the Azov Sea, where Russia's navy has blockaded the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk for several months. Moscow has steadily increased its naval presence possibly in preparation for seizing control of the entire Azov coastline and cutting off eastern Ukraine from the Black Sea. Russia could also intensify its attacks on Ukrainian controlled parts of Donbas. The unexplained assassination of Aleksandr Zakharchenko, head of one of the proxy separatist groups in Donetsk, may signal that the Kremlin is preparing new leaders to expand its offensive.

In Moldova, Russian services are exploiting divisions between the country's pro-European and pro-Eurasian streams. Both government and opposition leaders accuse each other of links with Russian intelligence services and the resulting protests and political paralysis are destabilizing the country and halting its progress toward the EU. Such a scenario may also escalate into conflicts with the Moscow-supported separatist region of Transnistria and the autonomous region of Gagauzia. This could precipitate more direct Russian intervention on the grounds of defending Russian speakers in the torn Moldovan state and increase Moscow's troop presence along the borders of Ukraine and Romania.

In the South Caucasus, Georgia remains vulnerable to a renewed Russian military thrust as Moscow reinforces its occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This could be couched as an "anti-terrorist" operation or a mission to bolster the Russian military base in Armenia. At the same time, Moscow's dissatisfaction with Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his campaign against political corruption could either trigger more direct interference in Armenian politics or a provocation to restart the war with Azerbaijan over the occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Such scenarios could topple the reformist government in Yerevan and redouble Armenia's dependence on Russia.

The Kremlin is unlikely to engage in two extensive armed conflicts simultaneously, but this may be possible if both are relatively limited or involve mostly proxy forces. The accompanying propaganda barrage would aim to convince an increasingly restless population that Putin is resolutely defending Russian interests against foreign enemies. To preclude new forms of aggression or make it as costly as possible for the Kremlin, NATO states must monitor, expose, and counter the activities of Russian services, provide military, intelligence, and diplomatic support to NATO partners, and push to resolve simmering conflicts, such as the one over Nagorno-Karabakh, that can be exploited by the Kremlin.

Tensions in the Azov Sea

*By Daniel Szeligowski,
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PISM,
August 23, 2018 p.
<http://www.pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-114-1185>*

After the annexation of Crimea and the construction of a bridge across the Kerch Strait, Russia has gained almost full control over the Azov Sea and now uses the situation to limit the freedom of navigation there. Such actions constitute primarily an element of economic pressure on Ukraine, but Russia may also provoke armed incidents involving some of the Ukrainians forces in the vicinity, which would pose a threat to stability in the Black Sea region.

Russian Actions in the Azov Sea

Since late April, Russia has been systematically limiting the freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea by means of delaying the issuing of permits to cross the Kerch Strait (over which it has gained full control since the annexation of Crimea) and temporarily closing selected areas under the pretext of organizing military exercises. Commercial vessels sailing to/from Ukrainian ports in Mariupol and Berdyansk have also been detained and subjected to multiple, often long-lasting (even for few days) inspections. According to information from the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine, the Russian coastguard has so far detained more than 150 vessels, including units from EU countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and others. In many cases, no reason was specified for the inspection, and no report was given.

Consequences for Ukraine

Russian restrictions on the freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea bring negative consequences for the Ukrainian economy, reducing the commercial attractiveness of Ukrainian ports in Mariupol and Berdyansk. Frequent inspections cause delays in transport and constitute an additional cost for ship-owners, of up to several thousand dollars per day. Additionally, as a result of the construction of the bridge across the Kerch Strait, vessels with an air draft greater than 33 meters and an overall length of more than 160 meters can no longer access the

Azov Sea. This excludes almost 150 vessels that used Ukrainian ports there, including Panamax cleared cargo ships.

The consequences of Russian actions primarily affect Mariupol. The port was Ukraine's second most important (after Odessa) for metal exports, which account for almost 25% of the country's total export revenues. However, the port's turnover has fallen 30%, it has lost at least one major contract (to Odessa), and has been forced to reduce its employees' working hours. In addition, the large metallurgical plants located in the city, belonging to oligarch Rinat Akhmetov (Ukraine's richest person), had to redirect part of their production to ports in the Black Sea, which had a negative impact on their financial standing. The industrial sector is the main source of employment in the region, so job losses could represent a threat to social stability.

The Status of the Azov Sea

The Ukrainian authorities are trying to counteract Russian pressure. From June to August they closed three areas of the Azov Sea in the vicinity of Mariupol and Berdyansk for the purpose of conducting military exercises (mainly with the use of land and air forces). However, the current status of the Azov Sea puts Kyiv at a disadvantage. The agreement on cooperation in the use of the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait, which was signed by both countries in 2003, designated the basin as part of both Russian and Ukrainian internal waters. It also left the question of maritime border delimitation in the Azov Sea to be settled at a later stage by means of a separate agreement. This has never happened, since Russia has blocked the process. Ukraine says that, while Russian actions involving the inspections of commercial vessels and its increased military presence in the basin do not formally violate the provisions of the 2003 agreement, they do run against the spirit of it. It is also unclear whether, due to the existence of the agreement, Russian inspections constitute a violation of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the field of freedom of navigation.

While the discussion intensifies in Ukraine about the need to terminate the 2003 agreement, it is unlikely that such a decision, although justified from the perspective of international law, would

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make any practical difference to Ukraine's position. Reaching an agreement with Russia on the maritime border in the Azov Sea will be impossible, as the Russian authorities will not agree to recognize Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea and the resulting rights of Ukraine to control the Kerch Strait. Any attempt by Ukrainian coastguard units to enforce control over Ukrainian territorial waters around Crimea would probably meet with a Russian military response.

Conclusions and Prospects

Russian restrictions on the freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea have tactical and strategic dimensions. In the tactical dimension, they are calculated to weaken the economic foundations of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine, based largely on the export of industrial products to foreign markets, and as such they constitute part of wider Russian activities aimed at destabilizing the Ukrainian state. The Russian authorities expect that the blockade of ports in the Azov Sea will have a domino effect, as a result of which the economic problems of Ukrainian enterprises will damage the material situation of society, thus raising anti-government sentiment. From the Russian point of view, this is especially important because of the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in Ukraine next year. In this context, the situation in the Azov Sea can also be seen as means of pressuring Akhmetov into supporting (financially and through the media) electoral candidates who call for the normalization of relations with Russia. In the strategic dimension, Russian actions are aimed at gradually eliminating the non-Russian presence in the Azov Sea so that it becomes solely part of the internal waters of the Russian Federation. From this perspective, it is likely that such actions will continue, and perhaps intensify.

The situation in the Azov Sea constitutes a long-term threat to Ukraine's security and stability in the region. In the future, Russia may use analogous actions to provoke armed incidents involving Ukrainian forces, especially if Ukrainian coastguard units decide to escort commercial vessels across the Kerch Strait. The Russian navy presence in the Azov Sea means it is already in a position to take immediate offensive action against Ukraine. Ukraine's ability to defend itself against

such attacks is limited, especially as Russian control of the Kerch Strait means that Ukrainian naval units might only be able to be deployed to the Azov Sea by rail or air, if at all.

The legal status of the Azov Sea is unlikely to change in the near future. It would not be beneficial for Russia, and neither Kyiv nor Moscow will change their position on Crimea.

The EU should demand that the Russian authorities cease restricting the freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea, particularly as ship-owners from Member States also use Ukrainian ports there and incur additional financial costs as a result of Russian actions. NATO countries could support Ukraine in the expansion and modernization of its navy and coastguard, and continue exercises organized jointly with Ukrainian forces in the Black Sea.

Pillar of NATO: Romania's Ambition in the Black Sea Region

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August 7, 2018.

<https://jamestown.org/program/pillar-of-nato-romanias-ambition-in-the-black-sea-region/>

United States President Donald Trump's behavior at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) recent summit in Brussels (July 11–12) and in its aftermath has cast a shadow on this landmark event. Trump's follow-up actions, including the meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, continued hitting at NATO and the European Union from afar. Trump's persona and his possible motivations furnished the main topic of analysis throughout these events, diverting attention from the actual results of the NATO Brussels Summit. Its agenda and decisions clearly identified Russia as the main source of threats and challenges to the Alliance. The summit's balance sheet is a mixture of significant accomplishments and unfinished business left over from years past, notably in the Black Sea region and NATO's eastern neighborhood (see EDM, July 25, 30, August 1, 2, 7, 8, 9).

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Judging from present trends—which continue a 15-year basic trend—Romania is on course to become the most important provider of stability and security between the Black Sea and the Western Balkans. Of all the countries in the Black Sea region, the Balkans, and the Danubian basin (all of which this country straddles), Romania is the most proactive member of the North Atlantic Alliance in terms of strategic initiatives; and it hosts the only significant NATO and US military presence in the Black Sea–Balkan–Danubian spaces. There, Romania is also the only country independent of Russian energy supplies; and it is the only country wary of the lure of Russian business generally. Romania maintains tension-free relations with all neighboring countries (Russia is not a neighbor); and Romania is the country where the highest public approval ratings of NATO, the United States and the European Union are recorded (or where the Trump effect and Euroskepticism have done the least damage).

Seemingly by default, Romania has become the most reliable pillar of stability and security among NATO's members and partners along the frontline in the Black Sea region. These are variously besieged or distracted. While partner countries Ukraine and Georgia are targets of Russia's aggression, NATO member Bulgaria shows only a limited interest in the Alliance (see below). Meanwhile, Turkey—NATO's mainstay on the Black Sea in decades past—has grown deeply alienated from the US and finds more common interests with Russia than with the Alliance in the Black Sea basin (see EDM, August 2).

It is also by default that initiatives regarding the southern part of NATO's eastern frontline tend to devolve to Bucharest. The Romanian presidents and governments have sought more actively than any country to interest NATO and the EU in this region, ever since Romania joined these two organizations. NATO membership and the bilateral strategic partnership with the US helped to raise the Romanian military's planning capacity. And since 2014, Russia's threats have surged. Consequently, Bucharest's initiatives have gained more persuasiveness, if not yet full traction within NATO. For its part, Romania's political system, with all its flaws, does back up the strategic vision with resources.

Following a consensus decision by the parliamentary parties in 2015, Romania is committed to spending 2 percent of its annual gross domestic product on defense each year for 10 years—2017 through 2026 (see EDM, March 19). Defense spending rose from 1.4 percent of GDP in 2015 (the year of that decision) to the 2 percent benchmark in 2017 (keeping the overall state budget deficit within the 3 percent limit), and a projected 2 percent again for defense in 2018. Within those allocations, the share of procurement of major weapons systems is estimated at 33 to 35 percent both for 2017 and 2018, far higher than the NATO-recommended share of 20 percent for major acquisitions (Calea Europeana, July 11).

Romania's nationally financed arms procurement programs aim to strengthen deterrence and defense both nationally and region-wide. The country's defense budget also covers most of the costs of NATO's multinational division headquarters and multinational brigade that are stationed on Romania's territory.

The majority of Romania's major weapons acquisitions are oriented toward the US. The Romanian parliament and government have approved the funding for purchases of:

- Patriot medium-range anti-missile and air-defense systems, from Raytheon (seven fire units, or three and a half batteries), with the first fire unit due in 2019.
- High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) from Lockheed Martin. The Patriots and the HIMARS are being acquired through the US government's Foreign Military Sales program (Defense News, July 27).
- 227 Piranha armored personnel carriers, to be co-produced in Romania on license from General Dynamics (these vehicles are expected to equip the NATO-affiliated multinational brigade based in Craiova).
- Two squadrons of US-made, second-hand F-16 fighter planes (at 12 planes per squadron). The first squadron has been acquired from Portugal and is currently in the process of being operationalized. Romania is seeking a seller for the second planned

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squadron, and envisions eventually acquiring 48 F-16s (Hotnews, July 18).

Starting in 2019, Bucharest envisages the start of acquisition programs for coastal defense artillery (anti-ship missile batteries) and construction programs for building four multi-functional corvettes and modernizing two old British-made frigates, at Romanian shipyards, in cooperation with as yet unidentified Western partners.

NATO's out-of-area missions and operations might be a distraction from the top priorities of territorial defense, but are nevertheless regarded by eastern frontline countries as investments in earning and retaining US confidence and a more persuasive voice in NATO. Following NATO's latest summit,

Romania's Supreme Council of Defense of the Country (CSAT—the top national security decision-making body) has approved an increase in Romania's contributions to NATO out-of-area missions and operations in 2019. The manpower increase amounts to 12 percent over the preceding year, bringing the total number to just over 3,000 personnel, including 2,100 Army personnel and 930 Interior Ministry personnel (gendarmerie and police). Almost one half of the total will be available for deployment to Afghanistan (Adevarul, July 19, 27). The message from President Klaus Iohannis and the government is that Romania complies with all elements of NATO's CCC motto (Cash Capabilities Contributions).

NOTES

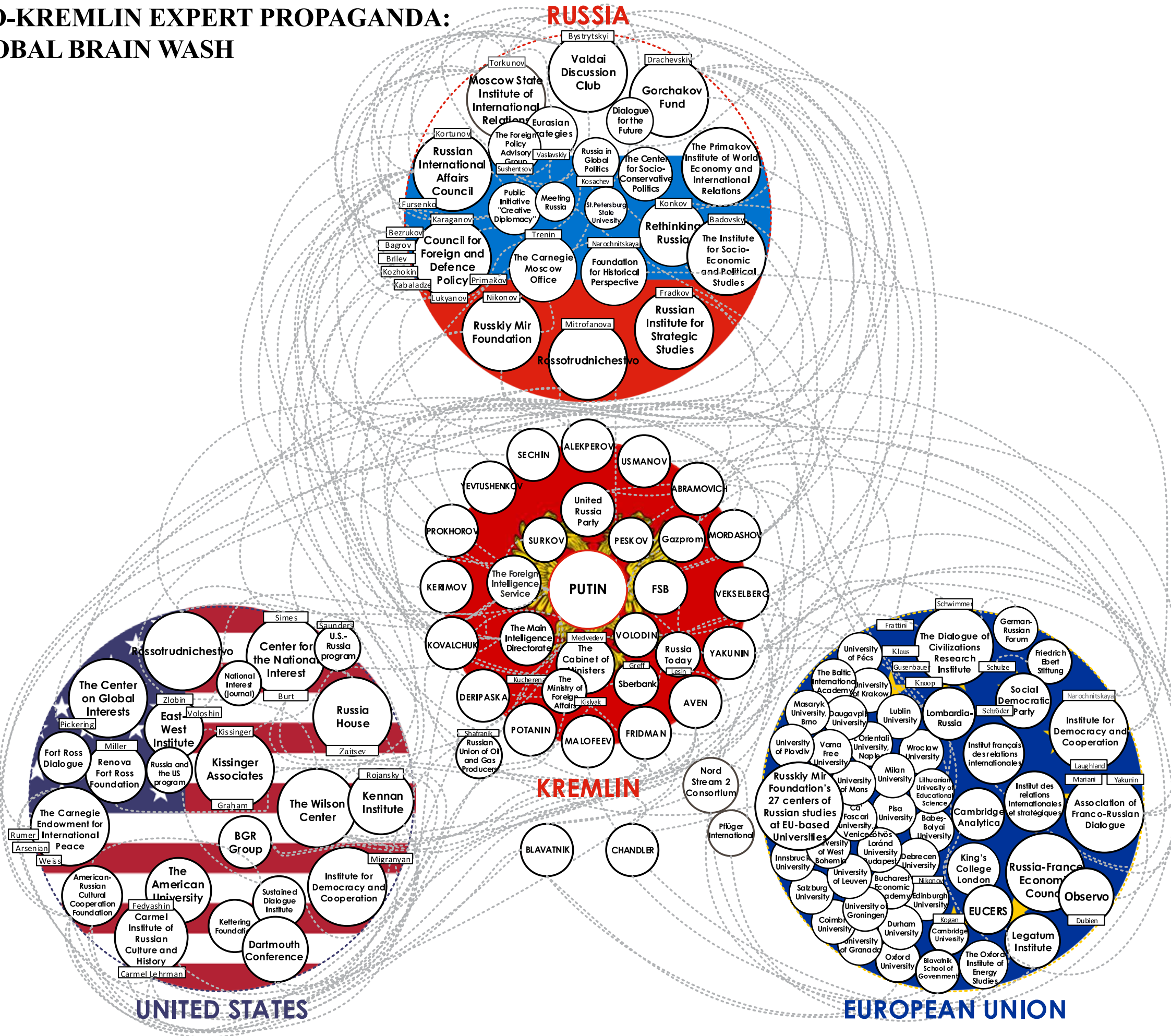
This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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NOTES

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**PRO-KREMLIN EXPERT PROPAGANDA:
GLOBAL BRAIN WASH**



The infographic depicts Kremlin ties with think tanks, universities and research centers in Russia, Europe and the United States of America. The author shows how the Moscow's think tanks, close or directly subordinated to the Kremlin, develop new ideological doctrine for the Russian regime and narratives of pro-Kremlin propaganda promoted through sympathizers or apologists of Russian policy in the West. Also, the organizations of Russian "soft power" - Rossotrudnichestvo, Russian World Fund and The Gorchakov Fund, as well as the centers for study of Russian culture and history founded by them at the universities of the EU (27 centers at the time of the study), are shown. Infographic shows links of the Western think tanks with various Russian oligarchs that are close to the Kremlin big business representatives, aiming at promotion of their interests as well as economic and political interests of the Putin regime.

Source: Kateryna Smaglyi, "Hybrid Analytica: Pro-Kremlin Expert Propaganda in Moscow, Europe and the U.S.: A Case Study on Think Tanks and Universities," Research Paper, Institute of Modern Russia, October 2018.



Head on international programs of the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI, Vitalii Martyniuk, presented a report on energy security in the Black Sea region during the event organized by the New Strategy Centre on 12-13 September 2018 in Bucharest, Romania.



On June 18, 2018 Centre for Global Studies with the support of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ukrainian Office organized international conference "Russian Neo-Imperialism: Sources, Genesis and Consequences for the Countries of South-East Europe". While presenting his report, President of the CGSS21 Mykhailo Gonchar, focused on the political prisoners of the Kremlin, in particular members of the editorial board of the Black Sea Security magazine Dmytro Shtyblykov and Oleksii Bessarabov, who are detained by the FSB on fabricated charges.



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