

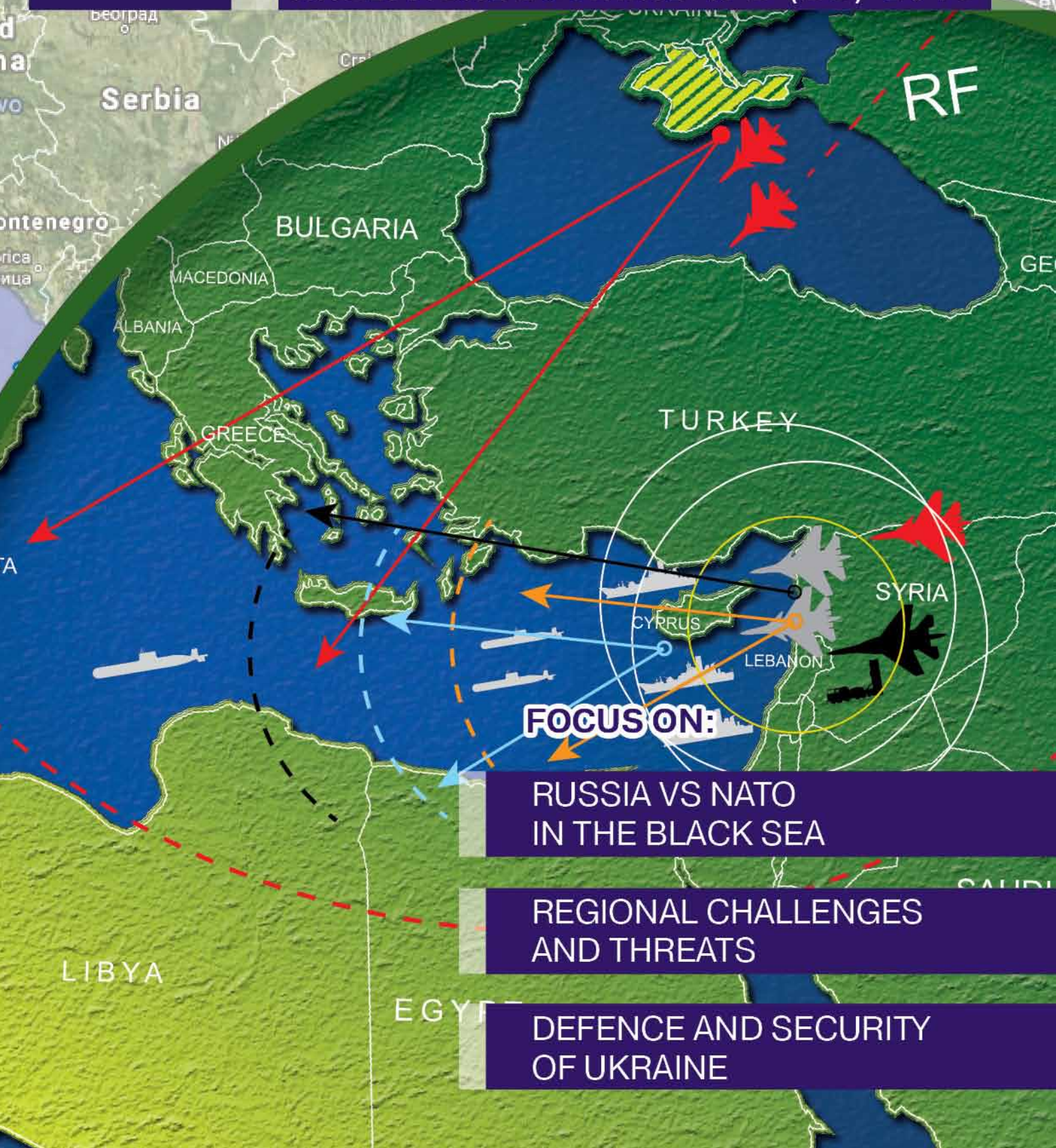


Centre for
Global Studies
**Strategy
XXI**

ENERGIES

BLACK SEA SECURITY

ANALYTICAL JOURNAL №3 (35) 2019



RUSSIA IN EUROPE:



OLD **MISTAKES**
NEW CHALLENGES?

#CRITICALINSECURITY

**THEY WARNED LONG BEFORE THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE.
THEY COULD BE PARTICIPANTS OF THE LVIV SECURITY FORUM-2019,
BUT HAVE BEEN KEPT IN PRISON FOR THREE YEARS BY THE PUTIN REGIME**

Oleksii Bessarabov, journalist, deputy editor-in-chief of the Black Sea Security Journal in the NOMOS Centre (Sevastopol), political prisoner of the Kremlin sentenced to 14 years of the strict regime colony for “saboteurs case.”



April 2011: “Today, Russia does not apply military and political pressure to Ukraine, preferring to seize its strategic assets and economic absorption ... Such a course of events does not exclude the likelihood of a situation escalating into a conflict, including using force.”

“The Black Sea Region: An Explosive Mix with Multiple Detonators,” Digest of the Razumkov Center “Crimea, Ukraine in Black Sea Security Coordinates”

Dmytro Shtyblykov, Head of International Programs of the NOMOS Centre, member of the editorial board of the Black Sea Security Journal, political prisoner of the Kremlin sentenced to 5 years of the strict regime colony for the “saboteurs case.” Does time in the Penal Colony-6, Omsk, (Russia).

October 2012:

“...what war is preparing for and with whom Russia is going to fight?

...in terms of military and economic performance, Russia is now unable to wage a war with either NATO, China or Japan. The obvious conclusion is that the armed forces of the Russian Federation today are able to fully handle combat missions in the post-Soviet territory.”

“Military Threats of Russia or with whom Russia is going to fight,” the Black Sea Security Journal No 4 (26).



Volodymyr Dudka – retired, former commander of the Simferopol ship of the Naval Forces of Ukraine, sentenced to 14 years of the strict regime colony for the “saboteurs case.”



Volodymyr Dudka was not engaged in the publishing of the Black Sea Security Journal, he was just a friend of Oleksii and Dmytro since their service in the Ukrainian Navy. This proved to be enough to become the third participant to the fraudulent “saboteurs case” and to receive a harsh sentence.

Bessarabov, Shtyblykov and Dudka are included to the lists of Ukrainian human rights organizations, as well as the Freedom House (USA), Memorial (Russia) and the resolutions of the European Parliament as political prisoners.

Harry Kемian, US Chargé d’Affaires in the OSCE stated: “The United States remains concerned about the unfair imprisonment of a growing number of Crimeans and other Ukrainians. On April 4, the so-called Sevastopol City Court sentenced two members of the Sevastopol-based think tank Volodymyr Dudka and Oleksii Bessarabov to 14 years in prison on suspicion of “subversive activity.”

On October 15, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, after examining the appeal of attorneys of O. Bessarabov and V. Dudka, upheld the sentence.

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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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FOREWORD

Dear Readers,

This issue is published after the elections in Ukraine that led to tectonic shifts in the country. A new political force, embodied by the president, with the pretentious name "Servant of the People," restructured the executive and legislative bodies, gaining a majority in parliament. One-party government was formed. In fact, the President of Ukraine and his party have received a monopoly on power, reminiscent of the time of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The ambiguous steps taken by the new authorities in the framework of the Minsk process and the Normandy format to settle the "conflict in Donbas" without mentioning the Crimean peninsula's de-occupation are exacerbating skepticism in society and rejection of it, as they might incorporate a course on Russia's capitulation to the Russian aggression. Protest sentiment in the Ukrainian society against the course on surrender increased rapidly during September-October. Foreign policy dilettantism and the influence of the oligarchic clans on the new government have led to its serious failures in the American and European directions, which undermines the solidarity of the de-consolidated West with Ukraine.



Mass protest against the capitulatory course of the ruling monopoly.

Kyiv, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, October 6, 2019

Photo: REUTERS / Valentyn Ogirenko

Source: <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/formula-shtaynmayyera-protesti-v-kiyevi-ta-inshih-mistah-foto-novini-ukrajini-50046656.html>

However, despite the turbulence of recent months, Ukraine's foreign policy remains unchanged. But the security situation for Ukraine has deteriorated. The shameful fall of France into the arms of the Putin regime, the over-capture of Germany by corrupt Russian gas "streams", the transit of power in the European Union, the deepening of European-American and American-Chinese

misunderstandings, Brexit, events in the Middle East, the internal political crisis in the US give a green light for Putin regime to continue the aggression not only against Ukraine or in the post-Soviet space. Russia through the efforts of its propaganda and intelligence services is now trying to re-interpret the events of five years ago - to portray the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine

FOREWORD

as a coup d'état, the shooting down of the MH17 flight by the Russian anti-aircraft missile system – as a consequence of the Ukrainian government inaction, the Russian proxies DPR and LPR – as the new sovereign states of “Donbas people”, etc. Russia does not neglect other countries in the Black Sea region, especially Georgia and Moldova, which are being imposed to the constant disruptive activities.

In this issue of the journal, our authors from Romania, Italy, Georgia, Moldova, in their articles, have reflected the threatening dynamics and trends of the security environment in the Black Sea region as well as in the adjacent regions of the Caspian, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Balkans, where Russia is demonstrating its dominance and opposing NATO. The outlines of a new geopolitical game between the US and Russia have emerged. Russia's attempt to penetrate the "soft subsoil" of the United States through Venezuela is now turning to Moscow for an American-Greek alliance to curb Russian and Turkish ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Against the background of the deterioration of Ukraine's foreign and security situation, the ill-considered initiatives of the new authorities to resolve the conflict in Donbas under the Steinmeier formula, Russia's explicit attempt to resuscitate the Novorossiia project, military build-up of the Russian strike forces at the borders of Ukraine, defense policy is gaining momentum. That is why we publish a fundamental article on defense by Volodymyr Gorbulin, the former Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, now the First Vice President of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine.

We also want to inform our readers, that Academician V. Gorbulin headed the newly created Strategic Council of the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI, which was formed of reputable and well-known persons in Ukraine. It consists of:

- Roman Bezsmertnyi, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine of II–V convocations, diplomat, PhD in political science;
- Sergii Haiduk, Chairman of the Association of Navy Veterans of Ukraine, Commander of the Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2014–2016), Vice Admiral;
- Hanna Hopko, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine of VIII convocations, Head of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (2014-2019), PhD in social communications;
- Sergii Kryvonos, Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, two star general;
- Hryhorii Perepelytsia, Director of the Foreign Policy Institute, doctor of political science, Captain;
- Oksana Yurynets, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine of VIII convocations, Head of the Ukrainian Parliament's delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2019), PhD in economics.

Finally, we would like to recall that two members of our journal's editorial board, Olexii Bessarabov, Dmytro Styblykov, and Vladimir Dudka, together with 113 Kremlin political prisoners, remain in Russian detention centers. The unconditional release of Ukrainian citizens from Sentsov's list should have been a manifestation of the will of the Putin regime, its willingness to end the war against Ukraine, but in reality they became the subject of political blackmail on the new Ukrainian authorities by the Kremlin.

Ukraine's struggle for the freedom of its citizens and repression of Russian aggression continue. Ukraine, like Georgia and Moldova, which have chosen Europe as their geopolitical vector, have no intention of leaving the chosen course. We will continue to cover the events and processes taking place in the Black Sea and beyond, publishing the exclusive materials of our authors.

***Editorial board
of the Black Sea Security Journal***

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Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine: Course is (Un)changed

**Major events on the vector of NATO-Ukraine cooperation
in June-September 2019¹**

From June to September 2019, NATO-Ukraine highest-level dialogue was intense: telephone conversations and President Zelensky's first overseas visit to Brussels, joint Sea Breeze 2019 exercises, meeting with Secretary-General Stoltenberg in

the UN General Assembly in September. Despite the changing face of Ukrainian politics and the conflicting signals, Ukraine and NATO do not end daily cooperation on many levels.



*The meeting of the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskii with NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg
Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_166584.htm*

On June 4-5, the first foreign visit of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to NATO Headquarters in Brussels took place. At a press point following the meeting, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg noted that Ukraine is a valuable

partner, making a significant contribution to NATO's mission in Afghanistan and Kosovo, while addressing military threats from Russia on its own territory. NATO and Ukraine forces train regularly together. This demonstrates Ukraine's considerable commitment to international security. He stated: *“NATO stands firm in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Allies do not, and will not, recognise Russia's illegal annexation*

¹ The article is prepared in the framework of the Project “Raising of awareness on NATO among the communities in the East and South of Ukraine,” which is implemented by the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI from June 1, 2019 till March 15, 2020 under the support of the British Embassy in Ukraine.

FOCUS ON: NATO-UKRAINE COOPERATION

of Crimea. And we condemn Russia's aggressive actions in the Black Sea region...In response to Russia's illegal actions, NATO has increased its presence in the Black Sea. With more ships and more planes. And we have stepped up our cooperation with our partners in the region, Ukraine and Georgia." As it was emphasized, Ukraine has a strong mandate to implement key reforms, major of which are to fight corruption and strengthen the rule of law.

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his speech expressed his commitment to the invariance of the course of Ukraine on Euro-Atlantic integration, enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine. He noted that the ongoing, armed Russian aggression remains a major challenge for Euro-Atlantic security, so our common task is to ensure stability and security in the Black Sea region that requires Alliance additional efforts [1].

On July 1-12, 2019, the annual international Sea Breeze exercises were held in the three regions of Ukraine - Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kherson, as well as in the Black Sea aquatorium. They were attended by 19 states, 32 ships, 24 aircrafts and more than 3000 military personnel. The Sea Breeze 2019 exercises demonstrated a high level of cooperation between the US and regional allies and partners to ensure preparedness and interoperability in the Black Sea region. This is stated in the blog of the Commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet, Vice Admiral Lisa Franchetti: *"In this theater, we view threats from a 360-degree perspective and work hard to have staffs and forces trained and ready to operate effectively on all of NATO's maritime flanks. Our agility and lethality in the maritime are most*

important in these areas. Major exercises Trident Juncture in 2018, Formidable Shield in May, BALTOPS just last month, and now Sea Breeze reaffirm and reinforce U.S. and Allied commitment to regional maritime security and collective self-defense. In this era of great power competition, NATO naval forces are committed to the principle of credible deterrence. The shared commitment with the NATO Allies and partners is unwavering: to maintain a free and open international order where the international rule of law is respected, adhered to, and enforced - where peace, stability, and prosperity thrive [2].

Thus, the post-election dialogue with NATO in Ukraine was quite intense. These include telephone conversations and the first overseas visit of President-elect V. Zelenskyy to Brussels, the launch of the International Sea Breeze 2019 exercise, and a meeting with NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg in the UN General Assembly in September. Despite the change in political figures on the political Olympus in Kiev, US turbulence on Ukrainian issues, Russia's anti-NATO propaganda, ambiguous statements by some Ukrainian officials who, via foreign and security policy, send conflicting signals to NATO and Ukrainian society and partners, Ukraine and NATO continue to cooperate. Summer polls show that 53% of Ukrainians support Ukraine's accession to the Alliance [3]. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is finalizing the preparation of the Annual National Program under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission for 2020. On October 31, 2019 Kyiv is preparing to welcome a delegation of the North Atlantic Council and the NATO Secretary General.

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Ukraine's Defense and Security: Our Responses to Threats

The Bulletin of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (No. 9, 2019) published an article “Ensuring the defense and security of Ukraine: current problems and ways to solve them”², written by the First Vice-President of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Academician V. P. Gorbulin. Volodymyr Gorbulin is a well-known specialist and public person who devoted his professional life to the problems of national security and defense. Therefore, we publish an abridged version of the article devoted to the analysis of threats to national security and defense of Ukraine, as well as responses to them.

Threats to Ukraine's national security

1. Threats caused by the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine

The current National Security Strategy of Ukraine states: “The Russian threat has a long-term nature; other fundamental changes in the external and internal security sphere of Ukraine necessitate the creation of a new system of ensuring the national security of Ukraine...”.

The threat to Ukraine's national security in the military sphere from the Russian Federation emerged in the East of Ukraine, where an armed conflict has been ongoing since 2014. Military operations of different intensity are conducted mainly with the use of land weapons and military equipment (WME) of the second and third generations. During “the hot phase” of the conflict in the Donbas, Russia, which, by the way, does not recognize the presence of its military forces on the territory of

Ukraine, fulfilled a number of tasks for the occupation of part of our territory with the use of outdated and modernized Soviet weapons and equipment. While fighting, both sides widely used rocket-artillery weapons, tanks, IFVs, APV, anti-tank missiles, a variety of small arms and a large number and a wide range of ammunition for them.

However, the course of hostilities in the Donbas showed low survivability, poor mobility and non-compliance of these WME with modern conditions that led to large losses on both sides. At the same time, the fighting demonstrated an unsatisfactory state of equipment and training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In a short time, our country was able to restore the combat capability of the Armed Forces and repel the aggressor, freeing most of the occupied territory in the East of Ukraine.

2. Threats caused by the strengthening of the Russian military power

The Military doctrine of Ukraine defines one of the threats to national security as the buildup of the Russian groups of troops with a powerful strike and offensive potential near the state border of Ukraine, the creation of new, and expansion and modernization of existing bases, and military infrastructure. Analysis of the course of events in this direction indicates a significant increase of the military potential of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. For example, today in the European part of the Russian Federation, directly near the borders of our state, four Russian armies are deployed. They have more than 84 thousand personnel, 1000 tanks (T-72, T-80, T-90), more than 2,800 IFV, APV and other armored vehicles, 1,100 artillery systems, 270 anti-tank missile systems (Sturm-S, Khrysanthema-S), 450 air defense systems (Tunguska, Strela-10, OSA-AKM, Tor, Buk)

² The full text of the article is available here: http://www.nas.gov.ua/text/pdfNews/Visn_9-20193_Gorbulin.pdf

and other weapons. They will be re-equipped with new WME, in particular, self-propelled artillery systems Coalitia-SV-KSH, tanks Armata, APV T-15 Bagulnik, IFV Kurganets-25, etc.

The number of artillery units in the brigades of the Russian ground forces is increasing significantly and new artillery units are being deployed, which, in particular, can use nuclear munitions. By 2020 it is planned to equip forces with more than 600 new multiple launch rocket systems.

Re-equipment of the Russian armed forces with more modern means of destruction, communication, intelligence and electronic warfare continues. In particular, the armed groups in the occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea deployed electronic warfare units (EWU). Their capabilities are enhanced with reconnaissance and guidance of weapons of destruction in combat using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), innovative electronic warfare and intelligence.

In the last six years, the Russian Federation has made significant progress in the creation of new and modernization of existing models of WME. The Russian armed forces have increased the number of carriers of high-precision long-range weapons of land, sea and air basing more than 12 times, and high-precision cruise missiles – 30 times. Along the perimeter of the Russian border, a continuous radar field of the missile attack warning system has been created for all strategic aerospace directions and for all types of ballistic missile flight tracks. At the beginning of 2019, the total equipment of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation with modern air defense systems increased from 16 to 61%. Thus, in the Strategic nuclear forces, it is 82%, in the Land forces – 48.3%, in the Aerospace forces – 74%, in the Navy – 62.3%, in the airborne troops – 63.7%.

According to experts, the Russian Federation needs few more years to complete the planned large-scale rearmament of the Armed Forces and appropriate training of personnel. After that, we can expect the intensification and strengthening of military and political pressure on Ukraine. In this regard, based on the analysis of the armed confrontation in the Donbas, the military-political leadership of Ukraine should form and implement a chain of priority measures to counter this pres-

sure from the Russian Federation that would not exclude the possibility of unleashing a full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

3. Threats caused by the termination of the IRNF Treaty

Termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019 became a significant international case, which may negatively affect the level and state of international security and produce threats to the national security of Ukraine in the military sphere.

In December 2018, NATO Foreign Ministers supported the conclusion that Russia violated the IRNF Treaty and urged it to immediately return to its full implementation. This proposal was once again made at a meeting of the NATO – Russia Council on January 25, 2019, but Russia continued to deny that it violated the Treaty. In this regard, on February 1, 2019, the United States announced that under Article XV of the IRNFT, it suspended its obligations to comply with it. This meant that the U.S. could terminate the Treaty within 6 months of that date if Russia did not return to its respect.

By the way, at the Munich Security Conference on February 15, 2019, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg noted that from that rostrum in 2007 the President Putin for the first time publicly expressed his intention to withdraw Russia from the IRNF Treaty: “The Treaty, which is respected by only one side, does not protect us”.

Despite those warnings, on March 4, 2019, Putin, being guided by their own motives, signed a decree on Russia's withdrawal from the IRNF Treaty, and on May 30, he submitted to the State Duma a draft law On the suspension of Russia's participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which was adopted on June 18. On 26 June, NATO Defense Ministers again urged Russia to return to the Treaty and allow its verification, but that initiative rested unanswered.

Therefore, a new stage of the arms race has begun in the world. At the same time, other participants, such as China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, North Korea and even those countries that have not yet had such missiles, are actively joining this race. Analysis of the causes and consequences of the ter-

mination of the IRNF Treaty allows us to conclude that this case is the greatest threat to the countries of Asia and Europe, Ukraine in particular.

The highest political and military authorities of Ukraine should already calculate the possible consequences of the aggravation of the situation near its borders and look for effective ways and measures that would make it possible to significantly increase the military potential of the country in the next 4-5 years. One of these possible measures may be the creation of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine in the future. The first step taken by the leadership of Ukraine in the direction of getting rid of the factors that hindered the deployment of works on improvement and further development of certain elements of rocket and space means and technologies, is the Ukraine's withdrawal (Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 789 dated August 21, 2019) from the Agreement on Co-ordination of Works on Issues Related to Export Control of Raw Materials, Equipment, Technologies and Services Used to Create Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles for their Delivery, concluded between the CIS countries on June 26, 1992 in Minsk. In our opinion, this will contribute to the emergence of separate works on creation of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine.

The current state of military-technical potential of Ukraine

1. State of the Ukrainian WME

After the collapse of the Soviet Union a big number of Soviet design and production samples remained in Ukraine. In the 1990s, these weapons could be considered modern and quite effective, but their number far exceeded the defense needs of Ukraine. Time passed, some of the samples of those WME were destroyed according to international agreements, and some of them were sold to other countries, sometimes for nothing. The rest of the weapons remained in military units and storage bases. Because of the fact that very few funds were allocated for the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, in particular for the development of new and maintenance of existing weapons in proper condition, those models of WME gradually deteriorated, became physically and morally obsolete. The consequences were clearly manifested in 2014, when hostilities unfolded in the East of Ukraine, and there was an urgent need for a big

number of WME. The development of the situation pushed the country's leadership to urgently solve the problems of technical equipment of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, for which considerable funds were allocated. However, for their effective use, including for the creation of new weapons, we still need the appropriate research-scientific institutions and production plants, design and technology bureaus, enterprises of the defense industry. In Soviet times, there was an effective system of research and production enterprises of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine, aimed at the design and creation of WME. However, the military-industrial complex of Ukraine was an integral part of the military-industrial complex of the USSR and even in the early 1990s it did not provide complete production cycles of majority of WME. In addition, the vast majority of the main WME developers and design and technical documents remained in Russia. Therefore, the Ukrainian enterprises faced an abrupt issue of providing military-technical support of the WME, their maintenance, storage, life extension, etc.

In the early 2000s, that issue was resolved to some extent. The system was worked out to provide not only technical support of existing WME, but also their in-depth modernization and development of new samples. Unfortunately, the non-systemic measures implemented in the following years to reform the military-industrial complex of Ukraine led to a gradual washout of its specific features as a branch of the defense sector, leveling it to civilian industries. The military-industrial complex of Ukraine for many of its components lost the ability to create and produce massively the modern models of WME — according to experts, Ukraine could produce in a closed cycle no more than 5% of the nomenclature needed for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Ukrainian enterprises of repairing of weapons were in slightly better condition, but they faced big difficulties, mainly due to the lack of necessary spare parts, in particular of Russian production, as relations with the Russian Federation deteriorated from year to year, and official relations in the line of military-technical cooperation were almost ceased.

The beginning of the military confrontation in the East of Ukraine showed the failure of the national military-industrial complex to independently meet the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces for the

critical nomenclature of the WME. For lack of proper scientific, technological and production base Ukrainian defense enterprises could not produce combat aircraft and helicopters, anti-aircraft missile systems, naval weapons, most of the ammunition, artillery systems of large caliber, small arms etc. Thus, the tasks of restoring and increasing the number of its own developments in those sectors of the military-industrial complex, in which Ukraine retained the relevant scientific and technical potential - missiles, aircrafts and armored vehicles, came to the fore. In these sectors, Ukrainian military-industrial enterprises in cooperation with specialized research institutions began to develop some new and upgrade existing WME, namely:

- armored vehicles: the Kharkiv design Bureau of Mechanical Engineering and the Plant of V. A. Malyshev – for tanks Oplot and Bulat, armored personnel carriers BTR-3 and BTR-4; the AvtoKrAZ and the Bohdan motors – wheeled armored vehicles Kozak-2, Cougar, Spartan, Triton, and Bars-3;
- aviation equipment: the Antonov State Enterprise – AN-3SH, AN-32P, AN-74MP special purpose aircrafts; the Motor Sich JSC – repair, modernization, re-equipment of Mi-8, Mi-17, Mi-24, Mi-2, Mi-8T helicopters;
- missile technology: the Luch DCB – portable anti-tank missile systems (ATGM) Skif, transportation anti-tank systems Barrier, helicopter ATGM Barrier-B and Alta, light portable missile systems Corsair, anti-tank guided missiles Stugna and Falarick 105, a complex of guided mortar weapons, and guided missiles of close air combat range of the air-air class.

2. Directions of further WME development in Ukraine

Based on professional analysis of the state of affairs in the field of technical equipment of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, it is possible to formulate several conclusions.

1. Taking into account the fact that now the Ukrainian Armed Forces are equipped with physically and morally obsolete weapons of Soviet times, the further development of the WME shall be based primarily on the results of fundamental and applied research on the entire spectrum of scientific

and technical areas. At the same time, special attention should be paid to the creation of a new fundamental development, which can become the basis of the latest domestic technologies for both special and dual use. As one of such directions it is possible to consider scientific substantiation of process of creation and use of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine, which space component can be applied for the solution of problems both in defense and civil spheres. Now we can cite many examples where the existing scientific potential is not used in the defense sector, although it is well known that the introduction of innovations in the development and production of new weapons is possible only in the case of the effective interaction of scientific circles, customers, developers and manufacturers of WME.

2. To introduce scientific developments and bring them to practical industrial application for military purposes, an appropriate industrial and technological potential is also needed. Today the Ukrainian defense industry is able to produce military products for the needs of the armed forces in the following areas:

- military transport aviation;
- missile armament for aviation and armored vehicles;
- precision weapons;
- tanks and armored fighting vehicles;
- radar stations, satellite navigation systems and electronic warfare;
- tank and aircraft engine building;
- warships and patrol boats.

There are also a lot of theoretical and practical developments and for the commencement of works on creation of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine. Priorities for the development of necessary types of WME in Ukraine should be determined based on the requirements of normative documents on national security of Ukraine in the military sphere. The main message should be that the general thrust of the military policy of Ukraine lies in the sphere of defense, particularly in the provision of security, protection of the country from military attacks against the independence and territorial integrity, which demands to have a powerful armed forces, equipped with high-performance WME and able to perform the following tasks:

FOCUS ON: DEFENCE AND SECURITY

1. Continuous monitoring and analysis of the composition of the armed forces of a possible enemy and a state and capabilities of its WME;
2. Timely detection of the enemy's intentions regarding the armed conflict (attacks on Ukraine);
3. Ability to respond effectively to armed aggression.

For implementation of the first group of tasks all possible open sources and information of human intelligence are used; the second group – ground, underwater, air and space (including satellite) means of surveillance and detection of location and movement of military objects both in depth of the territory of the possible enemy and near borders of Ukraine.

An important direction of implementation of this task may be the deepening of bilateral cooperation with the United States and NATO on joint production of WME, as well as the development in Ukraine of the National system of control and analysis of the space situation (SCASS). After the annexation of the Crimea it was restored in Mukachevo; a modern Space Control Center (SCC) was created on the basis of the former radar station of the missile warning system Dnipro. Modern mobile SCC radars based on digital antenna arrays were manufactured and introduced; optical observation data are widely used. In the future it is necessary to ensure the integration of the national missile defense system SCASS into the international European space control system and the anti-missile system of NATO countries.

The third task should be solved with the use of all possible effective means of destroying enemy manpower and air defense systems in the air, water, under water and on land.

One of the priorities is the introduction of innovations of a new technological cycle in certain segments of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine on the basis of the state order with a closed production cycle. According to the available scientific, technological and production potential, resource capabilities and the ratio efficiency-cost the optimal response to these challenges is the creation of operational and tactical missile sys-

tems (OTRC) using modern space technologies, navigation and reconnaissance purposes. Part of the implementation of the second and third tasks can be assigned to the rocket and space shield of Ukraine (of course, if it is created).

The efforts of military and academic science in close cooperation with the industry of Ukraine and scientific and industrial institutions of the developed countries of the world should be directed to the implementation of the above-mentioned tasks. Thus, it is necessary to maintain WME in efficient condition, to implement measures to increase their combat and operational capabilities based on the technologies of the fifth technological class, to work on the creation of effective newest WME, using the individual technologies of the sixth technological structure.

Potential preconditions for the creation of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine

Given this, there is a normal question - what is happening in the development of the latest technologies that can be used to create the latest weapons in Ukraine, which are necessary for modern warfare, in particular, in relation to the rocket and space shield? Development and serial production of the modern weapons will need experienced professionals (scientists, designers, technologists, workers of various professions, etc.), technologically advanced scientific and industrial production base, as well as practical experience in the creation and serial production of the necessary weapons. According to the results of the analysis regarding the possibility to implement the tasks of creating the rocket and space shield of Ukraine, it can be argued that some military-industrial enterprises still need infrastructure and human resources. There are some results in the air defense segment:

- Development of an anti-aircraft missile systems of medium range (SAM MR), which involves a group of enterprises under the leadership of the Luch DCB;
- Modernization of the S-125 Pechora (Radionics LLC and Luch DCB);
- For 2021-2022, it is planned to modernize the air defense systems of some modifications of the S-200 and S-300 series and missiles to them.

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In the segment of multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), the Soviet Smerch MLRS has been upgraded with a new 300 mm guided missile with a flight range of up to 120 km (the adoption of this system was scheduled for October 2019). Until the end of this year it is also planned to start deliveries of the upgraded version of the MLRS Vilkha-M with a range of up to 130 km and Vilkha-R with a cassette warhead to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Under the management of the Pivdenne Design Bureau, work is being carried out to create new rockets for Grad and Uragan rocket systems.

In the segment of missile systems the works on modernization of existing and creation of perspective armament are going on. They are: modernization of tactical missile complex Tochka (works in this direction started in 2019 on the Pivdenne DB); continuing development of the OTRC Sapsan in the framework of the creation of OTRC Grom-2 for foreign customers (rocket engines have been already successfully tested, and the complex was prepared to the first field test); the Yuzhnoye Design Bureau is working on the equipment of the Grom-2 missile systems with the Korshun-2 cruise missiles, which are analogous to the American Tomahawk missiles and the Russian Kalibr missiles, but the range of the Korshun-2 missile systems (280-300 km) is limited by the Ukraine's obligations to meet the requirements of the Missile Technology Control Regime.

In the segment of cruise missiles, coastal anti-ship missile systems (ASMS) Neptune for the Ukrainian Navy were developed, which can be attributed to the samples of weapons of the fifth generation (Luch DCB). This system is designed to control territorial waters, protect naval bases, coastal facilities and infrastructure, disrupt marine amphibious operations of an enemy. The complex provides division of objects of destruction, following and issuing of commands for missile launch. The missile is designed to hit targets at a range of up to 290 km.

However, today the Ukrainian Armed Forces don't practically have naval aviation. In particular, there are no airborne surveillance aircraft of Hawkeye type. UAV is capable of conducting radar reconnaissance in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, but there are no domestic reconnaissance satellites that complicates the use of Neptune missiles in the

short-term perspective. Start of work on the development of a ship-based anti-ship missile system on the basis of the Neptune SRC is also expected.

Concerning the segment of space means, in Ukraine, in addition to intelligence agencies, there is the National Space Facilities Control and Test Centre at the State Space Agency of Ukraine (NSFCTC). It has the necessary hardware and software (ground stations for receiving information from earth remote sensing (ERS) satellites, satellite control stations, special information processing centers, etc.), and trained personnel. NSFCTC already performs the tasks below:

- Receives remote sensing data on the location of land and sea objects from commercial spacecraft (CS) at its ground receiving stations;
- Provides government consumers with satellite images in 15-30 minutes after their receipt from the CS at the national receiving stations;
- Carries out case processing of satellite images;
- Plans the use of the onboard resource of CS ERS for areal and small objects monitoring;
- Provides coordinate-time and navigation support of Ukraine. In the short term NSFCTC plans to launch a promising domestic earth remote sensing satellites with the 7.8m and 2.5 m resolution.

Therefore, the combination of capacities of NSFCTC and the intelligence agencies of Ukraine for receiving of remote sensing data can to a certain extent ensure the use of missile weapons in the interests of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. It is only necessary to address the issue of adequate funding for the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Therefore, institutions and enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex have opportunities for modernization and repair of almost all items of WME for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as for separate development of the latest samples. However, for creation and production of WME in the segment of the rocket and space shield of Ukraine, newer technologies are needed, and this is much more complicated. The reasons for this are as follows:

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- Technological capabilities of the military-industrial complex do not fully meet the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces;
- Long-term insufficient state's attention to the conditions and development of the defense industry and scientific base;
- Unsatisfactory budget financing of state defense programs, which does not provide timely reform and development of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine in the direction of its ability to produce WME at least on advanced technologies of at least fourth and fifth technological generations.

This is the main reason that the domestic production of WME for the needs of the Armed forces, other military formations and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine has recently amounted to only 5-8% of the potential capabilities of defense enterprises. It is obvious that investments are needed to develop innovations and transfer them into specific actions. Science, especially military science, is unprofitable, at least for private capital, which is now being actively attracted for the development of technical equipment of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. In these circumstances, the key role in addressing the development of science and the implementation of its achievements in the military sphere, primarily in terms of financing, should be played by the state. Without this, in market conditions, it is difficult to hope for the transition of the country and its Armed Forces to a new technological class and ensure a high level of military security. It is necessary to analyze expediency and possible directions of transition to creation of the WME in Ukraine, constructed on technologies of the fifth and following, sixth, generations. Simultaneously, with the improvement of existing and the development of new types of WME intended for warfare in the near future, we should prepare for wars in the even more distant future.

In conclusion, it is feasible to once again emphasize: for the implementation of a balanced and effective military-technical and military-industrial policy of Ukraine, it is necessary to pay special attention to the need to develop the basic technologies of the next, sixth, technological generation and on their basis to work on the creation of the latest high-performance models of WME. It should be noted that the results of the studies

testify that, in the periods of global technological shifts, it is usually difficult for the leading countries to keep the leading positions, as in the upsurge of a new technological peak, the developing countries, which have expertise in the preparation of the prerequisites for this, come forward. Given this, Ukraine theoretically has a chance. The main thing is not to miss it!

Conclusions:

The analysis of the state, issues and tasks of defense industry enterprises of Ukraine, and their ongoing development over the last period allows making conclusions as follows.

1. In the current geopolitical situation, the Armed Forces of Ukraine remain one of the key tools for the implementation of the security and defence policy of the state, which is in a state of hybrid war with the Russian Federation.
2. The situation in the military-industrial complex of Ukraine is complicated by the critical state of the production and technological base of its defense enterprises, for most of which the possibility of manufacturing and modernization of WME remains at the level of the second and third technological generations.
3. To improve the defense of the state, provide deterrence and resistance to aggression, the available scientific and production potential of Ukraine shall be aimed at the study and introduction of modern technology to create WME of the next generations, especially missile weapons. The combination of production and technological capacities of such enterprises as the Luch DCB, the Pivdenne and Yuzhmash CB can provide a significant increase in the level of defense capabilities of Ukraine and create the necessary conditions for the formation of an effective rocket and space shield of Ukraine.
4. Missile programs on creating the Neptune SRC, Grom-2 OTRC, Sapsan and Vilkha MLRS should be attributed to the medium, not long-term, government programs. Their main advantage is that these programs can be independently implemented by the military-industrial complex of Ukraine within 3-5 years without involvement of the foreign partners. The implementation of these pro-

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grams (if they are properly funded) will enable these enterprises not only to maintain infrastructure and human resources, but also strengthen and ensure technological development.

5. The suspension of the IRNF Treaty and the further aggravation of the military-political situation in Europe put the need to revise the restrictions that were defined for Ukraine during its accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime. In particular, this applies to the provision of the ability to Ukraine to create and produce missiles with a range of up to 1,000-1,500 km instead of missiles with a range not exceeding 300 km, which is provided by the above-mentioned restrictions. It is clear that Ukraine will need international political support, primarily from the United States.

6. The existing in Ukraine exercise fields (Yavorivskiy, Desnianskyi, Berdianskyi, etc.) are not suitable for carrying out full-scale range tests of missile systems even with a range of 200-500 km, and even more so for medium and shorter-range complexes. In this regard, the new leader-

ship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense will need to make a decision on a possibility of conducting tests at the ranges of the foreign countries.

7. The economic situation in Ukraine, most likely, will not allow in the nearest future to launch domestic ERS satellites. Therefore, it is necessary to look for ways of entering into cooperation with other states to develop domestic remote sensing satellites or joint use of satellites. Until Ukraine is not able to launch national remote sensing satellites, it is worth continuing to purchase the onboard resource of foreign commercial satellites to meet the needs of the national security and defense sector. In addition, it is necessary to modernize and promote the development of the ground infrastructure of the state's space component: ground receipt stations, spacecraft control stations, information processing centers and elements of the space situation control and analysis systems, as well as to work out the issue of their integration with the missile and other weapons control systems of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

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Russia in the Black Sea: Technology of Squeezing NATO out³

In the Issue No. 2 (32) 2018 of the Black Sea Security Journal, a research “Marine Gas Infrastructure in the Russian Counteraction to NATO on the East Flank: Potential of Hybrid Use in the Black and Baltic Seas”, was published. In the article, the authors described how Russia uses Ukraine's seized offshore gas infrastructure to conduct exploration activities in its north-western sector. In the last issue of the journal, an article was published about GPS-spoofing, which the Russian military men resort to in a number of the Black Sea coastal areas, posing risks to naval and air navigation. Now, it is worth revisiting the subject of new forms of increasing Russian activity, but in the broader context of its further creeping Black Sea expansion.

The Black Sea Geodynamics

Three Black Sea countries are members of NATO - Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. Their coast is 2,310 km, or 68% of the total length of the coastline of 3400 km. However, this figure does not suggest that NATO dominates or controls the Black Sea. The realities are completely different.

Having occupied and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Russia has obtained a dominant geopolitical position in the Azov-Black Sea region. Crimea with Sevastopol, located almost in the center of the sea, is the most important zone of control of the regional space after the Black Sea straits, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. To 333

km of its Black Sea coast (Taman-Adler), which is less than 10%, Russia has added 867 km of the Crimean peninsula. It is also necessary to take into account 210 km of the Georgian coast in the zone of Abkhazia, which is under the actual control of the Russian Federation. Thus, a total of 1,410 km of the Black Sea coast, or 41.5%, are under Russian control. Only Turkey has a greater percentage of the total length of the coastline - 50%, which moreover de facto controls the main connection of the Black Sea with the Mediterranean and World Ocean across the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

Against the background of internal Turkish evolution away from the democratic model of development, the Kurdish issue, as well as external problems related to Syria, Iraq, the Middle East as a whole, the Eastern Mediterranean with the development of offshore gas fields in the region, cooling-down in relationships with the US, Erdogan and Putin regimes are in dynamic rapprochement process. And it is not just that Turkey, despite US warnings, has purchased Russian S-400 air defense systems or is considering a possibility of buying Su-35 and Su-57 fighter jets. Russian-Turkish relations are much deeper and are based on long-term and prospective energy and infrastructure cooperation, an algorithm of which was set by the Putin's Russia: export traffic of oil and petroleum products from Russian ports to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the Blue Stream and TurkStream gas pipelines, Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant. Thus, in fact, the Black Sea is dominated by an informal Russian-Turkish tandem of two autocratic regimes. The Montreux Convention (The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits) of 1936, with its restrictions on the presence in the Black

³ The article is prepared in the framework of the Project “Raising of awareness on NATO among the communities in the East and South of Ukraine,” which is implemented by the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI from June 1, 2019 till March 15, 2020 under the support of the British Embassy in Ukraine.

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Sea of the navies of the non-Black Sea states, also contributes to the Moscow's and Ankara's interests, but is of concern to Tbilisi, Kyiv and Bucharest, who feel unprotected against Russian aggression against neighbors - Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

In the Russian-Turkish tandem, Russia plays a leading role, setting the tone for bilateral relations and influencing Turkey's relations with the US and NATO. Another NATO member, Bulgaria, has actually taken a strike-breaker stance to the Alliance and is loyal to Russia. In 2016, the Bulgarian veto effectively prevented the creation of a NATO flotilla in the Black Sea, which automatically strengthened Russian dominance. The second line of the TurkStream pipeline to Central Europe through Bulgaria has effectively become a bribe to Sofia for its loyalty to Moscow, which automatically increases Russian dominance and weakens NATO's position in the region. Thus, the geopolitical dynamics of change within the Black Sea region in recent years is not in favor of NATO and partner countries - Ukraine and Georgia. Through geopolitically motivated energy corrupt projects, Russia has effectively neutralized two NATO members - Turkey and Bulgaria.

Provocations in the Course of Sea Breeze-2019

The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Gen Joseph Dunford, summarizing deliberations from the September 15 NATO military committee's meeting in Slovenia, stated: "Russia is a competitor, and the NATO advantage over a resurgent Russia has eroded." [1] A striking illustration of the US General's thesis is the situation in the region of the Black Sea, where not only the advantage of NATO has declined, but Russia's advantage has occurred.

In July-August 2019, Russia imposed an unprecedented number of restrictions on the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, an indicator of its far-reaching intentions to single-handedly control regional space. But before that, a bold and demonstrative step was taken during the traditional Sea Breeze-2019 multinational exercises, held July 1-12, in the north-western sector of the Black Sea. Before the exercises, Russia had closed an area of 8 thousand square km (see Fig. 1) and sent a vessels group there for maneuvers [2]. The Russian Defence Ministry called the actions of its ships as "a control over NATO ships" [3]. The Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation engaged for this purpose ten ships and vessels, in particular, Orekhovo-Zuevo, Mirage, Ivanovets, Naberezhnye Chelny and R-60 rocket boats, Azov and Caesar Kunikov large amphibious ships

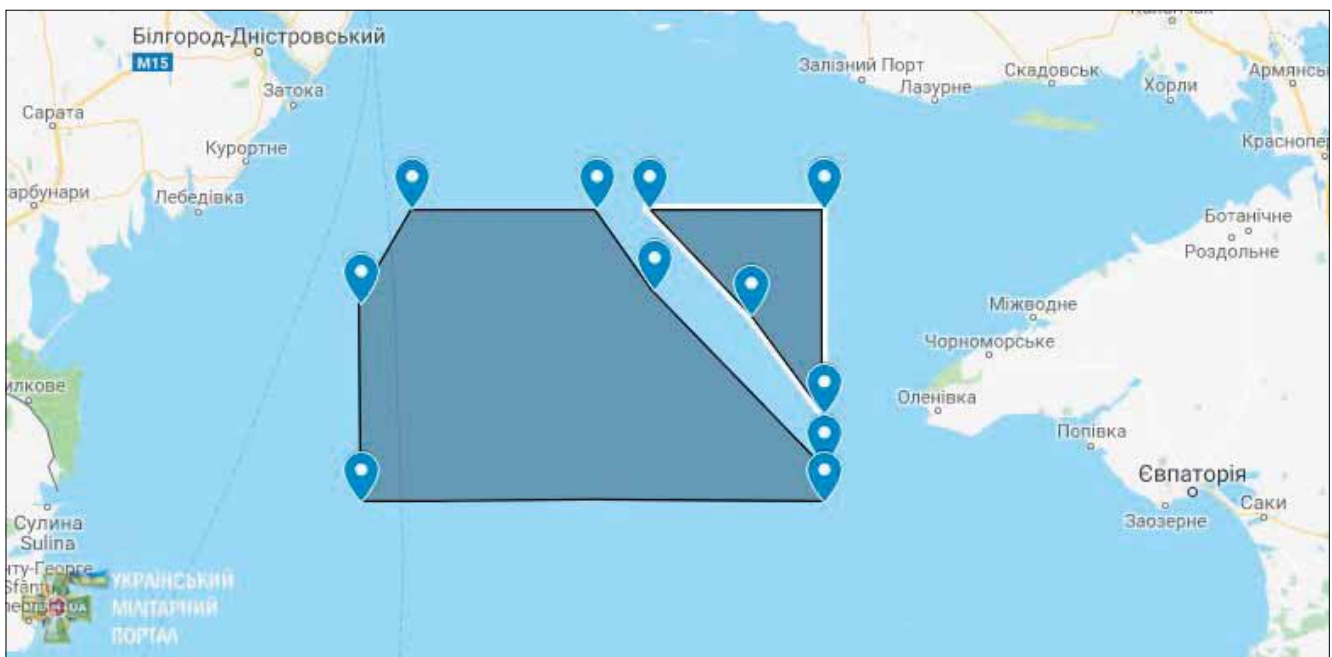


Fig. 1. Map of Sea Breeze-2019 exercises taking into account the unilateral "cutting" by the Russian Federation
Source: <https://censor.net.ua/ua/n3135236>

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On July 10, Smetlivy Kashin-class guided missile destroyer of the Russian Black Sea Fleet entered the closed area for navigation, where firing within the Sea Breeze-2019 exercises took place. According to the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, despite the coastal warnings for seafarers about the closure of the

area for conducting international exercises, Smetlivy provoked a dangerous accident, while entering the closed area for navigation, where maritime artillery firing of the naval group of the international coalition took place (see. Fig. 2). [4]

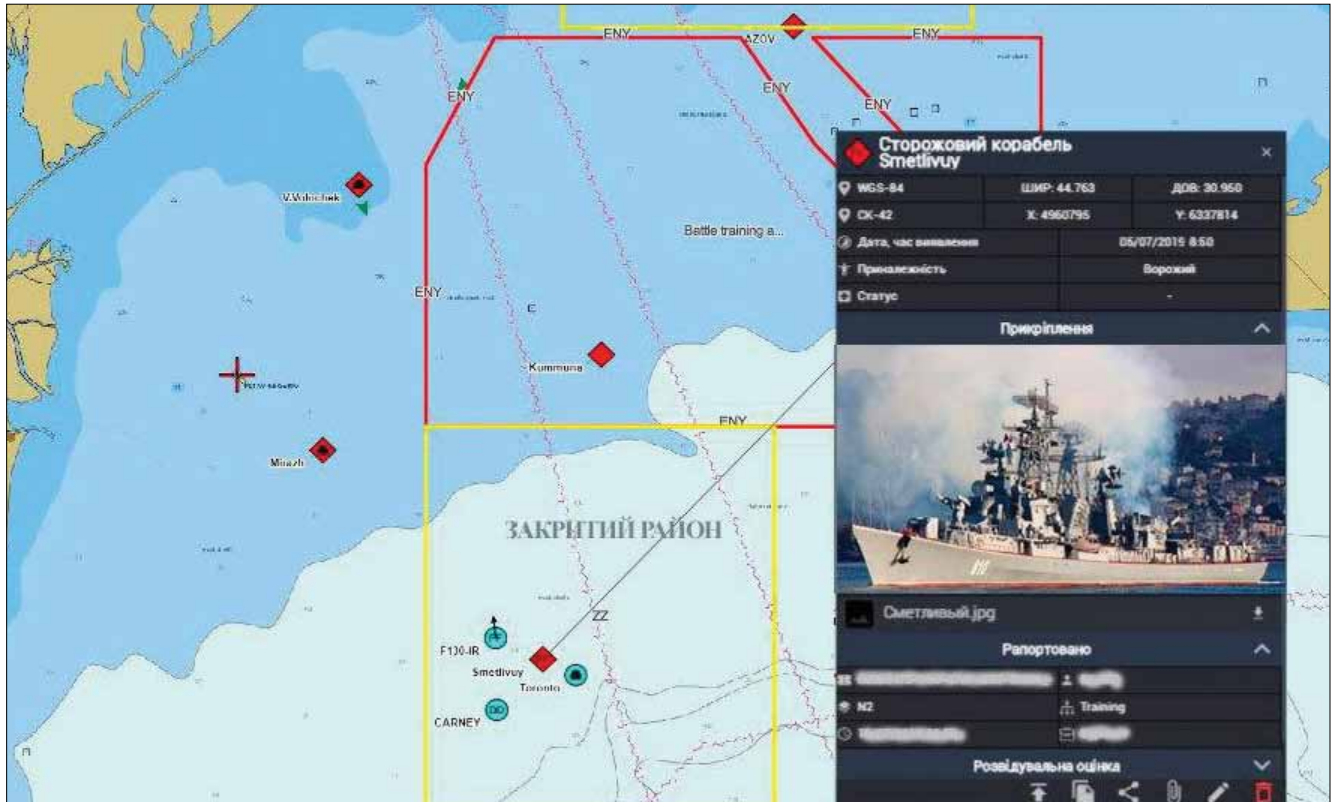


Fig. 2. Map of the Russian Smetlivy guided missile destroyer penetration in the closed area of marine artillery firing during Sea Breeze-2019 exercises

Source: <https://www.unian.ua/war/10612647-korabel-zayshov-u-zakritu-zonu-navchan-u-zsu-povidomili-pro-chergovu-provokaciyu-rf-u-chornomu-mori.html>

Thus, Russia resorted to demonstrative and provocative actions to show who was a master of the Black Sea waters. It practically succeeded, because the Sea Breeze-2019 maneuver was territorially replaced, taking into account the restrictions imposed by Russia.

Control Through Restrictions

After the episode with Smetlivy, new demonstration actions came. Numerous restrictions

have been imposed on the Black Sea by the Russian side. As of the third decade of July 2019, a number of navigation warnings were simultaneously issued for areas where navigation was prohibited (restricted) or danger for sailing was declared. These areas accounted for more than 24% of the Black Sea water space and covered much of the recommended maritime routes in the exclusive maritime economic zones of Ukraine and the countries of the region (see Figs. 3 and 4).

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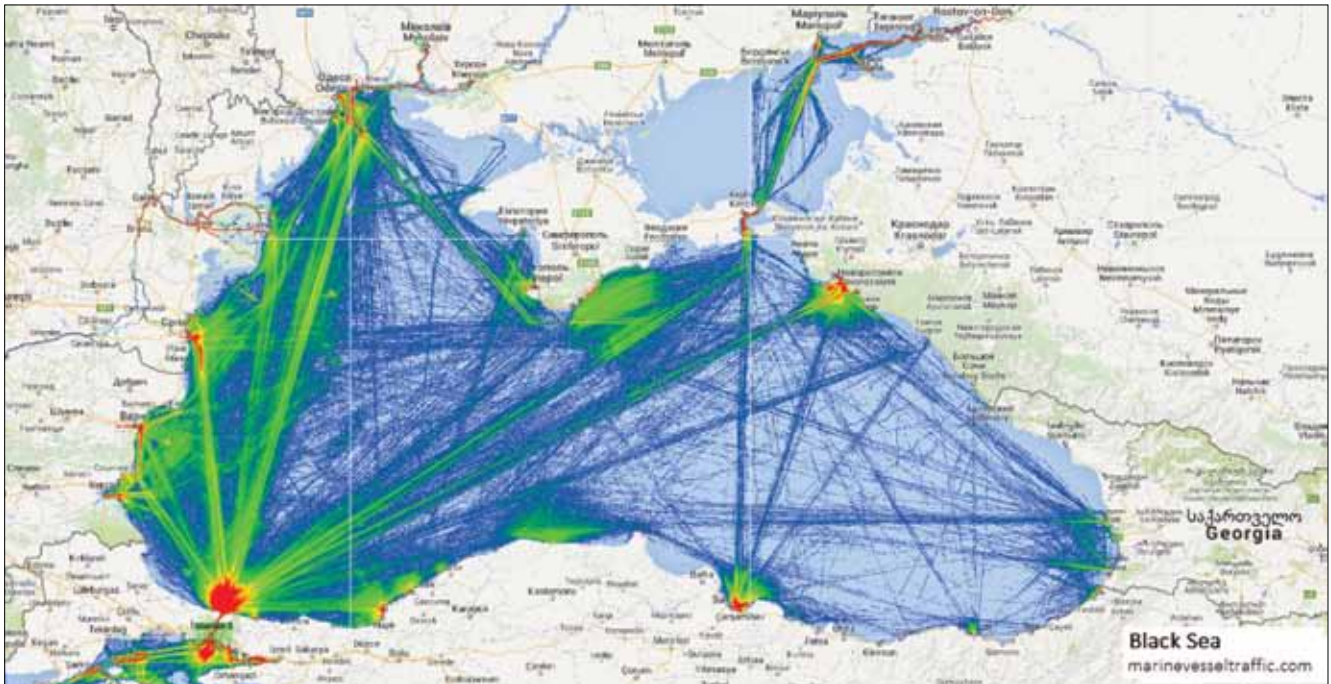


Fig. 3. Image of the traditional commercial traffic in the Black Sea
Source: <http://www.shiptraffic.net/2001/04/black-sea-ship-traffic.html>

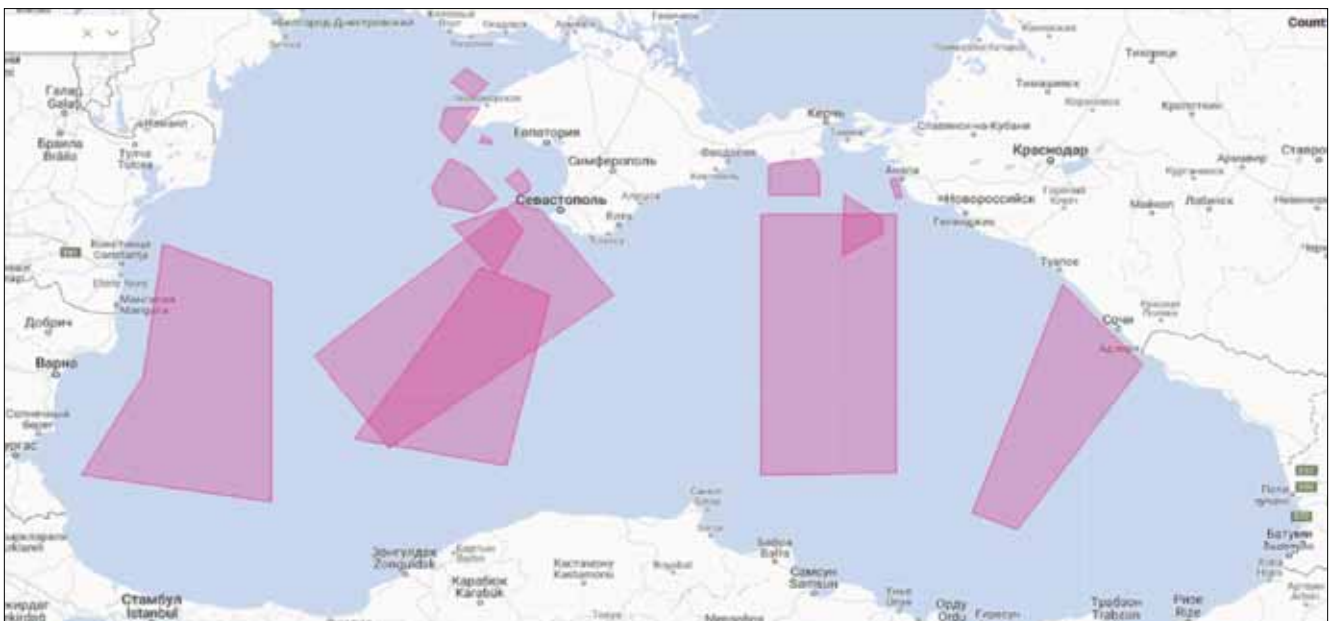


Fig. 4. Image of the Black Sea with limited navigation areas imposed by Russia as of July 26, 2019
Source : Ukrainian Navy.

Initially, the focus of these restrictions was not fully understood, although the Russian side explained them by carrying out artillery and rocket firing, as well as training in a number of areas of the Black Sea. During the monitoring of navigation in the area of responsibility of the command of the Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, cases of unjustified initiation of the closure of the Russian Federation or declaring dangerous areas

for navigation were detected under the pretext of conducting military measures. It was found that, contrary to the requirements of the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, SOLAS-74⁴, the planned activities were not published in advance on the official website

⁴ Rule 5 of Chapter 5 of Convention; of Chapter 4.2 of the Joint guidance on maritime safety information implemented under International Maritime Organization Resolution A705 (17).

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of the Navigation Area Coordinator, NAVAREA III⁵, which is the Hydrographic Institute of the Spanish Navy (Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina)⁶. Namely, on the basis of information of the Coordinator, the areas are declared dangerous for navigation. At the same time, the Coordinator's position regarding the proper implementation of the SOLAS-74 norms regarding the verification of the reliability of information from the Russian Federation, timeliness of its provision, availability of factual grounds for information dissemination, are of concern. For example, despite the 14 closed training and firing areas of the Black Sea Fleet (see Figure 4), there is information only about four of them, which were real events during the month (on the third decade of July – first and second decades of August) on the site of the press office of the Russian South Military District. However, these events were short-run:

- On July 20, the ships and coastal units of the Black Sea Fleet conducted training to combat unmanned aerial vehicles;
- On July 25, Dmitry Rogachev patrol ship carried out artillery firing in the sea area;
- On August 8, Muromets small anti-submarine ship carried out artillery firing at the air target;
- On August 9, combat units of the Black Sea Fleet missile complexes conducted training on missile strikes on naval targets [5].

Therefore, the rest of the announced warnings about artillery firing, rocket launches and fleet maneuvers in the designated closed areas were merely intentions for which no appropriate action was envisaged. Therefore, information was not always sent to the NAVAREA III Navigation Area Coordinator.

It can be stated that Russia abuses the obligation of a SOLAS-74 to report potential and actual danger at sea, in particular in areas outside of its area of responsibility or beyond its jurisdiction. This demonstrates the use of this duty as a hybrid influence tool aimed at both obstructing the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and demonstrating its ability to single-handedly set A2 / AD zones.

The consequence of the described actions could be creation of significant obstacles to commercial navigation, fishing, use of sovereign rights of the state in the exclusive maritime economic zone, which in turn negatively affects the economy of Ukraine and its rights as a maritime nation. Such actions could also demonstrate the effect of Russia's domination on regional space. The formula for establishing control over navigation restrictions is being worked out by Russia to act on the scenario of the blockade of the north-western sector of the Black Sea, in its actions against Ukraine and Romania at a certain D-Day.

The infrastructural basis of military expansion

To the abovementioned, one should add another interesting feature of Russian restrictions in the Black Sea. If you combine the map of the forbidden zones with the routes of passage of the Blue Stream and TurkStream offshore gas pipelines, they largely coincide (see Figure 5) [6].

⁵ NAVAREA III includes the waters of the Mediterranean, Black and Azov Seas: http://www.armada.mde.es/ihm/Aplicaciones/Navareas/Index_radioavisos.html

⁶ Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina, IHM: http://www.armada.mde.es/ihm/Aplicaciones/Navareas/Index_radioavisos.html

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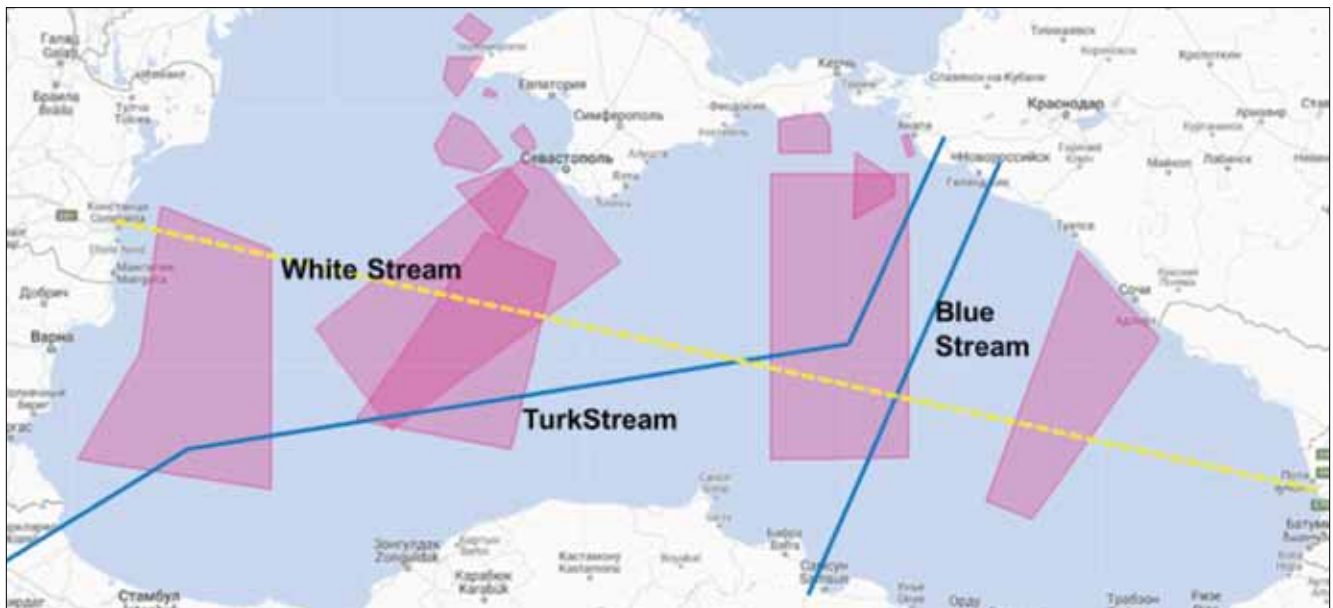


Figure 5. Map of coincidence of the closed Black Sea regions of Russia by the International Order 0817/2019 with the routes of existing and perspective gas pipelines.

The route of a potential White Stream project by which Caspian gas could enter the EU market via the Black Sea and Romania, should also be added. The project is still hypothetical, although it has

been endorsed by the European Commission as a project of common interest, but has lately been updated as a part of the intercontinental route of Turkmen gas to the EU market (see Figure

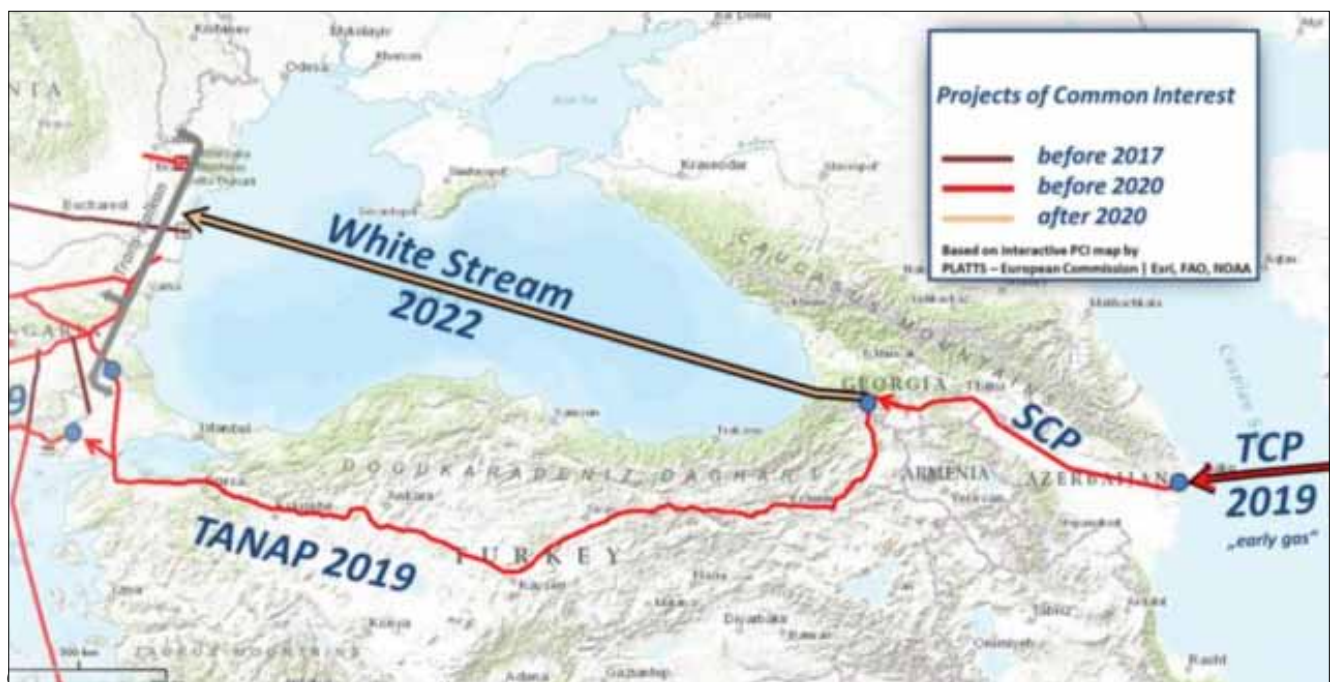


Fig. 6. Scheme of the hypothetical White Stream route in the Black Sea
Source: <http://financebooks2018.com/economy/1235.html>

It should be noted that the original White Stream route had a different design - from the Georgian coast to Crimea through the shortest sea area (see Fig. 7) and the possibility to use Ukrainian gas transmission system with the prospect of its integration into the European gas market. But after Romania joined the EU in 2007 and Russia's braking of Georgia's and Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO and the EU, the route was adjusted to enter the EU market via Romania directly [7].

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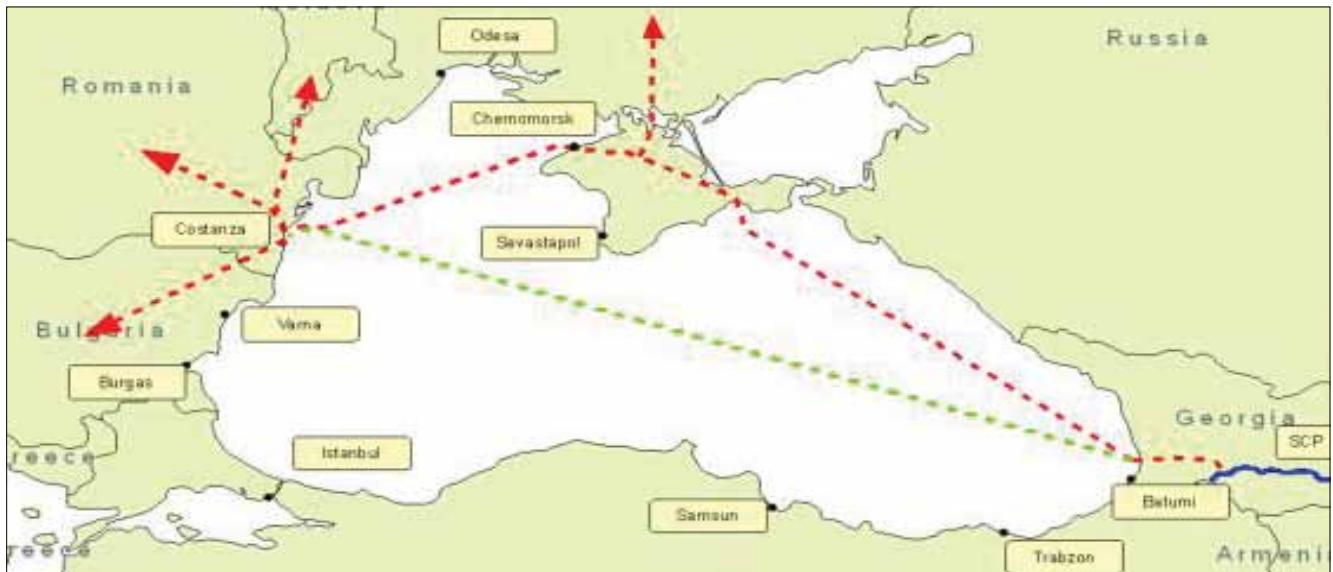


Fig. 7. Scheme of the initial design of the White Stream project in the Black Sea through Ukraine to the European Union
Source: <https://image1.slideserve.com/3576891/slide3-l.jpg>

This project is considered by Russia as competitive with its "streams" (first South Stream and later - TurkStream), which should bring to the European market competitive Russian gas volumes from Central Asia and the Eastern Caspian. Russia has been blocking the construction of White Stream for more than a decade, preventing the construction of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline in the Caspian Sea. After the occupation and annexation of Crimea, it improved its ability to block alternative projects in the Black Sea. The Crimean design of the gas pipeline became impossible.

All this means that Russia is preparing to transform the Black Sea into a zone of its own total control under the pretext of neutralizing threats to the strategically important for the Russian Federation, Turkey and Bulgaria energy infrastructure and preventing the implementation of competitive projects.

And this is not an idea of today. In Russia, this is being done systematically and consistently, combining military and energy strategies. As an example, we recall an article dated from more than 20 years from the Independent Military Observation Dec. 10, 1999, with the eloquent title "Fleet protecting the Blue Stream" («Флот на страже «Голубого потока»). In particular, it said that at a meeting of the Security Council

of the Russian Federation, which took place on November 23, 1999, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin noted that "Russia is being squeezed out of the oceans" and pointed to "deterioration of the Russian Navy's position on the Black Sea and Baltic directions" [8]. The article also states that "the US Navy is increasingly striving to master the Black Sea Theater of War." Since Russia has begun construction of the Blue Stream gas pipeline to Turkey, it is necessary to take care of its security, as it can also be influenced by external forces, including international terrorists. The author of the article concluded at the time: only the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation, which needs to be strengthened, can ensure the safety of the underwater gas pipeline.

Factor of Alexandroupolis

Since the beginning of the 2000s, Moscow has not been wasting time both in terms of increasing its resources and in strengthening its economic and political influence in the countries of the Black Sea region. Among the main tasks of the Black Sea Fleet, formulated by the Russian Ministry of Defense, are not only traditional like protection of the exclusive maritime economic zone, ensuring the safety of navigation, but also the execution of foreign policy actions of the Russian government in economically important areas of the World Ocean.

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As a result of Russia's systematic efforts, Moscow now makes the United States and NATO feel that it can not only control them but also squeeze them out of the Black Sea, which it already considers as its lake. But the biggest achievement in Russia is the neutralization of two US allies in NATO - Turkey and Bulgaria - through joint energy projects. It is practically a blurring technology, a NATO erosion by Russian efforts, both from the outside and from within the individual Allies.

The Kremlin's actions described above continue to examine the response of NATO and, above all, the United States to restricting freedom of navigation in the Azov-Black Sea basin. After all, the act of aggression against the Ukrainian vessels group in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait on November 25, 2018 did not lead to any serious consequences for Russia. Moreover, it ignored the verdict of the United Nations International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on the return of captured seamen and ships to Ukraine. And it was tolerated. Therefore, the Kremlin believes that it is possible and necessary to move on. At least in Putin's logic, they are demonstrating the US and NATO as the host of the Black Sea, and at the very least they will be able to finally "recruit" Turkey and Bulgaria into Russia's allies in the region.

Under the pretext of protecting critical infrastructure in the Black Sea, the threats to which have been greatly exaggerated, as there has been no incident in the 17 years of the Blue Stream's operation, Russia is stepping up its capabilities. At a conceptual level, the need to strengthen protection was identified in a new document, "Doctrine of Energy Security of the Russian Federation", adopted by decree of the President of the Russian Federation on May 13, 2019. Among other things, the Doctrine recognizes the military and political threats to energy security, for instance a sharp exacerbation of interstate relations and the creation of conditions for the use of military force [9]. In this context, the September hysteria of the Russian propagandist media about the threat, posed by the US to the TurkStream and other energy communications, if the Greek port of Alexandroupolis become American after

the privatization, as the US would deploy its military base there to fight against Russia, was not accidental. [10]

According to Russian estimates, this will allow the United States to control maritime traffic through the Dardanelles strait to / from the Black Sea, which means at any time the opportunity to interrupt the "Syrian express" and limit the capabilities of the Russian Naval Task Force in the Mediterranean (actually the former 5th Navy Squadron, which ceased to exist after the collapse of the USSR, has been revived since 2013). "Having mastered Alexandroupolis, the US wants to put under control the Dardanelles to lock Russia in the Black Sea," "with the acquisition of this port, NATO and the US Armed Forces can break into the Balkans within hours and easily stop Russia's trade through the Black Sea with the rest of the world, blocking the Dardanelles," – to such conclusions came the Russian Fund for Strategic Culture after statements by the current US Ambassador to Greece and former US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey R. Pyatt on American interest in the Greek port, after visiting Alexandroupolis together with Defence Minister of Greece Nikos Panagiotopoulos on 13 September, as was stated in the Greek newspaper interview Thraki.Net [11, 12].

It is obvious that the ambassador's emphasis on the importance of Alexandroupolis amid privatization by investors from the Russian Federation and China of two major Greek ports (controlled by the Russians port in Thessaloniki and port of Piraeus controlled by the Chinese) could only provoke a reaction in Russia. Geoffrey Pyatt points to the critical geopolitical importance of Alexandroupolis as a gateway to the Black Sea and the Balkan region, the importance of the port as a link to European energy security, regional stability and economic growth [13]. It is important to note that, in addition to the existing Aegean LNG terminal, a floating mobile LNG reception facility (FSRU) from the United States should be available in Alexandroupolis. According to experts, US LNG and existing gas infrastructure open a window of opportunity for Southeastern Europe to use LNG

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and transport it in regasified form through the Trans-Balkan Gas Pipeline. The latter connects Greece, Turkey with Ukraine and has been the main artery for gas supplied from Russia to Bul-

garia, Greece, Northern Macedonia and Turkey via Ukraine, Moldova and Romania for decades and will soon be emptied after Russia's launch of the TurkStream (see Fig. 8) [14].

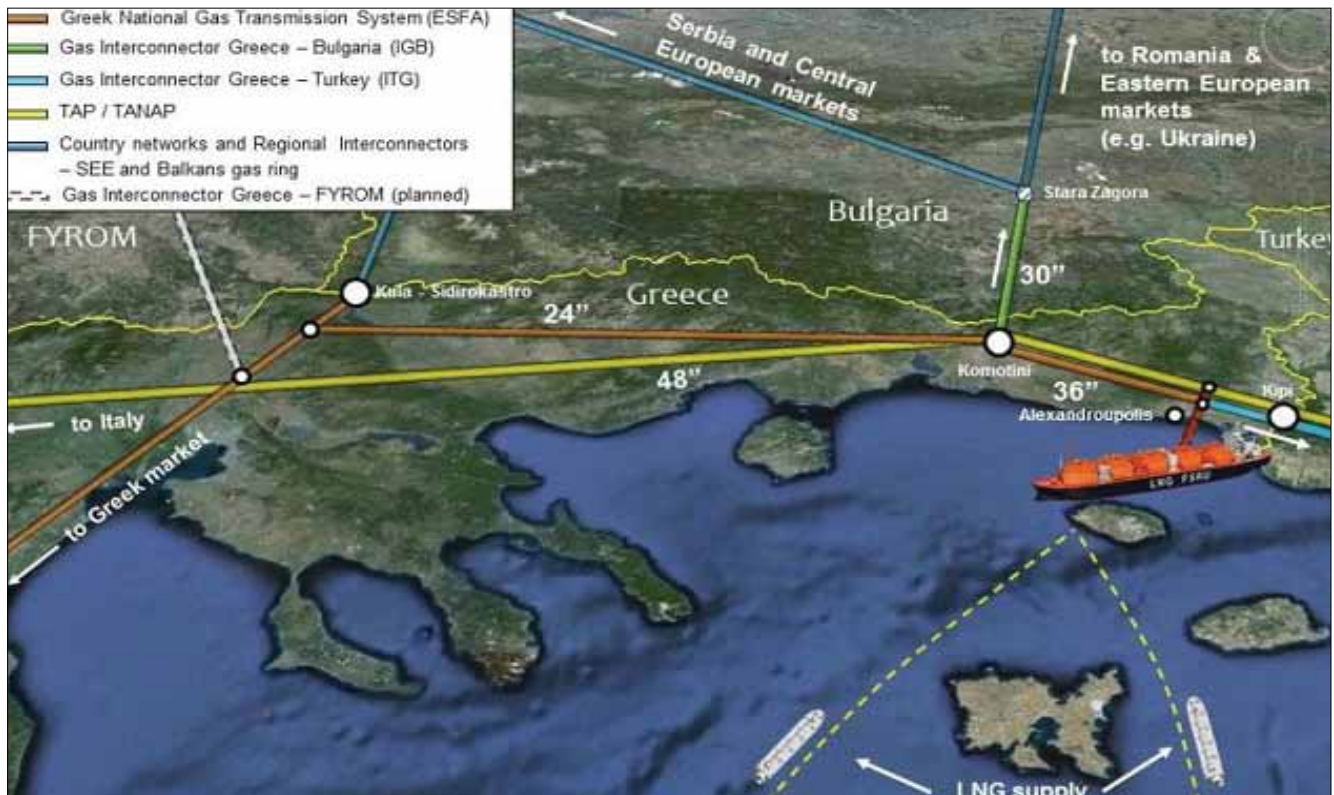


Fig. 8. Map of Aegean gas crossroad

Source: <http://www.gastrade.gr/en/the-company/news-press-releases/gastrade-launches-a-market-test-for-the-alexandroupolis-lng-terminal.aspx>

Projection to the Baltics

It is noteworthy, that to ensure the protection of critical energy and transport infrastructure in the Black Sea the Russians engaged not only the Black Sea Fleet, but also the Federal Guard Service of the National Guard (Rosgvardia). Thus, on June 26, 2019, a special meeting of representatives of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, ministries and agencies was held under the leadership of V. Zolotov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Troops of the Russian Guard. The meeting was devoted to the issue of ensuring the safety of the bridge over the Kerch Strait, as well as the energy bridge and the

gas pipeline at the bottom of the Strait, which were laid from the Krasnodar Region to the occupied Crimea. It was determined that by the end of this year, all legislative issues should be resolved in order to "give Rosgvardia all the necessary powers." "There must be a firm belief that no craft, no unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), no swimmer or saboteur will be able to pass through the waters ..." - the meeting said, according to media reports [15]. Russia already has an excessive concentration of forces and resources not only in the Kerch Strait, but in general in the Azov-Black Sea basin. Force protection by the various Russian agencies in the area occupied by the Russian Kerch Strait is demonstrated in the media (see Figure 9).

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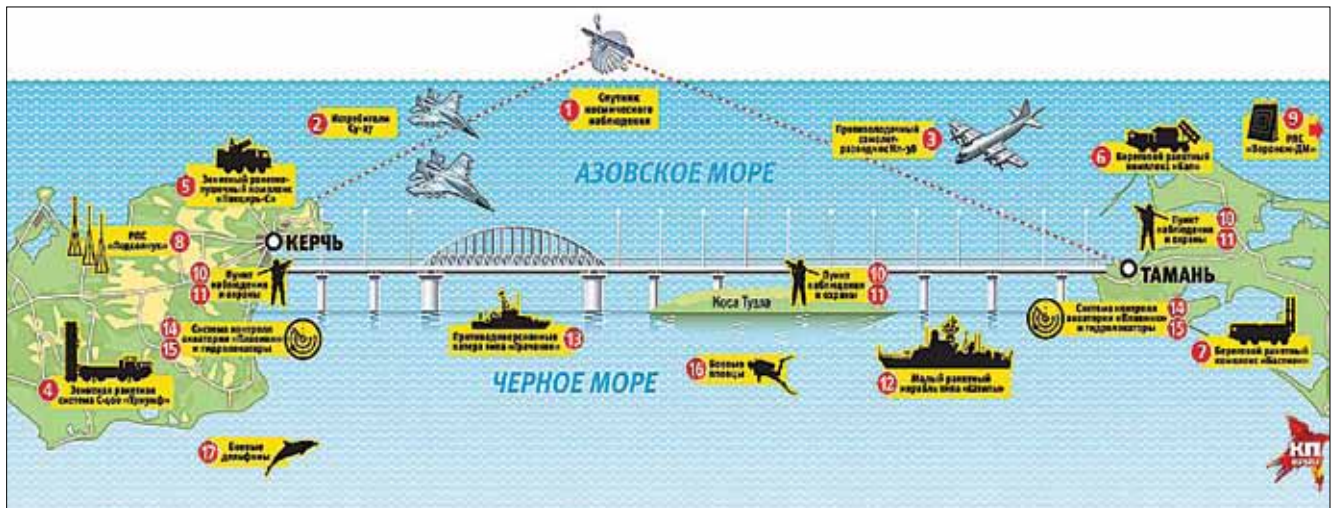


Fig. 9. Map of the Russian forces and facilities for security and defense of the Kerch Strait

Source: <https://www.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26831.5/3871553/>

That is, Russian security agencies are complementary in protecting critical energy and transport infrastructure, which is understandable. Obviously, this is related to the possibility of obtaining additional budget financing, but not only. Practically, this is a legal way in Moscow, a way to exert force expansion in the region under the pretext of protecting critical infrastructure “on the outskirts”.

And now we need to make a projection on the Baltic Sea, where the Nord Stream 1 is already built and another line is under construction. Poland wants to lay an alternative – the Baltic Pipe for Norwegian gas there. Unlike the White Stream in the Black Sea, the Nord Stream 2 project is quite realistic. In the Baltic Sea, Russia will follow the same pattern as in the Black Sea, under the pretext of protecting four pipelines of strategic importance for Russia and Germany. Putin's gas and cash flows have already neutralized Germany as a NATO member state. What happens next, when the Nord Stream 2 is completed, is not hard to imagine.

Gradually, Russia is stepping up the Baltic Fleet as part of an appropriate rearmament program by 2020. The Russian media with pathos recently noted that the Baltic Fleet continues to receive new warships and security vessels. They say that

if there were only 20 new units in the period from 2000 to 2010, then in 2010–2019 – 56 units appeared, 17 of which were combat ones. Altogether, as of May 1, 2019, Baltflot has 76 warships, boats and submarines, as well as 164 auxiliary vessels [16]. Russian military media outlets point to the absence of allies in the Baltic Sea and the superiority of NATO – a total of 93 combat ships of NATO member states are present in the Baltic Sea. They also point out that “neutral” Sweden and Finland, which are unfriendly to Russia and are increasingly involved into NATO, have also serious forces – a total of 73 ships. Thus, by this logic, Russia is more than twice weaker in the Baltic Sea than the “united” naval forces of the other states. Further logic of the Russians is easy to calculate. Russia needs to strengthen its naval presence given the existence of strategically important for Russia and Germany gas and transport infrastructure in the form of four lines of both Nord Streams. Of course, Russia will not be able to apply the NATO squeezing out template as it does in the Black Sea, as the south of the Baltic Sea is the coast of NATO member states. It is logical to conclude the need for asymmetric build-up of the forces and means of the fleet – at the expense of “all kinds of combat robots: boats, submarines, self-propelled mines and so on.” [17]

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Conclusions

Russia's creeping expansion in the Black Sea and reinforcement in the Baltic Sea should not be left without proper NATO response. Ukraine should draw attention of the competent international institutions to Russia's abuse of the norms of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, SOLAS-74.

We should have no false expectation about the Kremlin's further intentions and actions to squeeze NATO wherever possible. Therefore, while there is time, Russia should be stopped in the Baltic and the Black Seas. By stopping Nord Stream 2 and the second line of the TurkStream due to sanctions against contracting companies, the US will be able to avert a negative scenario of transforming the Baltic and Black Seas into domination areas of Russia, if there is enough political will in Washington and London. Obviously, the US has found, in a privatization deal with the port of Alexandroupolis, an adequate response to Russia's actions in Venezuela, which Moscow is trying to turn into a foothold in the American "soft subaltern" by analogy with Cuba during the Cold War.

With its permanent presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, the United States will create an umbrella for multilateral cooperation in implementation of Israel-initiated natural gas production and export projects in cooperation with Cyprus for the Leviathan and Afrodite gas fields; in cooperation with Greece and Italy - for the construction of the East Med gas pipeline to export gas to the EU, as well as for the supply of LNG from the United States for diversification of energy supplies to the Black Sea and Balkan countries. The United States are well aware that Russia will act to neutralize projects that bring competitive gas streams to the European market, and therefore act ahead.

Washington does not seem to lack political will, despite Trump's political pirouettes. If Alexandroupolis becomes the base of the US Armed Forces, including the Navy, Russia will not be able to block the Ukrainian ports in the Azov and Black Seas and the Kerch Strait without risking the blockade of its maritime trade and "Syrian express" from the Black Sea ports. The north-eastern Aegean sector is also convenient for operating cruise missiles for targets in the Black Sea area without entering it.

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The Black-Sea Problem of the North Atlantic Alliance⁷

It is no longer news that the occupied Crimea has been transformed into a huge military base of the Russian Federation. Its presence has changed the situation not only in the Black Sea region but also in the south-east flank of Europe and the Mediterranean [1]. It is therefore important to consider NATO's response in the naval sphere to Russia's expansion in the region.

In early May 2016, at the Balkan Countries Chiefs of Defense Conference, the Turkish president said: *"We should enhance our coordination and cooperation in the Black Sea. We hope for concrete results from the NATO summit in Warsaw on July 8, 9... The Black Sea should be turned into the sea of stability. I told the NATO Secretary General that you are absent in the Black Sea and that is why it has nearly become a Russian lake. We should perform our duty as we are the countries with access to the Black Sea. If we do not take action, history will not forgive us"*. That is, three years ago, when Turkey was in a state of cold war with the Russian Federation, President Erdogan first publicly formulated the key meaning of the situation in the Black Sea, which was due to the occupation of Crimea.

In 2016–2019, the Black Sea not only remains "almost a Russian lake", but this "lake" is getting bigger.

The failure of the idea of the NATO Black Sea Fleet

On 8-9 July 2016, a decision was expected at the NATO summit in Warsaw to enhance the Alliance's Black Sea naval capabilities. This was due

to Romania's initiative to create a NATO Allied Fleet in the Black Sea. It appeared after the launch of the AEGIS Ashore SM-3 interceptor missiles at the US Air Force in Devesel, southern Romania, at the end of 2015, 35 km from the Bulgarian border. In Romania, they realized: the Russian troops in the occupied Crimea were not only equipped with missiles capable to reach any target in Romania, but the country also became reachable for the new Russian Black Sea Fleet (RF BSF) missile vessels.

However, due to the refusal of Bulgaria, which prime minister said he wanted to see cruise ships near the Bulgarian coast, not military frigates, this had not happened.

Tandem Turkey-Russia and NATO

Just a few days after the statement by President Erdogan, mentioned above, a coup attempt took place in Turkey at night of July 15-16, 2016. Further, the foreign policy of a key Black-Sea country for NATO began to change rapidly. Its marker was the signing of an agreement with the Russian Federation on the Turkish Stream offshore gas pipeline on October 10, 2016. As per today, the first branch of this pipeline has already been built and the second will pass through the territory of another NATO Black Sea country, Bulgaria.

The acute crisis between Turkey and Brussels, which is still developing today, could not but raise questions in 2016 about the reliability of Turkey as a NATO member. The events of 2019 regarding Turkey's acquisition of S-400 missiles from Russia have caused growing doubts about Ankara's credibility as an ally and have already led to open discussions about Turkey's prospects for NATO membership.

Crimean (Black Sea) A2/AD

During 2017, Russia replaced the Crimean S-300 missile systems, which appeared there immediately after the occupation, with the newest S-400. It

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was the final chord in the creation of the so-called A2/AD (anti-access and denial) area on the peninsula that is, the restricted access area, the access to which is associated with unacceptable losses.

The radiuses of Crimean A2/AD missiles, even without marine-based Kalibr missiles (2500 km range), cover the entire Black Sea, half of Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, the entire territory of Moldova and southern Ukraine. The number of new missile ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet together with Kalibr missiles has already reached 15, and during 2019-2020 it will exceed 20 units.

However, the "pumping" of Crimea with weapons does not stop. According to the Monitoring Group¹, it is the Southern Military District of the Russian Federation that will be the first to receive Su-57 fifth-generation jet fighters for the 3rd Aviation Regiment in Kuban or the 38th Aviation Regiment in Sevastopol. Also in 2019, the Russian Black Sea Fleet will receive another division of the SS-C-5 Stooze missile system in Crimea.

Occupation of the Ukrainian shelf

In the first days of occupation of Crimea in 2014, Russian Special Forces captured the offshore drilling platforms of the Ukrainian company Chornomornaftogaz not only near Crimea, but also at the Odeske field.

In five and a half years, all of these facilities have acquired new features - they are used as platforms for air, surface and underwater control stations. A round-the-clock protection of the annexed shelf is carried out by the Russian Black Sea Fleet's missile ships' brigade. The volume of illegally produced gas during the occupation years is about 10 billion cubic meters.

In the Karkinitsky Gulf of the Black Sea, on the line of the maritime administrative border between the Kherson region and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Russia extracts sea sand under the protection of the Russian Coast Guard ships. The production volumes average is 1 thousand tons per day.

Creation of production of the missile corvettes for the RF BSF in Crimea

During the occupation of Crimea, 13 defence enterprises of Ukraine were seized. All of them are

included in the defence system of the Russian Federation. More shipyard PO (Feodosia) and The Zaliv Shipbuilding yard (Kerch) built 9 corvettes with rockets Kalibr for the RF BSF. The number of cruise missiles in service with them will be 72 in one volley. That is, the ship stock of the Russian Black Sea Fleet will now be replenished not from Russian factories, but from the stocks of Crimean shipyards.

Occupied Crimea and the war in Syria

The occupied Crimea became the bridgehead of the Russian Federation in the Syrian war. As of August 1, 2019, out of 100 naval-based Kalibr cruise missiles used for targets in Syria, 56 rockets were owned by Russian Black Sea Fleet ships (44 missiles were fired by the corvettes of the Caspian Fleet).

Military equipment is supplied to the Syrian regime from Sevastopol and Novorossiysk on large amphibious assault ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and other Russian fleets, as well as on landing vessels of the Black Sea Fleet based in occupied Sevastopol. This is the so-called Syrian Express. The final destination is Tartous Port, a constantly expanding Russian naval base in Syria.

The number of Syrian Express runs only on warships (large landing ships, LLS) is as follows: 2013 - 30 runs; 2014 - 46; 2015 - 69; 2016 - 67; 2017 - 41; 2018 - 30 runs. After the occupation of Crimea, in 2015-2016, the number of runs of Russian Black Sea Fleet ships to Syria doubled.

The decrease in the number of runs on warships in 2017-2018 is explained by the creation in the Black Sea Fleet of the 205th detachment of vessels (former civilian vessels purchased by the Ministry of Defence). The detachment is based in occupied Sevastopol. In addition, the Black Sea Fleet uses about 10 leased dry cargo ships and ferries.

The capture of the Kerch Strait and aggression in the Sea of Azov

The new problem that arose in April-May 2018 is the so-called Azov crisis or the creation of obstacles to navigation in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov for ships transporting to the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk.

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The Monitoring Group's⁸ study makes it possible to draw the following conclusions [2]. The Azov Crisis also aims at training. A huge number of Russian sailors, Russian coastal defence ships and aviation have worked in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. The same forces captured military boats of the Ukrainian Navy in international waters near the Kerch Strait in November 2018. In 2018, the Russian Federation increased the grouping of ships in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Most of them are based in the occupied Crimea (Kerch and Sevastopol).

The main export routes of Ukraine are located not in the Sea of Azov, but in the Black Sea - from the Bosphorus to Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson. This "sea road" passes by offshore gas platforms at the Odeske field seized by Russia. Possible detentions of vessels on the way to/from Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kherson ports in the future may well be "justified" by the safety of drilling platforms in the Odeske field.

Creeping de facto annexation of the Black Sea basin

On July 1-12, 2019, during the Sea Breeze-2019 exercise, it was revealed that Russia had blocked one of the training areas in the Black Sea from the Ukrainian Zmiinyi Island near the Odesa coast to Tarkhankut Cape in Crimea. This was done through the international warning on the dangers of navigation spread by Russia.

Starting from July 24, 2019, the Russian Federation had blocked five regions in the Black Sea, including a significant area in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Bulgaria and Romania, and almost entirely the eastern Black Sea from Sochi to Turkey to obstruct Georgian-American Agile Spirit-2019 training.

The total area of the Black Sea areas covered by the Russian Navy in July 2019 alone is over 120,000 square km or more than 1/4 of the total area of the Black Sea. The purpose of these actions is to form a "habitual" perception that the entire Black Sea is a zone of influence of Russia. This is Russia's strategy for displacing NATO from the Black Sea basin.

⁸ A joint monitoring group of The Black-Sea News online edition and the Institute of the Black-Sea Strategic studies concerning the international sanctions regarding RF

NATO's Navy Black-Sea History

The peak of NATO's interest in the Black Sea came in 1992-1998, or after the collapse of the USSR when six new independent states emerged in the region and socialist regimes ceased to exist in Romania and Bulgaria.

In 1995-1998, the number of Navy ships calling the Black Sea annually ranged from 30 to 40 units. The period 2009-2013, after the NATO Bucharest Summit, which effectively rejected Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic perspective, can be called the years of NATO's demonstrative loss of interest in the Black Sea. The number of warships' visits in 2011 and 2013, prior to the occupation of Crimea, has been at a historic low since 1991 - eight visits. This was the lowest number since the collapse of the USSR.

During the decisive phase of the special operation on the occupation of Crimea using ships of the Russian Navy (February 20 - March 7, 2014), there were no combat-ready non-Black-Sea NATO countries' ships in the Black Sea. Before the beginning of the NATO countries' Navy regular patrolling of the Black Sea - March 7, 2014 - all administrative buildings, routes of entry were blocked, all Navy deployments and other military garrisons were seized by Russian troops in Crimea, thousands of military ships were transferred to the peninsula as well as equipment, including coastal anti-ship missiles.

The absence of NATO warships in the Black Sea at that time was perceived in Russian military circles as a factor that facilitated the seizure of Crimea. In the military and intelligence circles, the US and NATO did not expect or consider a possible scenario of the Russian occupation of Crimea. This was confirmed by NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the time: *"It was a surprise to all of us. We considered Russians to be partners with whom we could work... We were really taken by these events by surprise, and I don't think we could have done more or done anything differently."*

Yet, in the face of Ukraine's loss of its Navy, NATO's presence in the Black Sea has become a deterrent factor to Russian aggression. This was especially important in 2014 and 2015 when the risks of the Russian Black Sea Fleet landing operation in the coastal regions of Ukraine were greatest.

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At the end of December 2017, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged that the NATO Navy had lost the necessary skills to fight at sea, and noted that the Alliance's readiness to face the challenges at sea had decreased: *"After the end of the Cold War, NATO reduced its capabilities at sea. We trained less and lost our skills."*

On January 17, 2018, Clive Johnstone, Commander of NATO Allied Maritime Command, made several important points: *"We are now experiencing a period of such offshore rivalry we haven't seen before. Russia is preparing itself for a period of intense challenges... In the field of intelligence, we see that Russians act more purposefully, aggressively, openly, and closer to our home than ever before, and we are a little nervous... We need to adjust to that as Russia begins to place its pieces on the chessboard - reconnaissance ships, warships, submarines. If we look at the exercises conducted by the Russian Federation over the past couple of months, one cannot but mention their ability to use considerable forces over long distances time and time again. As far as the Black Sea is concerned, the area is undergoing the greatest changes. We were amazed at the huge investment needed to hunt even one Kilo-class submarine... We started building our military capabilities in the Black Sea. We are beginning to better understand the situation there."*

NATO Naval Operations in the Black Sea in 2014–2018

Throughout 2014, NATO has not only demonstrated support for Ukraine in the Black Sea but also tested the war theatre. The NATO Navy reconnaissance ships spent a total of 150 days in the Black Sea in 2014. In total, NATO ships have entered the Black Sea 31 times, the highest number since 2000.

NATO's regular presence in the Black Sea, directly related to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, began on March 7, 2014, with the launch of the Truxtun Missile Destroyer (DDG 103). From that day until mid-November 2014, NATO warships had been in the Black Sea almost continuously. Starting from February 20, 2014 - the day when the Russian special operation on the Crimean occupation began - 247 days before the end of the year (or 78.4%) were "covered" by NATO ships.

In 2015, NATO Navy ships entered the Black Sea less frequently than in 2014, 21 times and, accordingly, spent less time there - 51.2% of the calendar year (187 days). In 2016, the number of visits decreased. The monitoring group recorded only 14 calls. Accordingly, they were in the Black Sea 32.8% of the year time or 120 days.

In 2017, the number of calls increased almost 1.5 times compared to 2016 - 20 visits that lasted 41% of the year, or 149 days. In 2018, the trend remained at 2017 levels - 20 visits, which lasted 45% of the year, or 164 days. In the first seven months of 2019, the number of visits by NATO ships to the Black Sea has started to increase again and has already exceeded the figure of 2018 and is 21 calls.

Naval trends and forecasts

The trend of 2016 in reducing the number of NATO ships in the Black Sea could not help but raise questions. The actions of the NATO Navy in the Black Sea in 2014-2016 clearly demonstrated caution and a desire not to exacerbate relations with the Russian Federation. So, in 2014, until March 2015, there was no call of any NATO Navy ships entering the Ukrainian naval base in Odesa. In 2015 and 2016, 80-90% of the port activities were carried out to the naval bases of the Black Sea NATO members Romania (Constanta) and Bulgaria (Varna, Burgas). In 2015-2016, they only came to Odesa five times.

An obvious reason is an expansion in 2015–2016 of the geography of active operations of the US Navy and other NATO countries in Europe. In response to the concerns of NATO's Baltic NATO member states, NATO's Baltic Sea BALTOPS exercises have been increased by the Russian aggression. In addition, Russia's direct intervention in the war in Syria, which began on September 30, 2015, required an increased Alliance presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Finally, since 2015, the Russian Federation has successfully applied the "stretching" tactics of US 6th Navy ships and permanent NATO naval groups between different theatres. The appearance in 2016 in the Kaliningrad region of two ships deployed from the Black Sea Fleet, with Kalibr cruise missiles, shore missile launches and Iskander systems' redeployments promoted the dispersion of NATO

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forces and the 6th US Navy between the Black, Mediterranean and Baltic Seas.

The NATO Navy in the Mediterranean region includes two permanent groups of frigates and two permanent groups of minesweepers. This grouping was formed before the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. It is sufficient for peacetime, and therefore faces the fact that its forces are not sufficient to balance the military threats from the Russian Federation from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The significant reduction in operations in the Black Sea was also likely the result of the off-season, when the US Navy and NATO tried to find an adequate response to the Russian Federation's actions but did not have increased military budgets.

To date, NATO has not yet found a final solution to the problem of maintaining the necessary level of deterrence of Russia in the Black Sea region, but the process of this search has accelerated. As a palliative, the deployment of a small number of US Army land forces is used in Romania and Bulgar-

ia, and in addition, the number of reconnaissance flights of US aircraft over the Black Sea increased dramatically in 2017–2019. The size of the Mediterranean group of NATO ships - SNMG2 - has almost doubled in 2019 (from four to 7-8 units).

Possible radical solution to the problem is the transfer of modern warships, which are in the reserve of the Navy of the NATO countries and are suitable for integration into the command and staff systems of the block, for the naval forces of Romania and Ukraine. Finally, the acceleration of Ukraine and Georgia NATO membership should be implemented.

In 2019, it is increasingly important how the Russian Federation will use the military capabilities it has created on the Crimean Peninsula. If this is adequately acknowledged in the world, then in 2019 there is a chance to see scenarios for blocking the threat due to sanctions and increasing NATO's naval presence in the Black Sea. This should be complemented by further acceleration of the Ukrainian armaments.

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Russian Armed Forces in the Black Sea: Scenarios for Action⁹

The invasion into Georgia and aggression against Ukraine show that the main threat to security in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov region is Moscow's policy. An assessment of this threat involves an analysis of the Kremlin's intentions and its military potential. In a number of cases, the strategic plans of the state are reflected not only in governmental declarations, doctrinal documents, but also in the specifics of military construction, including the deployment and capabilities of strike groups. They show which countries the state plans to wage war on, preparing for an attack or defence, which is the most likely direction of a major blow. Thus, the deployment of Soviet troops in the western districts in early June 1941 was very convenient for offensive operations, but completely unfit for defence. This was one of the reasons for the defeat of the Red Army in the first months of the war. The location of the Soviet Army's striking divisions in the Warsaw Pact countries reflected the Soviet plans in the short term to reach the English Channel and the Pyrenees.

Major groups of Russian troops in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov region

Russian troops in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov region are part of the Southern Military District (SMD). In 2013–2016, two motorized infantry and two aviation divisions, nine brigades and 22 regiments were formed in it [1]. Today it includes three armies; the 22nd Army Corps in Crimea; the 4th Air and Air Defence Forces Army; the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Fleet; the 7th Airborne Assault Division and 56th Airborne Assault Brigade; three brigades and a special purpose regiment; several district-level artillery and mis-

sile crews; numerous parts of the R&E intercept, communications, command, logistics and more. The Southern Military District personnel number in 2016 was at least 200 thousand people [2]. Comparing the number of military formations, which are parts of the South Military District, to the number of formations in the other military districts, its personnel number in 2018-2019, could be estimated at approximate level of 250 – 260 thousand people. Based on the standard armament of Russian troops, it can be estimated that in the forces of the Southern Military District there are 830-840 tanks, about 2300 armoured combat vehicles, 1100 artillery mounts of more than 100-mm calibre and MLRS, 275 combat aircraft and 117 attack helicopters (see Annex 1). Thus, the Southern Military District troops can be compared in terms of personnel with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but they have much more combat aircrafts, and prevails about 2-2.5 times in terms of numbers of the armies of the three states of the South Caucasus.

Until 2014, Russia claimed that the Southern Military District was intended primarily to suppress rebellions. However, regular armed forces are of little use in that case. Armoured vehicles against combat groups in remote areas (forests, mountains) are practically useless. In the absence of high-precision aviation ammunition, insurgents can be hit by Russian aviation either accidentally or in the event of massive carpet-type bombing, accompanied by massive casualties among civilians. Fighting guerrilla groups in the North Caucasus is mostly the task of the National Guard. From the regular troops those that could suppress them are the special forces, air landing troops, and the 34th Motorized (Mountain) Brigade of the 49th Army, staffed with trained climbers. Accordingly, the main task of Southern Military District (SMD) is the operation against the Black Sea states. For this purpose, four land forces armies have been set up in the SMD. The Black Sea Fleet, combat aviation, air landing troops and special forces units will act in close coordination with them.

⁹ The publication was prepared within the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support from the Black Sea Trust Fund, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust Fund or its partners.

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The first grouping is directed against Ukraine. It includes the 8th Army, the formation of which began in 2017 and the main striking forces of which include: the 150th Rifle Division deployed in Rostov region; the 20th Motorized Rifle Brigade stationed in Volhohrad. In the operational control of the 8th Army there is a large group located in the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It consists of approximately two-thirds of members of local terrorist gangs and one-third of Russian military personnel and is under the command of Russian officers. There are about 30,000 people in this group, from 400 to 600 tanks, about the same number of armoured combat vehicles, up to 200 MRL (multiple rocket launcher), etc. [3]. It is manned by Russian military personnel with the responsibility of the 12th command of the SMD reserve forces. Judging by armaments, this grouping is equivalent to 1.5–2 full-fledged tank divisions with numerous reinforcement and supply units.

The second group is represented by the forces of the 58th Army, deployed in the eastern part of the North Caucasus region. Its main task is the war against Georgia and Azerbaijan, but individual units can be used as second-tier forces in the war against Ukraine. This is the most powerful grouping of SMD. It consists of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, three Motorized Rifle Divisions, two Missile and one Artillery Brigades. In addition, troops of two military bases will participate as forces of the first tier in the war against Georgia: the 7th base stationed in Abkhazia and the 4th base stationed in South Osetia. Each of them is in fact a reinforced motorized brigade. In total, they number 8-10 thousand personnel, about 80 tanks, 240 armored combat vehicles, about 100 large-calibre artillery units and MRL.

The 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade stationed in Buinaksk in Dagestan has been appointed for operations against Azerbaijan, which in 2018 began to be transformed into a motorized rifle division. The 102nd military base located in Armenia will also participate in the war with Azerbaijan and Turkey. It consists of three motorized rifles, artillery and anti-missile regiments, a separate tank battalion, as well as an aviation group of 18 MiG-29 multi-purpose fighter jets and 13 Mi-24 attack helicopters [5]. The 19th Motorized Rifle Brigade, located in Vladikavkaz, is being transformed into another division [6]. In other words, Russia is stepping up

a group whose priority is to invade Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The third group includes the 49th Army deployed in the western part of the Northern Caucasus. It includes the 205th and 34th Motorized Rifles, 1st Missile and 227th Artillery Brigades, supply and reinforcement units. Most likely, these units are second-tier forces in the wars against both Ukraine and the South Caucasus.

The fourth group stationed on the occupied Crimean peninsula plays an increasingly significant role. Its main strike force is aviation units based at Kacha, Saky, Gvardiyske and Belbek airfields. Five S-400 missile system and the same number of S-300 missile system have been deployed in Crimea [7]. The 810th Brigade and a separate Marine Corps Battalion, the 126th Coast Defence Brigade, the 97th Airborne Assault Regiment, created and included in the 7th Airborne Division, were stationed there [8]. On the peninsula there are about 32 thousand Russian troops [9], 113 combat aircrafts, about 60 attack helicopters, Bal coastal missile complexes and SS-C-5 Stooze [10], operational-tactical missiles Iskander [11]. In March 2019, a squadron of Tu-22M3 bombers capable of delivering strikes, including nuclear ones, were deployed to Crimea across Europe and the southern Mediterranean [12]. Since 2014, modern ships have been introduced into the Russian Black Sea Fleet: six submarines of the improved Kilo class; three frigates of the Admiral Hrihorovich class; two corvettes, armed with 64 Kalibr launchers, with a range of up to 2500 km.

Military and political tasks of the SMD

The combat potential of the SMD clearly exceeds what is necessary to defend the Russian territory. Their staff and location indicate that they are intended for:

- conducting several options of offensives against Ukraine, ranging from the local armed conflict to the great war that covers the eastern part of the country;
- armed aggression against Georgia;
- preventing potential NATO and Ukraine support from NATO member states in the event of Russian aggression against these countries;

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- fighting against NATO member states in the Black Sea in the event of a war with the North Atlantic Alliance that may begin in the Baltic Sea region.

War with Ukraine is undoubtedly the main task of the SMD. It is often said that such a war is unrealistic, because it threatens a sharp increase in Western sanctions, and in a case of occupation of the Ukrainian territory there will be a guerrilla movement, which counteraction will require not less, and perhaps more, armed forces and will cause great losses. This is correct, but Moscow's goal in the war with Ukraine may be different: with lightning offensives to defeat Ukrainian troops and then dictate the terms of the ceasefire to Kyiv, and confront the West with a fait accompli. These conditions may include, in particular, the transition of the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine to the Russian protectorate.

Such a conflict can start with a local armed conflict near the demarcation line in the Donbas, in the Sea of Azov or Northern Tavrida and quickly, within 2-3 days, turn into a great war covering the territory of Ukraine to the east of the Dnipro, as well as the Mykolaiv and Odesa regions. Russia's strategy is likely to follow the logic of a blitzkrieg in order to win a military victory before the international community can take effective political and economic measures to stop Russian aggression.

Of course, it is hardly possible to predict the course and outcome of a new stage of Russia's war against Ukraine. With more or less certainty we can speak only of Russian plans for its beginning. The military action, which is likely to be planned in Moscow, is consistent with the classical scheme: air strikes and air battles to gain air supremacy; operations of Russian airborne troops and special forces and the deployment of the land forces. In the south, you can expect an advance of the 150th Division and the troops of the 49th Army through Mariupol and Berdyansk to the occupied Crimea. Troops of terrorist groups "DNR"/"LNR" are likely to try to hold down the Ukrainian forces north of the line of contact. Troops deployed in Crimea will land naval and airborne troops and perform air strikes targeted against Ukrainian troops. But the key task of the Crimean grouping in the war against Ukraine is to create an anti-access and area denial zone (A2/AD) in the Black Sea area to pre-

vent the emergence of large NATO naval forces there. The outcome of the war will ultimately depend on the ability of Ukrainian troops to thwart the plans of the Russian blitzkrieg, and Ukrainian diplomacy to mobilize external support. The latter seems quite real, as large-scale hostilities in Ukraine threaten EU countries with a serious environmental disaster, and the occupation of the Odesa region will create a direct military threat to NATO's southeast flank.

A change in Georgian leadership in November 2013 slightly reduced the risk of a new Russian invasion to Georgia, but its threat was not eliminated. Its main objective is to prevent Georgia's membership in NATO, which is one of Tbilisi's top priorities. A new war with Georgia is likely to be planned as a blitzkrieg in Moscow. The strike units located at Russian military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the airborne troops, will try to capture the Georgian capital overnight. Troops located in Abkhazia will attack Georgian ports on the coast. A crucial factor will be the time factor: goals must be achieved before the West has time to take political or military measures to preserve Georgia's independence. After the capture of Tbilisi, it is safe to assume that a "national rescue government" will be announced and a "brotherly relationship" with Russia restored. Georgian troops will be ordered to cease resistance.

War with Azerbaijan and Turkey may result from a horizontal escalation of conflicts over Nagorno Karabakh or, more likely, through the collision of Russian and Turkish troops in Syria. The probability of the latter cannot be ruled out, but its probability is difficult to estimate.

Conclusions

Thus, by this time, the Black Sea basin has become a large area of potential armed conflict between Russia and the states of the region.

The structure and deployment of SMD shows that they are preparing for massive lightning offensive operations in order to defeat enemy troops during a blitzkrieg, to dictate them the terms of the war's end before the world community can stop the Kremlin.

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Annex 1

Military forces of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov region²

Composition of forces	SMD ^{a)}	Ukraine	NATO member countries			South Caucasus countries		
			Turkey	Bulgaria	Romania	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Staff, K people	250-260	204	355	31	69	21	45	67
Tanks	830-840	832	2485	90	460	123	109	439
Armoured fighting vehicles	2300	1973	4433	280	1377	265	228	769
Artillery	1100	1737	7795	311	927	240	238	575
Aircrafts	275	125	333	22	55	3 (+6) ^{b)}	15	37
Strike helicopter	117		64	6	-	6	7	26
Submarines	7 ^{c)}	-	12	-	-	-	-	-
Frigates	6 ^{d)}	1	18	4	-	-	-	-
Mobile robotic systems	6 ^{e)}	-	-	-	4	-	-	-

a) The data on the SMD are given without taking into account the armed forces of "DPR"/"LPR", which are actually part of the 8th Army of the Russian Federation. The figures for the Armed Forces of Moldova and Transnistria are not shown, as their impact on the balance of forces in the region is minimal. The Black Sea Fleet ships do not include the Moskva guided missile cruiser, which is undergoing long-term repairs, as well as the large Kerch anti-aircraft ship (AAS) of the 1974 of manufacturing, in Sevastopol.

b) Six tanks are being preserved.

c) Of the seven submarines, six are modern improved Kilo (636.3), equipped with four Kalibr cruise missile launchers up to 2500 km.

d) Of the six frigates (also known as the "watch ship" in Russia), there are three modern Admiral Grigorovich-class designs of Project 11356. Each of them, among other things, is equipped with 8 launchers of Kalibr missiles.

e) Of six corvettes, two are of modern design - Vyshniy Volochyok and Orekhovo-Zuevo of Project 21631, equipped with 8 launchers of Kalibr cruise missiles. Two more, the Bora and the Samum, are missile launchers on Project 1239 on airbags, with high impact missile potential and capable of speeds up to 55 knots at wavelengths up to two meters. Two more corvettes of outdated design.

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The Russian Sea: A New Reality for Ukraine and NATO¹⁰

Russia's occupation of Crimea, its transformation into a military base in the centre of the Black Sea region, the formation in Crimea of a powerful missile, aviation, naval group that actually controls the Black Sea and extends military and strategic influence of Russia in Europe and the regions of the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East changed the situation in the Black Sea region.

Ukraine, which has been in a state of hot armed conflict with the Russian Federation for six years and holds off back the constant attacks of Russia, has not been able to create sufficient naval capabilities to counter Russian aggressive occupation in the Black Sea. Moreover, NATO countries were unable to formulate their own strategy for countering Russia in the Black Sea region and chose the tactic of "passive deterrence of the Kremlin."

The open armed aggression of Russian warships, aircraft and helicopters towards the ships of the Ukrainian Navy near the Kerch Strait on November 25, 2018 showed that neither NATO nor the international community generally intends to engage in open confrontation with Russia over its expansionist actions in the Black Sea. In fact, on November 25 last year, a new regional reality was observed - Russia controls the Black Sea, and NATO seeks to create conditions for its deterrence, avoiding direct confrontation.

For Ukraine, this new reality could not come as a surprise, since Russia did not hide its intentions, acted demonstratively openly and brazenly. A striking example is the construction of the Kerch Bridge, which was contrary to international law and predictably would have led to a complica-

tion of shipping in the Kerch Strait. However, unfortunately, in the last five years the military and political leadership of our country has failed to provide a system of counteraction to the Russian aggressor by sea. The fleet component of the Navy of Ukraine with striking force, which could become a real threat to the Black Sea Fleet, was not developed. Moreover, there are still no conceptual approaches to solve this task.

The Strategy of the Naval Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine 2035 (published only in early 2019 and not in early 2015, as it should have been, given the Russian aggression), although was a good attempt to demonstrate a certain vision of the problem, but hardly could become the matrix of Russia's counteraction in the Black Sea. The biggest problem of the Strategy is its linearity, conventionalism and symmetry, absence of non-standard approaches. The time component of its implementation is stretched with an intensity that is consistent with the conditions of peacetime, not the situation when Russia occupied Crimea, the Donbas and takes daily open steps to strengthen its military domination in the Black Sea.

In particular, the first phase of the Strategy, which lasts until 2025, envisages the development of capacity to control the territorial waters of Ukraine and beyond, up to 40 nautical miles off the coast of the country. The main priority for the development of the Ukrainian Navy by 2025 is the establishment of a system of revealing the situation and intelligence in the near sea area. The second priority is to prevent enemy action in any area in the near sea zone, which involves mine planting action, radio-electronic intercept, coverage of the near sea zone with all available coastal means of destruction. The third priority is to ensure effective control of coastal waters, rivers and the protection of Ukrainian ports by enhancing the sentinel, convoy and patrol boats to provide navigation in the near sea area and river mouths, to create an effective system of protection of port

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infrastructure through the development of anti-mine defence, anti-submarine and rescue capabilities.

In fact, it is said that by 2025, the Ukrainian Navy will abandon Russia's counteraction in the entire Black Sea area and agree for dominance of the Black Sea Fleet of Russia, focusing on actions in the near-sea zone. Obviously, these priorities and tasks of the Ukrainian Navy do not correlate with other temporal-spatial reality, which is shaped by the military-political leadership of Russia and, accordingly, defines the priorities and tasks for the Russian Armed Forces in the Black Sea region.

In fact, the situation is extremely dynamic and the likelihood that Russia will continue to increase its efforts to establish a total A2/AD (Anti-Access and Area Denial) zone in the Black Sea is very high. It is easy to imagine that if the Ukrainian Navy voluntarily surrenders the Black Sea basin to the Russian aggressor, then by 2025, when the Navy command plans to move to the second phase of the Strategy, Ukraine may very likely lose the sea access altogether.

But the hope that NATO countries will be able to fulfil the task of protecting Ukraine's national interests in the Black Sea instead of Ukrainian Navy is naive and dangerous. NATO will act in the Black Sea based on its own interests. Given the limited naval capabilities of Romania and Bulgaria, and Turkey's special position, as well as the special regime for the Black Sea countries established by the Montreux Convention, NATO's task in the Black Sea is likely to continue to be "passive deterrence" on Russia. This should mean demonstrating the intentions of force response in the event of a threat to NATO members and at the same time preventing the creation of conditions for direct armed conflict with the Russian Federation, and not active opposition to the Black Sea Fleet, including to protect Ukraine.

The paradox is also that the general decline of the Russian Pacific Fleet, due to critical technological problems in the defence industry, focuses the Kremlin on building regional-level fleets. According to a recent publication in The National Interest, "The Russian Navy is rapidly decommissioning old large ships and using small ves-

sels. This leads to a gap in comparison with US and Chinese fleets... Meanwhile, small ships fit into Russia's strategy of destabilizing and, at times, invading enemy countries"[1]. That is, as The National Interest experts conclude, the Russian Navy is gradually becoming a regional fleet, losing its position in the ocean.

However, this conclusion of our Western colleagues, which sounds positive for, say, the United States, only adds to the anxiety about the future development of the situation in the Black Sea from Ukraine's perspective. In Crimea, a planned expansion of the self-sufficient, inter-specific grouping of troops formed in the summer of 2015, which functionally includes three main components - land, air and sea continues. At the same time, the land component of the troops of Russian Federation plays an auxiliary role - the actual defence of the occupied territory, and the main focus is on the development of strike aviation, missile and naval groups. It is the ballistic attack systems that become a major priority for the Russian Navy in the Black Sea, because even in the face of reduced oceanic capabilities of the Russian Navy, the Kalibr cruise missiles provide projection of force over the Mediterranean Sea, and, if necessary, strike at the territory of both Ukraine and any other country in the region.

As of early 2019, we can talk about the successful implementation by Russia of the concept of creating a modern marine component in Crimea, which relies on low-tonnage relatively inexpensive ships armed with anti-ship missiles and Kalibr cruise missiles with a range of more than 2000 km. In the context of the actual failure of programs to create prospective frigates of the project 22350 [2], as well as blocking the supply of 11356 project frigates due to sanctions by Ukraine, Russia has relied on the saturation of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation with supplies of the corvettes of project 21631 (Buyan-M) and corvettes of project 22800 (Karakurt). Despite the fact that these ships also have significant problems with engines due to Western sanctions, such ships can become the basis of a strike of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, posing a threat to all countries in the region. Similarly, submarines of project 636.3, equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles, can hold the Navy of the Black Sea region countries in constant tension.

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Current plans of the Russian ministry of defence stipulate that up to 24 units of surface and underwater carriers of Kalibr cruise missiles with a total number of up to 168 units should be in Crimea by 2020 [3]. And although there are doubts about the ability of the RF Defence Ministry to fulfill the plans of the Russian MoD to double in one or two years the number of marine carriers of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea Fleet (at present, there are eleven - three frigates of project 11356, two corvettes of Project 21631, six submarines of the Project 3336 total number of 64 Kalibr missile launchers), in the perspective of 5-7 years such intentions seem quite real. The biggest problem for the Russians will be solving the issue of engines under sanctions. During this period, the Russian Black Sea Fleet may include up to three Buyan-M class corvettes of the Project 21631 and up to five corvettes of Project 22800 (Karakurt).

It also looks probable that the UAV (Unmanned aerial vehicles) squadron would be created as part of the 318th Mixed Air Regiment of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, equipped with Forpost UAV (Searcher II (Israel) drones, which are assembled of Israeli components in Russia) [4]. The main tasks of the squadron will be to conduct reconnaissance, as well as providing targeting for anti-ship missiles and the Kalibr. In addition, it is envisaged to join the UAV squadron of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation strike modification of the Israeli-Russian Forpost-M drone. In fact, the UAV squadron completes the formation of a target acquisition and fire-control systems in the Black Sea Fleet on the basis of the integration of intelligence, control and attack facilities.

Thus, by 2022-2025, Russia is most likely to create a relatively inexpensive and effective fist fire in the Black Sea that will control the Black Sea and directly threaten the territories of Ukraine and NATO countries.

At the same time, it is obvious that Ukraine alone will no longer be able to form the combat potential of the Navy and other Armed Forces in the maritime direction in 5-10 years, sufficient to counter the Black Sea Fleet and other Armed Forces in the Black Sea. In turn, given NATO's strategic approach, which is likely to be a passive deterrence of Russia and the prevention of direct

NATO-Russia military conflict in the Black Sea, Ukraine is vain to hope for the Alliance's possible strong steps to increase its naval strength in the region.

In this situation, caused by the ineffective policy of the state in the naval sphere over the last five years, the optimal may be a comprehensive approach, which, on the one hand, will involve the implementation of asymmetric steps in the construction of the Navy, and on the other - using the capabilities of our NATO partners in the non-military areas of counteraction to the Russian Federation. This will not contradict NATO's position on the inappropriateness of provoking Russia in a military direction. In other words, it is necessary to counteract the "hybrid war" of Russia by "hybrid" methods.

At the same time, it is critically important for Ukraine to create the conditions for the involvement of NATO countries in a comprehensive "hybrid" counteraction to Russia in the Black Sea. Only consolidated, systematic and rapid steps by Ukraine and NATO countries can change the strategic balance of the Black Sea region and punish the aggressor.

In this context, it is proposed to encourage and involve NATO countries in the following activities:

in the diplomatic sphere:

- establishment of a system for international monitoring of the situation in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait;
- introducing additional sanctions against Russia for violations of international law in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait;
- strengthening of existing sanctions against Russia for annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas;
- ensuring the implementation by Russia of the decision of the United Nations International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on the immediate return of Ukrainian ships to Ukraine;
- imposing sanctions on ships entering Crimea and banning them from entering EU/NATO ports;
- the introduction of restrictions on the entry of Russian ships into the ports of NATO member countries;

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in the information sphere:

- constant updating of the narrative regarding annexation of Crimea by Russia, aggression in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov Kerch Strait in the international information space;
- dissemination of up-to-date information on Russia's violations of international law in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov Kerch Strait;
- dissemination of the messages of OSCE missions on violations of the Minsk agreements in Donbas by Russia in the international information space;

in the military-strategic sphere:

- ensuring the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, Kerch Strait;
- promoting the naval presence and activity of NATO countries in the Black Sea (including through the creation of NATO Fleet Headquarters in the Black Sea);
- increasing NATO military presence in the region by deploying air defence systems/missiles, aviation, missile systems, ships, conducting exercises to build NATO's own A2/AD in the Black Sea;
- strengthening the Alliance's support for the Navy of the Black Sea countries of NATO (Romania and Bulgaria), as well as Ukraine and Georgia;
- intensification of Ukraine's cooperation with Turkey in the naval sphere.

In the military and technical field, Ukraine should take non-linear and asymmetric steps. Planning for a gradual build-up of combat capability with the prolonged (decades-long) expansion of the fleet's area of responsibility obviously cannot provide the conditions for changing the balance of power in the Black Sea and forcing Russia to act within international law. Against this background, breakthrough ideas and steps that will have a significant impact on the Navy's position in the Black Sea should be considered. It is unambiguous to widely use advanced technologies and systems, in particular, unmanned (autonomous, robotic). Arming the Navy with reconnaissance and strike UAVs, surface and underwater autonomous vehicles (including striking ones) can, in a short time and relatively small means, change

the combat potential of the Ukrainian fleet and its ability to perform combat missions in virtually the entire Black Sea area, and not only in the near sea area. The size of the Black Sea makes it possible to take full advantage of the benefits of unmanned, autonomous and robotic systems.

These steps are proposed to be implemented within the framework of the so-called mosquito fleet concept by creating a grouping of missile launchers (primarily with strike capabilities) for an asymmetric approach to deterring the enemy. In this case, it is advisable to apply a multi-level approach to this task - in parallel with the construction of boats of Ukrainian design, one can consider the acquisition of a license for the production of small-scale foreign warships on its territory, as well as conduct substantive negotiations on military-technical assistance from Western partner countries. This approach will allow, on the one hand, the rapid expansion of the ship's fleet and, on the other, the process of reviving the national shipbuilding school.

Critical to the implementation of the mosquito fleet concept is the launch of a series of anti-ship missiles for both mobile coastal and aviation missiles and directly for missile launchers. In addition, the extension of the land component, in particular, the strengthening of the Marine Corps and the Special Forces of the Naval Forces, should be continued as part of the development of the Navy.

In general, the Centre for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies estimates that only asymmetrical and courageous actions by Ukraine, together with NATO partners, on the development of the Ukrainian Navy, as well as a complex ("hybrid") counteraction of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea can create the necessary conditions for changing the balance in the region in our favour and the punishment of Russia. Much time has been lost, although the chances of a breakthrough from the "Russian Sea" are still there, and further stalling, both in defining the Navy's development strategy and in reforming its military, technical and defence policies in this area, could have tragic consequences for the Navy, and for Ukraine.

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The Balkans and the Black Sea: Energy Aspects of Russian Influence¹¹

The energy security of the Black Sea region, in particular, the security of natural gas, oil and other energy supplies, is directly influenced and exerted by the Russian Federation. This is a multifaceted problem that has several dimensions.

The desire to consider gas, crude oil and petroleum products a common commodity is widespread. In the Western press, even Russia's "streams" - Nord Stream, TurStream - are sometimes referred to as "just commercial projects". However, the European Energy Security Strategy [1, 2] clearly regulates sources of supply and does not allow more than 30% of imports from a single source. Enhancing the security of EU countries is envisaged through interaction with members of the Energy Community, in particular Ukraine and Moldova. Particular attention is paid to measures to reduce dependence on Russian gas. Most countries in the Black Sea region have pledged to comply with EU energy legislation - Romania and Bulgaria as members of the EU, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as members of the Energy Community and signatories to the Association Agreements with the EU.

Ukraine, as noted in the latest reports from the European Commission and the European Parliament, has undergone a long way of reform, which, together with the organization of reverse gas import routes, has significantly increased its security. This is facilitated by the tripartite format of negotiations with Russia on gas transit, where Ukraine and the EU take a consolidated position based on EU energy legislation. The victory of Naftogaz in the Stockholm Arbitration in the case against Gazprom is of strategic importance because it opened a new toolkit for relations with Russia and for the first time proved its effectiveness.

At the same time, the Russian Federation continues its long-standing efforts to exclude Ukraine from the gas supply chain to the EU. In its arsenal such actions are: construction of geopolitically motivated gas transport infrastructure; ignoring European energy law; provoking "gas crises" with the shuffling their off the responsibility to third parties. But unlike the previous crises of 2006 and 2009, Ukraine and the EU now have stronger legal mechanisms that must be put in place to counteract the likely interruption of Russian gas flows. In particular, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement characterizes gas interruptions as an extraordinary event that entails the introduction of EWM (Early Warning Mechanism) with common counter-measures. This is a significant difference from previous situations where the Russian Federation used gas as a weapon.

To enhance the reliability and regional integration of gas networks in the wide Black Sea region, the example of Lithuania should be cited. Until 2014, the country had been suffering the actions of Gazprom, which had a large share in its gas infrastructure. Becoming part of the EU gas market, the Lithuanians demanded Gazprom to comply with European rules and set up an LNG terminal in Klaipeda. These actions helped to eliminate Gazprom's longstanding monopoly in the Baltic States, diversify and secure gas imports at competitive prices for the whole region at the price level of European gas hubs. Russian gas has not disappeared, but its import volume has decreased by 50%, and most importantly, the possibility of its use as a lever of influence and blackmail has been eliminated.

The use of the Ukrainian gas storage infrastructure (underground gas storage facilities, UGS) for the needs of the countries of the region is important for enhancing security of gas supply. As of July 2019, more than 1.4 billion cubic meters of gas in Ukrainian UGS belongs to companies of other countries. Naftogaz has an ambitious goal of put-

¹¹ The publication was prepared within the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support from the Black Sea Trust Fund, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust Fund or its partners.

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ting at least 20 billion cubic meters into storage before the start of the heating period. UGS gas is a significant argument against Russian pressure and threats, and a guarantee of sustainable energy supply for both Ukraine and neighbouring countries. In Ukraine, on the basis of 10 UGS, the organizational and legal possibilities for the operation of the customs warehouse regime have been developed, which enables the customers of the services to store natural gas in Ukraine for 1095 days without paying taxes and customs duties.

Currently, Moldova's gas supply is 100% dependent on a contract with Gazprom. Thus, if Gazprom will interrupt gas supply to Ukraine's GTS, Moldova could suffer significant losses, as it did in 2009. Therefore, Naftogaz offered to use its technical capabilities to supply gas to Moldova, which would be purchased on the EU market. In turn, Moldovan Prime Minister Maya Sandu said the Yassy-Chisinau gas pipeline project would not be completed quickly. "Gas supply is a technical problem, but it is also an economic problem. Today, we buy gas from Gazprom at a price at which we could buy it in Ukraine, the one it receives through the reverse system," she stressed [3]. So, there is a quick solution that allows Gazprom-dependent countries to get gas out of its grip.

The region is predominantly energy dependent. In 2018, the region's dependence on gas imports was more than 80%. Only in Ukraine and Romania, which produce significant volumes of gas, did this dependence not exceed 50% (see Fig. 1).

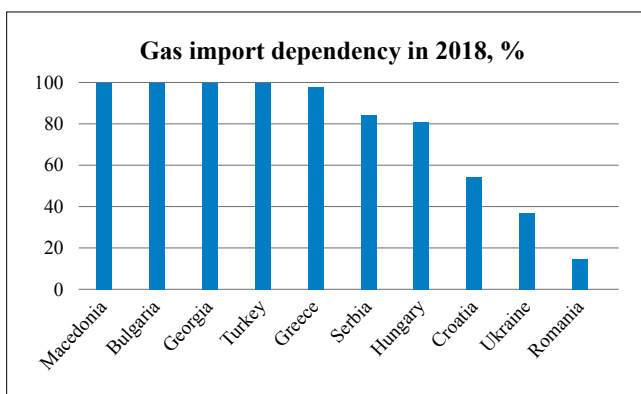


Fig. 1 Countries' dependence on gas import
Sources: BBSPA, Annual Statistical Review, 2019

Last year, most countries in the region had a very high dependency on oil imports. Ukraine and Turkey also imported coal. The lion's share of total imports of goods from the Russian Federation to

Ukraine, about \$ 8 billion US, were energy sources. Although the supplies of Russian natural gas were discontinued in 2015, Ukraine still depends on Russian supplies of petroleum products, liquefied gas, coal, fuel cells and nuclear power plant equipment. In 2015–2018, the share of imports of petroleum products from the Russian Federation ranged from 17% in 2016 to 41.3% in 2018 (see Figure 2). The total share of supplies from the Russian Federation and Belarus, which receives Russian oil on preferential terms, reaches 75% (see Fig. 3).

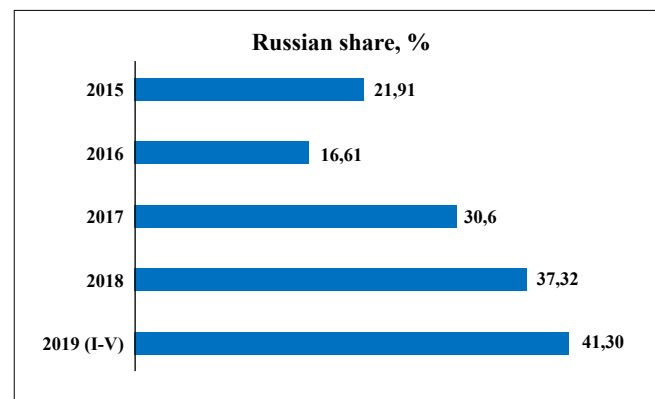


Fig. 2 RF share in import of petroleum products to Ukraine

In total, 2.678 million tonnes of diesel fuel were imported in 2018, 93% of which was delivered through the product pipeline. The bulk of liquefied natural gas (LNG) was also imported from Russia and Belarus.

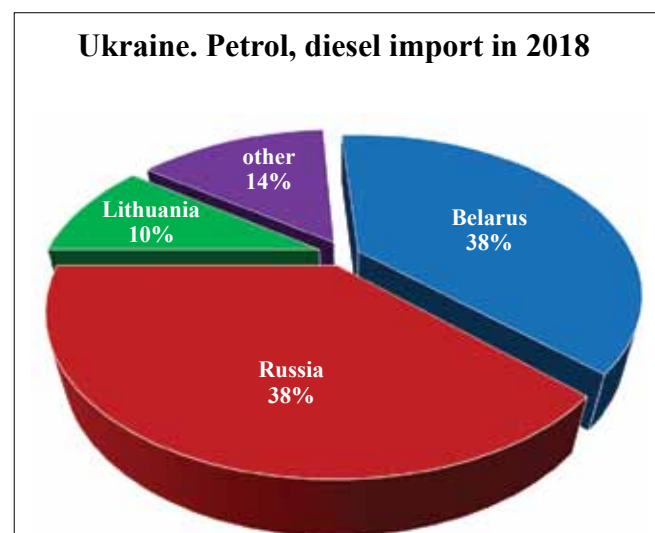


Fig. 3 Sources of import of petroleum products to Ukraine
Source: State fiscal service of Ukraine, <http://sfs.gov.ua/>

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The danger of this situation was clearly confirmed by the Government of the Russian Federation, when in April 2019 it strengthened the regime of manual management of exports to Ukraine [4]. This special export regime provides for monthly reconciliation of volumes (instead of annual) and the need for obtaining permits of the Ministry of Economy and the Federal Service for Technical and Export Control (within the structure of the RF Ministry of Defence). In June 2019, the fuel quota was 30% and LNG was 60% of the monthly average. Russia's Lukoil (25%) and Rosneft (75%) received quotas.

Consequently, imports of petroleum products from the Russian Federation can be stopped at any time. To stimulate imports from non-Russian sources, the Ukrainian government has introduced special duties on imports of Russian diesel through pipelines and liquefied gas. This made it possible to reduce dependence on Russian imports. In June 2019, almost 20% of LNG imports came from alternative sources (maritime routes, EU shipments) (see Figure 4).

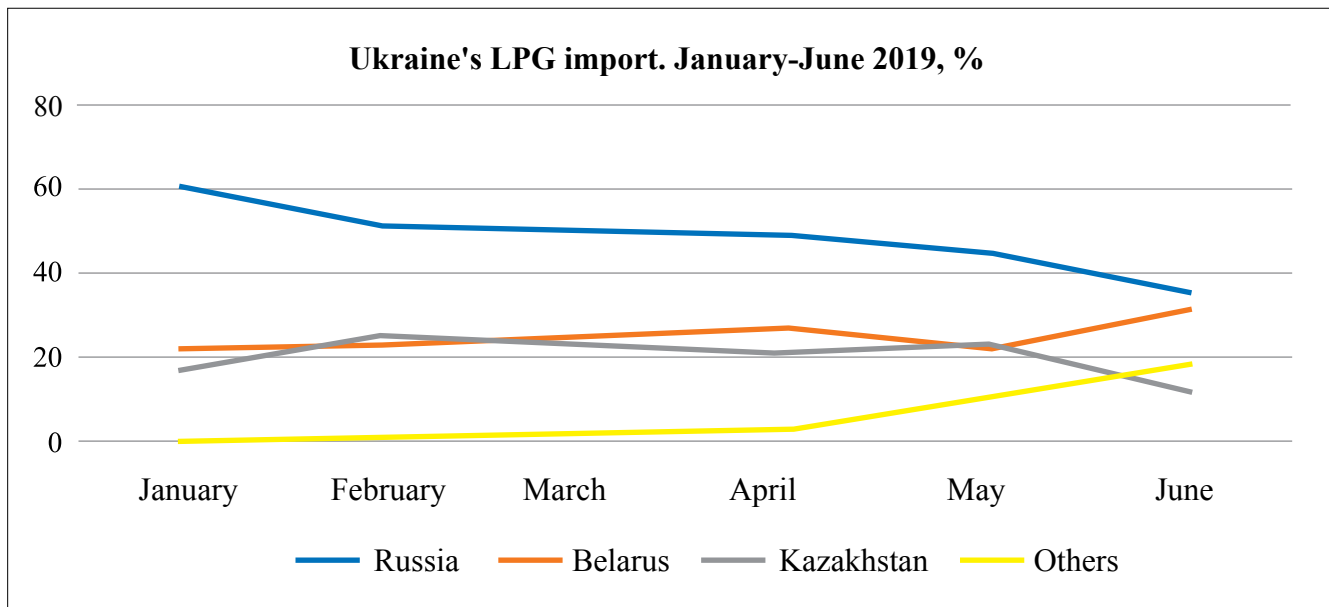


Fig. 4 LNG import to Ukraine in January – June 2019

Source: <http://enkor.com.ua/>

The EU's energy security strategy identifies the supply of LNG as an important security factor. Currently, there is only one LNG Revithoussa terminal in the region, located near the Greek capital. It was built in 1999 and is managed by DESFA SA, which is a subsidiary of Greek DEPA. After commissioning of the third LNG tank in November 2018, with the support of the European Commission, the storage has the capacity of up to 225,000 cubic meters, and the regasification capacity increased by 40%. In addition, a project is currently underway to install an FSRU near Alexandroupolis in Northern Greece. The project implementation is scheduled for the second quarter of 2021 [5]. This terminal should ensure LNG's entry into the Bulgarian market through the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector (IGB, construction begins this year) and further through the existing

network to the markets of Eastern Europe. In the region, these projects are seen as a real opportunity to diversify gas supplies.

Why should Gazprom and other Russian companies in the region be seen as a threat? In 2012, the European Commission opened an antitrust case against Gazprom, accusing it of domination and dishonest behaviour in gas markets in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in violation of Article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Three years later, on April 22, 2015, the European Commission stated that Gazprom is hindering competition in the gas supply markets in Bulgaria and seven other Member States, implementing a common abuse strategy in these markets, implementing territorial restrictions and pursuing unfair pricing policies. It was noted that Russian gas supplies were contingent on

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investments in Russian gas pipeline projects or on the acquisition/strengthening of Gazprom's control over EU gas infrastructure. The European Commission has in fact confirmed that Gazprom was overpricing in five Member States - Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

Has this changed Gazprom's behaviour? The EC's antitrust case over Gazprom violations in eight EU countries can be safely continued. In Ukraine, the behaviour of the Russian monopolist is repeated, and by some indicators it is an order of magnitude worse. In Gazprom's arsenal - stopping gas flows, blackmailing, imposing skyrocketing prices with the following political demands to reduce them (the Kharkiv agreements), sabotaging the Stockholm arbitration decision, requiring Naftogaz to pay for gas that was allegedly delivered without its consent. in the Ukrainian occupied territories of Russia.

In May this year, Naftogaz of Ukraine filed a complaint with the European Commission about Gazprom's antitrust behaviour [6]. For the first time, a non-EU national company appeals to the European Commission to stop Gazprom's breach of EU gas legislation. The complaint also noted the possible destruction of the Ukrainian GTS, which could be caused by Gazprom's policy and construction of bypass pipelines in the Baltic and Black Seas. Since Soviet times, the Russian Federation has been using dual-purpose energy imports to generate cash income and as a source of ever-increasing strategic leverage on consumer countries [7].

Following previous gas crises, some countries in the region, most notably Romania, are actively seeking to get rid of excessive Russian gas dependence. At the same time, the situation is similar in the oil refining industry and in the oil products market, where companies from the Russian Federation are trying to dominate. There are many examples of this.

Today, five subsidiaries of Russia's Lukoil play leading roles in the Bulgarian economy: Lukoil Neftochim Burgas AD produces oil products; Lukoil Energy and Gas Bulgaria generates electricity; Lukoil Aviation Bulgaria operates

aircraft refueling operations at Bulgarian airports (Sofia, Burgas, Varna, Plovdiv, Horna Oryahovitsa) and the Republic of Moldova (Chisinau); Lukoil – Bulgaria has more than 220 gas stations and calls itself a leader in the distribution of automotive fuel, polymers and petrochemical products; Lukoil Bulgaria Bunker is the main supplier of bunker fuel in Bulgaria.

In Croatia, Lukoil has a network of 52 gas stations and two oil depots. It is also present in Georgia, Moldova, Macedonia and feels confident in Ukraine. Although after the Russian aggression began, the Russian company was forced to change the name of its gas stations to Amis, but Lukoil Lubricants Ukraine actively and fruitfully develops a dealer network throughout the country, cooperates with hundreds of service stations, in particular, Ukravto and AIS service stations.

Russia's influence in key sectors of Serbia's economy, as noted by expert studies, is turning into a political influence on the country's government in strategic decision-making. Lukoil's acquisition of 79.5% of the Serbian company Beopetrol and its gas station network has made the Russian company the second largest supplier of oil products in the country. Under the privatization agreement, the Russians have pledged to invest 85 million euros in the company's infrastructure. However, a report on the privatization of Beopetrol, published in 2013 by the Anti-Corruption Council of the Serbian government [8], stated that Lukoil had failed to comply with the agreement and had caused significant losses. The report concluded that instead of Lukoil's own investments, it used Beopetrol funds to lend to its parent company. The loan amounted to a significant portion of the money that Lukoil paid for privatization. Moreover, the Report states that the Serbian Privatization Agency did not prevent Lukoil from extending the loan repayment period until 2031 [9].

Another Russian state-owned company, Gazprom-neft owns a multi-business Serbian NIS (Naftna industrija Srbije) with two oil refineries in Pancevo and Novi Sad (7.3 million tonnes of oil), exploration, oil and gas facilities in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and a network of 480 gas stations and oil depots.

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*Photo 1. NIS (Gazpromneft affiliate) tanks
Source : <https://www.gazprom-neft.com>*

The activities of Russian companies have been the subject of extensive research. Only this year, leading Western publishing houses published two materials on Russian influence in the Black Sea region through the activities of oil and gas corporations, confirming the relevance of measures to counter Russian threats in the energy sector [9, 10].

The basic patterns of Russian companies' behaviour and the role played by the Russian state using energy supply as a foreign policy tool have been identified. Counteraction measures should be implemented using the tools of European legislation, the Energy Community Treaty and relevant association agreements with the EU.

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Can Belligerent Forces Be Transformed into Peacekeepers?¹²

Conflict zones in the Black Sea Region continue to pose an extremely serious challenge to continental security. The region remains extremely vulnerable that threatens continental peace and security because of the increasing number of conflicts. Although the international community has had many opportunities to insist on peaceful resolution of conflicts, such opportunities have been missed that encouraged Russia to act virtually similarly in Ukraine afterwards. The current situation is much more complicated and the possibility of resolving any conflicts is postponed. Under these conditions, one of the instruments that would prevent the resumption of military hostilities is the presence of peacekeeping forces. The concept has not been sufficiently discussed and, at first glance, seems to be an effective solution. The international experience, and here we refer primarily to the International Missions under the UN mandate, is diverse and offers both positive and negative examples, but the supposed Peacekeeping Missions (PM) in the former Soviet space represent something different. The PM in Georgia (1992-2008) and that in Moldova (from 1992 to present) represent a model that requires a careful analysis, especially considering the discussions about the need to displace a Peacekeeping Mission in the east of Ukraine.

A possible PM in Ukraine has been under discussion for several years. The Russian Federation is trying to impose a formal Mission that would maintain the current situation and cancel or postpone a quick and effective conflict resolution. Ukraine, so far, makes it clear that it wants a Mission under the UN mandate that would be in line not only with its interests, but also with the rules of international law. The experience and situa-

tion in the Republic of Moldova (the RM) should probably be one of the most studied elements in the process of identifying solutions for a possible PM in Ukraine. Although there is a period of 23 years between the two conflicts, they practically reveal a similar scenario of the same actor. It desires to freeze the conflict, to preserve the current situation and consolidate control over a part of the territory of Ukraine, so that afterwards, it would be able to influence the situation in the entire country through different methods and instruments. What should be the criteria and elements necessary to prevent the repetition of mistakes made by the Republic of Moldova and to establish an effective PM in the east of Ukraine? Or what would be the tasks and objectives of the future PM, so that it meets the needs of regional security?

For several years, the Transnistrian problem has been considered to have real chances for settlement. Both the constitutional authorities in Chisinau and especially some international actors expressed naive optimism and even insisted that this conflict was easy to be settled and it would ultimately be resolved through dialogue. There have been offered various scenarios, resources and instruments, but the issue has never been subjected to a public debate, which would have allowed for the identification of priorities and gradually led to the solution of the problem. One of the basic elements that needs to be studied in the process of identifying solutions for the Transnistrian problem is the Russian military presence in Moldova. Thus, in addition to the presence of its military troops, in the full swing of the war, Russia imposed its own format of a peacekeeping mission, without clear terms and mandate that is made up of belligerent forces (Russia and Moldova). Moreover, Russia has practically subordinated to itself and controls the entire contingent of military personnel trained in the peacekeeping mission.

¹² The publication was prepared within the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support from the Black Sea Trust Fund, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust Fund or its partners.

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At the same time, if we take a close look at the situation, we notice that Russia has managed to isolate the region. The military and paramilitary forces in this region of the Republic of Moldova cannot be inspected or monitored, respectively, it is impossible to assess the real situation in this territory. It should be mentioned that the entire contingent of Russian personnel, involved in the PM, live together with their families exclusively in Transnistria. As the region is a closed territory, including for any monitoring or inspection missions, it becomes clear that the Russian militaries and their family members, living and working together with the local population, are mixed and integrated into the society.

In this context, we will also take into account the fact that Russia has generously offered its citizenship to all inhabitants of the region, so it is very difficult in these circumstances to assess the real military potential of the Russian Federation in the area, as well as to make a clear delimitation of the paramilitary structures from the official ones.

In Moldova, the authorities have always tried to explain to the public how it was possible that in the full swing of the Moldovan-Russian war of 1992 [1], the belligerent parties became overnight joint peacekeeping troops. Obviously, there are arguments that can justify such a decision that had been imposed upon the Moldovan authorities by Russia, but now, after 28 years, we can say that the only positive aspect of this is the cease of military violence. Moldova hastily accepted a ceasefire agreement accompanied by the creation of the PM, which is not the case of Ukraine that is making great diplomatic efforts to have peacekeeping forces, but not under any conditions.

Another problem, and at the same time a difference, which Moldova has not insisted on, is that Russia, although it signed a ceasefire agreement with Moldova on July 21, 1992 [2], managed to "lose" its status of party to the conflict, somehow inexplicably becoming a "guarantor state", "mediator" and "peacemaker". Thus, being in fact a party to the conflict or better said an aggressor, the Russian Federation obtains the opportunity to influence and practically have a decisive role in the process of settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. The difference in the case of Ukraine is that the public opinion, as well as the Ukrainian

authorities, do not insist on calling things by their proper names, both in the case of illegal annexation of the Crimea and in the events occurring in Eastern Ukraine. We are witnessing Ukraine's consistent efforts to discuss directly with Russia the issues related to the situation in Eastern Ukraine, but it is certainly not easy. Moreover, it is important to take into account the fact that a number of commitments made by the Russian Federation are subsequently not fulfilled or respected.¹³ Thus, Ukraine needs strong guarantees from relevant international actors and structures, and in the end, this delays the process. At the same time, Ukraine also seems to be aware of the fact that international guarantees or commitments and documents signed by Russia can be violated or ignored by it.

Considering the analysis of all the aspects, it is important to investigate carefully and comprehensively the right of occupation. Its applicability in the case of the Transnistrian conflict has been analyzed and practically proven due to so many Reports of international organizations [3], as well as judgments of the European Court of Human Rights¹⁴ [4]. However, the situation can be described as a setback, because after 28 years of alleged negotiations, we can say that it took time to change the realities in this area. The Kremlin easily obtained all the time it required to implement this model in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, and now it seems it would like to multiply this model in the east of Ukraine, including through the direct involvement of some prominent figures from Tiraspol, who have been appointed to various positions in Donetsk.

In contrast, the applicability of the right of occupation in the case of Ukraine, although it practically contains the necessary elements, is still to be continuously documented in order to be materialized in official documents. Therefore, in this situation, it is necessary to collect evidences that shows the involvement of Russia, its support in

13 See for example the commitment to completely withdraw troops and armaments from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002, repeatedly undertaken by the highest authorities of the Russian Federation at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999.

14 Case of Ilascu v. Moldova and Russia, para. 382 At the same time, on September 1, 2019, the European Court has ruled over 20 Decisions, in which the Russian Federation was recognized responsible for the violation of human rights in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. Russian authorities are trying to politicize the subject and refuse to comply with the mandatory decisions of this important international court.

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various dimensions and the support offered to the administrations, which de facto control the Ukrainian territories.[5]

In response to the question contained in the heading of this publication, we can conclude that a belligerent party should not have an opportunity to become part of a PM in a respective country or region, but this cannot be avoided so far. Consequently, based on the experience of the Republic of Moldova to establish a PM, it is important to take into account the following aspects:

- Any PM must meet clear criteria, based on the principles and norms of international law, that will contribute clearly, visibly and predictably to both the normalization of the situation and the improvement of security, as well as to the quality of life of the people in the Mission's area of action. Namely, the UN plays an important role in this regard, as it remains the only structure in the world responsible for global peace and security, that is why it is assigned a unique responsibility [6]. States delegated or participating in a PM should not be able to influence any events in that country.
- Also, a PM should have a clear term and a well-defined mandate, available for both authorities and civil society, in order to be discussed, monitored and to the extent possible, improved or adapted. The dynamics of the settlement process of the Transnistrian conflict meant total uncertainty, the consolidation of de facto regime and economic degradation continues on both banks of the Dniester River. This is possible because the lead by Russia PM had a formal role, serving as a cover-up for political and geopolitical actions of the RF in the region.
- An eventual PM in Eastern Ukraine should necessarily meet a number of functions to help effectively resolve the conflict. The human rights component, the informational and administrative functions should not be lacking. Therefore, the requirements and expectations of those involved in a PM are very high, from monitoring and information tasks to military and police activities, as well as humanitarian efforts.[7]

- It is absolutely unacceptable for a PM not to carry out, for several decades, some activities aimed at information, education and involvement of the population in measurement and assessment of the quality of its services. Any PM involves expenditure, which must be sooner or later quantified and justified. The lack of such assessments and planning, given that the PM on the territory of Moldova does not have a definite term, actually reveals another role and purpose of this format in the Transnistrian region.

- Finally, the so-called DDR - disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants are foreseen by the compulsory programs of peacekeeping missions. None of these notions has been addressed or achieved in the case of the Republic of Moldova. The structures designed to ensure the organization and functioning of the PM are inefficient. The activity of the Joint Control Commission can be easily obstructed and is often politicized that provokes a breach of commitments and documents regulating the situation in the security area. Thus, the situation of disarmament, demobilization or the presence of military troops is completely different from that found in the documents signed by the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation¹⁵.

Discursive peculiarities of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine

As mentioned above, the situation in Ukraine is different from that in Moldova, although most of the time both authorities and civil society experts in this country insist on examining or making analogies with elements of the Transnistrian

¹⁵ For example, Article 3 of the Agreement on the principles of peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of Moldova (<https://gov.md/en/content/fundamental-documents-jcc>), signed on 21.07.1992 by the Presidents of the R. Moldova and the Russian Federation, stipulates that public order in the municipality of Bender will be provided by the Joint Control Commission, together with the police and militia subdivisions with limited effectiveness. In fact, immediately after the installation of the peacekeeping posts in the municipality of Bender, the separatist administration took control of this city, and today this city is completely under the control of the de facto Tiraspol administration, the Moldovan authorities mysteriously losing control over all institutions, except a penitentiary and a police station, which has a regime with extremely limited and humiliating possibilities. More than that, Bender, according to the Moldovan-Russian Agreement, was declared an area with increased security regime, respectively the presence of military units is prohibited, being the obligation of the JCC to ensure compliance with the provisions.

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conflict. Ukraine is trying to "decipher" the intentions of Russian external aggression, as well as to avoid turning the Donbas conflict into a long-term war, which the Moldovan authorities had failed to do.

The Russian Federation is not excluded from the conflict settlement in Eastern Ukraine. Even though it imposes conditions, negotiates documents, often we cannot find the signature of Russian officials on many of the documents. This is done with a single purpose: to avoid being a party that bears responsibility, and thus, avoid any further sanctions. After all, the "Ukrainian problem" is presented in the RF as an internal one, where Ukraine, i.e. the governments that followed Yanukovich, is presented as destructive and prejudicial for the rights of Russian citizens. Russia tries to demonstrate that it does nothing but help protect its nationals and defends itself from external aggression. The fact that there are no signatures of Russian officials on the documents, which are the result of the negotiation formats, is a particular feature of the conflict in Ukraine, but there are others, too.

Russia opposes changing the structure of the peacekeeping mission in the Republic of Moldova and argues that it is the element that ensures dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol. De facto, it helps it maintain a convenient status-quo. Any attempt to discuss a possible change in the PM is handled through threats.[8]

In Ukraine, Moscow is against an UN-mandated PM, from which the Russian military will be excluded. Thus, it would lose control over the situation and could no longer put pressure on political actors in Kyiv. Ukraine wants a PM, where Moscow will not be present and will not have access to decisions, data or instruments of control. On the other hand, there are 3 members of the UN Security Council, who believe that such a mission is necessary and that its presence is appropriate. They are the US, the UK and France. However, even in this case, the opinions are different. For example, John Bolton said that the UN is the platform, where Ukraine should present its views on conflict resolution. However, relying on an PM under the UN mandate could harm the negotiation process: *"This mechanism must be implemented with great care, because the Secu-*

urity Council creates PMs, and afterwards, they exist endlessly."[9] Earlier, in 2017, Kurt Walker stated that the intention of the US is to send a mission to the region without Russian militaries that would have multiple functions and responsibilities in the area of security or would ensure the security of inhabitants in the region. The presence of the Russian militaries could be used as a tool for mobilizing resources to influence local public opinion to Moscow's advantage. In conclusion, Ukraine should not rely only on a PM, it should advocate for multiple mechanisms and platforms, and, at the same time, be very careful and evaluate, at every stage, the implementation of the decisions agreed upon by the parties.

Ukraine insists that a PM should have control over the Russian-Ukrainian border. Only after ensuring such control, it can proceed to the next stage of conflict resolution: the implementation of the provisions of the Minsk Agreements. The border should not be monitored by Ukrainian, Russian or Belarusian military troops, it should be done only by the peacekeepers, but Russia opposes the participation of NATO member states. A possible solution would be Sweden or Finland. Sweden has already expressed its readiness to contribute to such a PM [10]. In order to determine the exact number of military personnel, it was proposed to create a short-term technical mission to evaluate the local needs [11]. Thus, Ukraine displays openness to a dialogue and solutions, and the population agrees with the presence of a PM in the eastern region (only people of Eastern Ukraine are more skeptical about it) [12]. Returning to the mission, after ensuring these elements, a condition must be kept in mind: no Ukrainian political leader will accept to negotiate with separatist leaders [13]. Another condition is that the Russian troops should no longer be present on the territory of Ukraine, that is they should withdraw. The role of a PM is to provide Ukraine with the necessary conditions for restoring sovereignty, territorial integrity and control over its own borders.

Russia, however, has a different vision, insisting that a PM should have mostly security functions for the OSCE SMM and not be involved in political, electoral, and social-economic processes. Such a mission should have precisely the following role: to contribute to the ceasefire, to provide

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normal conditions for elections in the regions affected by the conflict and to support a peaceful takeover of control in the territory.

Taking the Moldovan experience in Transnistria into account, Ukraine has the option of observing, analyzing and taking different decisions. Mistakes need to be eliminated, and communication is the key to getting support from its own citizens. In addition, Ukraine has other resources and capabilities to influence international public opinion and achieve its goals. The Moldovan authorities have been very hesitant in the negotiation process, insisting on changing the PM format. Formulating clear objectives, choosing strategies and tactics, communicating with external partners and excluding non-transparent com-

promises or agreements from the negotiation process or unfavorable conditions for Kyiv to create this mission are extremely important preconditions for the success of this endeavor, i.e. to get external support for this mission.

Discussions on setting up an UN-mandated monitoring mission have begun in 2017. It was obvious from then that it would be difficult to reach a compromise, considering the extremely different interests of the parties. So far, several countries have declared their availability to contribute to this mission. However, they have not come to concrete terms yet. In certain periods the conflict escalates, which contributes to the increase of tension and mistrust between the participants in the conflict resolution process.

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Romania and the Changing Dynamics in the Black Sea Region¹⁶

Since 2014 the security environment in the Black Sea has deteriorated gradually and constantly, despite efforts to the contrary made by NATO. Romania is in a complicated situation. Having been a member of NATO for the past 15 years, Romania's security has come into question after the conflict in Ukraine was waged for the first time after the end of the Cold War. The Crimean annexation in 2014 has drastically shifted the threat assessment of the Romanian national security establishment in relation to its Eastern neighborhood. For the Romanian decision-makers, Crimea was a wakeup-call that meant not only "the end of history" syndrome of the West and the end of Romania's "strategic holiday" after its Euro-Atlantic integration came to an end, but that Russia was waging a type of war designed to remain under the threshold of a traditional aggression as it was understood at the NATO level.

Romania's military adaptation

The immediate visible consequence was a major effort of rebooting the national defense through a comprehensive acquisition spree. In 2015, president Klaus Iohannis brokered a multi-party agreement in order to create a political consensus for allocating 2% of GDP on defense starting in 2017. [1] Although somewhat belated, the 2% of GDP allocation has been aimed at increasing the readiness of the armed forces and to procure modern equipment or to update existing one. Furthermore, from a diplomatic and political standpoint the 2% figure shows Bucharest's commitment to its defense. In May 2017 the Romanian parliament approved a € 9.3 billion equipment procurement program for the next ten years.[2] Unfortunately, for the first two years since the re-armament pro-

gram was initiated, Romania has been unable to fully spend 2% of GDP on defense, despite allocating the funds. Lack of administrative capacity, complex public acquisition legislation, as well as political interference, means that many programs have been delayed or stuck in litigation.

In defense terms two major developments occurred in Romania's strategic posture after 2014. The first, a newfound relevance for territorial defense, while the second is the importance of joint operations for the national defense. However, in order to implement these concepts Romania requires modern military equipment as well as a modern defense structure. Tentative steps were taken in 2018 to adapt the command structure of the armed forces to the new realities on the battlefield by transforming the Joints Chiefs of Staffs into the Defense Staff.[3]. Two new commands were created and operationalized: a special forces command and a cyber command. [4]

A transformation in mindset

It is in this broader context, that Romania started increasingly to conceive its security needs as the ones of a frontline state. The structural variable, which reactivated the geopolitical competition in the Black Sea, was the militarization of Crimea by developing a gradual anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) bubble in the peninsula, very similar to what Russia deployed in the North, in Kaliningrad. Romania joined the club of the other allies concerned about the impact of access-denial capabilities on their neighborhood. Soon Romania discovered it had "another Kaliningrad and very likely a Kaliningrad+ in our vicinity. (...) a real game-changer, essentially altering the very fabric of the security environment" [5]. Since then Romania became one of the voices that pleaded during a succession of NATO summits for a "robust deterrence posture at the shores of Black Sea", able to counterbalance the Russian A2/AD capabilities. This particular key ingredient became the driving force behind the

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2016 National Military Strategy, which considers that the existing capacity of Russian aggression, bolstered by the A2/AD build-up in the Black Sea, “represents the main threat against the security of Romania”.[6]

Over time, the Romanian military establishment projected a new awareness and increased understanding that the A2/AD systems deployed in Crimea could question the Alliance’s credibility, impede NATO’s ability to project power and reinforce the exposed allies, creating a bubble, which reaches expands over the Black Sea and parts of Romania. Such capabilities can be used to induce the region into submission and could be the critical pillars of a coercive strategy. They are able to create “a perception of Russian escalation dominance at the conventional level” that might intimidate risk-averse elites to force the littoral states into accommodation [7]. In the result, “Russian work on A2/AD can also be a form of psychological and political warfare.”[8] Overall, there is increased recognition (and the recent incidents in the Sea of Azov might have consolidated significantly this perception) that Black Sea is no longer the free and open space it used to be, it became a contested body of water. The implication is that freedom of navigation, the sea lines of communication and the potential for doing commerce might soon be questioned. “The Black Sea region is in the center of the new great-power competition” that captures well the new mindset [9]. As general Ben Hodges, former Commander of the United States Army Europe (USAREUR), said recently in Constanta: “There is a new Iron Curtain that goes over the Black Sea.” [10]

The unfinished NATO pivot in the East

Over the past few years, Romania has articulated publicly a very specific agenda for NATO’s broader Eastern Flank and particularly for the Black Sea region. This is evident in all the messages and public stances that within the B9 format Romania had a regional platform created for building and advancing a common position regarding the most imperative security needs in the CEE space. In this context, almost since the transformational NATO summit in Wales, the biggest priority for Romania has become fixing the perceived structural imbalance within the Eastern Flank, between the Nordic and Southern parts, the gap between the Baltic and Black Seas regions. At the press conference together with his Polish counterpart in June

2018, Klaus Iohannis called explicitly for a common, synchronized approach for the East that includes the Black Sea region: “*Nevertheless I have to stress it is important, and it is important for us all belonging to the Bucharest Format 9, to reiterate an integrated approach of the Eastern Flank. As long as we have a unitary approach, we will be very strong. If we would split the Eastern Flank in many pieces to be approached separately, this unity would be rather more difficult to guarantee.*”[11] The semantic, conceptual differentiation at the core of NATO transformation, which started in 2014, between Enhanced Forward Presence (focused on the Baltic ecosystem) and Tailored Forward Presence (focused on the Black Sea) induced a perception, a consciousness of demarcation and disparity. It created deep resentments in Bucharest and a perception of a NATO Flank operating at multiple speeds. This is the reason in April 2019, President Iohannis doubled down on his discourse aimed at incentivizing the Alliance to deal with the structural disparity on the Eastern Flank: “*Let me spell it out clearly: the security in the Black Sea region and on the entire Eastern Flank projects directly on the Euro-Atlantic security. Any deficiency, any vulnerability at the Black Sea prompts hostile actions. (...) The Black Sea region demands a further articulated approach, to be coordinated politically, operationally and in terms of capabilities, to redress the balance and deter hostile actions. That is why I have advocated and will keep firmly supporting a united, strengthened and especially coherent allied presence on the entire Eastern Flank. Such a presence is required, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, to achieve an efficient NATO deterrence and defense posture.*”

A highly fragmented Black Sea region

The light NATO presence is puzzling for the countries that inhabits a neighborhood that was at least three times the target of the Russian revisionism in the recent time (Georgia - 2008, Ukraine - 2014, the Sea of Azov - 2018). The creative strategic consolidation of an effective allied deterrent posture in the Black Sea is long overdue especially when compared to the Baltic region – a region that increasingly projects convergence, solidarity, common threat assessment analysis and a conscience that we are together. The very opposite is true at the Black Sea shores: fragmentation, divergence, unbridgeable divisions between the littoral states (especially between Turkey and Bulgaria), lack of

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solidarity and common policies. The Black Sea region is the opposite of any cohesion. One of the peculiarities of the Black Sea region is the strained relations between the countries of the region. Besides tensions with Russia, NATO countries don't share the same strategic outlook and bilateral relations are fraught with misunderstandings and distrusts.

In general, this is the ideal environment that provides the raw conditions to be exploited by Russia in order to prevent potential counterbalancing coalitions. In addition, it creates the ideal context for the lack of a key ingredient – the ability to project a comprehensive, alliance wide, whole of government strategy able to harness both civil and military instruments to balance Russian regional footprint. There is nothing of the kind, no coherent campaign plan. It remains a big Western vulnerability, as general Breedlove warned: *"We haven't learned and adapted enough. If you look at this war below the lines or what General Gerasimov calls indirect means, it is an all of government approach. They bring an all of government attack in these indirect means. The nations of the West think first and foremost with their military. We in the West are struggling with an all of government response."* [12]

Turkey as a wild card

Turkey is the most powerful NATO member in the region and controls the access from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. However, its relations with Russia are complex, even if the military balance in the region has shifted in Kremlin's favor. The 2016 attempted coup has shifted Turkish perceptions in the Black Sea region. Despite Russian aggression and revanchist foreign policy, Ankara considers it less of threats, which are happening close to its borders in Syria. Furthermore, security priorities for Turkey have changed to include regime survival. This is where the acquisition of S-400 air defense systems fits, despite the obvious rational signs that overall, Russia is a greater threat than a potential Kurdish state or rocket attacks from Syrian territory. From a military point of view the acquisition of S-400 is an insurance policy for the regime, that parts of its armed forces are not going to turn against it. [13]

For the past five years, Russia has diligently created A2/AD bubbles around Turkey in the Black

Sea, in the Middle East, in Syria and in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. These A2/ADs have effectively neutralized Turkey's military edge. Furthermore, the 2016 attempted coup has shown distrust between the military and civilian authorities. Many superior and mid-level Turkish officers have been purged or put on trial for involvement in the coup. Around 300 pilots have seen their careers ended after 2016, a development, which raises a lot of questions concerning the effectiveness of the Turkish Air Force. [14]

Turkey's relations with the West have taken a turn for the worst. The S-400/F-35 scandal represents just the tip of the iceberg. The US is considered by Ankara as a destabilizing factor in the Middle East and its support for the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters as a threat to its territorial integrity. The reluctance of American authorities to extradite Fethullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind behind the 2016 coup, has soured bilateral relations even further. However, Kremlin's "early warning" regarding the coup has won over president's Erdoğan trust, while Western silence on the issue has fanned the flames of suspicion in Ankara.

One of the other points of contention between Turkey and other NATO allies in the Black Sea region is the way, in which Ankara sees itself as the leading allied nation in the region because of its role as "keeper" of the Straits. Turkey doesn't want any other NATO members in the region to challenge its position and it views with suspicion naval initiatives aimed to increase international presence in the Black Sea. As such Turkey and Russia have blocked Romania's initiative concerning an allied led naval mission in the Black Sea in 2008. Furthermore, Turkey doesn't enjoy a particularly close relationship with Bulgaria. Romania has a strategic partnership with Ankara and their armed forces have trained routinely. Nevertheless, developments of 2016 have altered the relationship.

Additional rifts

In its turn, Bucharest is suspicious about Sofia's intentions. For cultural and economic reasons Bulgaria wants to have a good relationship with Russia. In 2016, Sofia managed to sink Bucharest's NATO naval training initiative for the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, Bulgarian troops are part of the Multinational Brigade South-East, which is under the Romanian command.

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Historically, Ukraine and Romania have had tense relations and viewed each other with suspicions. After 2014 Bucharest's bilateral relationship with Kyiv has gradually improved, but there are still lingering tensions regarding Ukraine's language. Common naval and military exercises have multiplied after 2014. Furthermore, in 2019 both countries signed a defense industrial cooperation agreement.

Beyond a region that doesn't necessarily share its security and defense concerns, Romania's neighborhood is complicated by states that have close relations with Russia – Hungary is the best example. Although a member of NATO and EU, over the past decade Budapest has maintained a close relationship with Moscow, even after the US and EU have imposed sanction. Hungary is one of Russia's "advocates" in the EU and other European international fora.

Serbia is not a member of either EU or NATO and looks to Russia for its security. In turn, Moscow uses Belgrade as a bridgehead into the Western Balkans.

Towards an effective porcupine posture

The "porcupine posture" has become over time a common denominator for describing the standard defense logic necessary to deter a great power like Russia. The concept was initially circulated by the father of the containment doctrine George Kennan, so it originates in another era of great-power competition – "we must be like the porcupine who only gradually convinces the carnivorous beast of prey that he is not a fit object of attack." Romania joins the club of the frontline states where the term is debated and has a clear meaning. The Romanian defense procurement emphasizes air defense (procurement of Patriot long range air defense systems as well as short range air defense systems), increased firepower for the land forces (HIMARS long range artillery rocket systems), increased mobility and protection for the land forces (Piranha 5 APCs and a new generation of trucks), four multirole corvettes for the navy as well as coastal defense systems.

But for defense planners the key question remains what an effective deterrence posture is and, at the same time, fiscal-prudent and sustainable. One cannot outspend a way out of the problem. One cannot aim for parity in the Black Sea or for too expensive

hardware. There is always the temptation to go immediately for the jewels in the crown – submarines and F-35. For example, in his recent article, Lieutenant Commander Jeffrey Frost, an active-duty naval officer stationed at U.S. Sixth Fleet in Naples, Italy, suggests a combination of measures to creatively outmaneuver the legal requirements (basing "small ships, such as patrol craft, in Romania, where they could enter the Danube River to fulfill the Montreux Convention requirement that non-Black Sea warships depart the Black Sea after 20 days"), naval mines as well as land-based anti-ship weapons ("the U.S. Army currently is developing a new version of the ATACMS MLRS system with an extended range and possibly with a warhead capable of targeting ships") [15]. Another interesting proposal is the one made by T.X. Hammes, who sees an opportunity for the "Mellians of the world" in leveraging the fruits of the 4th Industrial Revolution (especially the UAV, 3D printing and robots) to be able to keep in check the power of the giants: a combination of mass (3D printers can produce at scale, cheap and fast) and precision (swarms of autonomous drones armed with cruise missiles) is rapidly changing the character of defense. [16]

Interim conclusion

Romania has an opportunity to become the center of gravity of NATO's posture (creatively enabled and empowered by the United States) in the Black Sea especially when taking into consideration the strategic choices made by the other NATO littoral states. On one side, Bulgaria has always avoided antagonizing Russia, making too many waves or taking steps that could be perceived as too hostile for Moscow. On the other side, Turkey remains the keeper of a security status quo that dramatically favors Russia. More importantly, Turkey is currently on the verge of a major anti-Western shift and a series of steps taken in this logic (dismantling any imprisoning and harassing any significant opposition to Erdogan's rule, green lighting the acquisition of the S-400 systems from Russia as a statement that NATO is no longer its only option) places Ankara much closer in style, values, interests, alignment to the revisionist powers, at a time when there is a renewed global competition between Western democracies and the authoritarian powers.

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Geopolitical interests of Russia and the South Caucasus¹⁷

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus region has exacerbated its strategic function that was previously controlled by the empire and served to its interests. "Thanks to the strategic position of the South Caucasus, the region plays very important role in world politics." [1] After becoming independent, the using and activation of the strategic function - profitable geographical location - became one of the major foreign policy goals for the young states of the region. At the same time, the Russian political goals entered into action, and those goals were in sharp conflict with the South Caucasus region's interests.

Speeches and declarations of the political leaders of Russia and political doctrines of this country constantly emphasize the significance of the South Caucasus region for Russia. The geopolitical influence in the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and the adjoining regions is strategically important for Russia and, due to it, the official Kremlin has even sharply expressed its position in its strategic doctrine related to the relation to this region and even considered the possibility of local bombing in case of necessity [2]. The need to do it is always included to the agenda due to the strategically beneficial position of the South Caucasus for Russia.

Russia, as one of the major states in the world, has its political or other ambitions in this region and manages to realize them. Therefore, the South Caucasus region is in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, the states of this region want to be independent and move to the development and progress, but on the other hand, because of the Russian ambitions, they constantly struggle to overcome

these influences from the northern neighbor. It can be said that the process rotates on a closed circle and neither with the support of the West, nor on the basis of their own forces, as the states of the region cannot independently choose the foreign policy vectors and follow their own direction. Such a situation is characteristic for the small states, but that does not mean that it is impossible to leave this circle. However, it's not easy.

It should be mentioned, that, if within the world political processes, the radical changes toward the Russia are not held, its neighboring South Caucasus region will not be able to change the reality around them. Moreover, Russia will not stop its efforts to increase its influence in the region and it is not easy to deal with this pressure. Of course, there are many authors, who express its suspect related to the whole powerfulness of Russia. For example, Hannes Adomeit thinks [3] that the Russian policy is not fully successful in the world political arena. Walter Laqueur notes that Russia now has its strength zenith [4] and that he sees black clouds on the horizon of Russia in economic, demographic and political perspective and imaginable Russian strength exists as a result of propaganda of the Russian ruling elite rather than reality. Lasha Zilpimiani also thinks: "Unlike other countries that have undeniable influence in the Caucasian zone, Russia is the only one which gradually loses its influence" [5]. But the fact is that Russia has successfully managed to rule the processes in the South Caucasus, notably by the fact of occupation, and not just by this way.

Strategic positions of Russia in the South Caucasus

Russia is constantly working and will continue to work in this direction to correct its strategic imbalance and breakthrough in the South Caucasus as a result of the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the process that is going on within the next few years. In this case it should be

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

pointed out, that the West has entered the region by transport and energy projects, and it has become a very painful topic for Russia. Official Moscow is constantly fighting with this reality. Russian special security services or military-analytical circles are constantly working on this issue and are looking for new ways and methods (although they often use old methods) to change the reality in their favor. If we consider one of the last plans and the approach of the Russian Military elite, we will see that the goal is the same, but they try to improve and diversify the methods and strategies. For example, in one of the Russian military analytical editions - "Military-industrial courier", the author explicitly says that the South Caucasus region is strategically important for Russia, and Moscow does not intend to lose control over it. The author describes the processes in the region by the following position: "As for Transcaucasia: Russia is giving up its positions in this region vigorously. Initially Georgia was allowed to establish close relations with the USA. In comparison to other countries of the Transcaucasian region, Georgia was the most integrated country into the Russian Empire, and then to the Soviet Union ... Shortly, if Russia will allow Georgia to be under full control of the USA, it will be the failure of our foreign policy"[6]. From the comment, it is clearly shown, that a threat to be under Russian orbit will permanently exist for the South Caucasus.

These processes have the other side: the countries of the South Caucasus are, at the same time, looking at two foreign policy directions and it's is considered as natural for them. During the era of the Soviet Union, these states did not have independent foreign policies, and it is seemed that for them it is usual that taking of foreign policy courses is dictated by external force. Therefore, the states of this region still have to live with the political lifestyles and methods of the Soviet period. There are still characteristic approaches to this period and until the mental shift and transformation are not made, the approach to political challenges will not be changed. Consequently, in the interest of Russia is to have influence over the South Caucasus region, but the Soviet mentality and the existence of Soviet forms of governance and management in these countries also promote Russia to successfully carry out its interests in the region. Thus, it is impossible to move towards the West by Soviet methods and mentality. This internal resistance is one of the biggest obstacles on the path of devel-

opment. In the case of overcoming this internal resistance, the South Caucasus states will be able to successfully deal with the impact of strong political actors - in the case of Russia and Turkey.

As for Russia's conflict of interest with other political actors in the South Caucasus, naturally, Turkey and the West (we mean its classic understanding: both Europe and the United States) have strategic interests to the region. The activity of the Islamic Republic of Iran is comparatively weak at this stage. However, this does not mean that Iran has rejected its interests in the Caucasus. The imposition of sanctions and the almost insurmountable political confrontation with the US do not allow Iran to activate its Caucasian policy. This helps Russia to be bolder in its actions. Russia is trying to prevent the entrance of more forces to the region and uses all means to do this. For example, the Russian State Duma responded to the US sanctions imposed on Russia by the law on May 22, 2018 [7].

However, it should be said that relations between the US and Russia are still dynamic. These two great powers still manage to negotiate with each other, despite the great contradictions. Their confrontation in the South Caucasus is dynamic: both sides are fighting for their strategic interests. But their methods of fighting are radically different. On the sidelines, the Russian Foreign Ministry has always expressed great hope that the conflict will be resolved, and Russia will do everything for it, but in reality, Russia understands differently the security than the United States. Russia is always trying to prevent the influence of other forces in the area of its strategic interests. Russia has blocked the work of the UN and the OSCE international observation missions in Georgia, and Russia does not want more observers to South Caucasus for the mediation and peacekeeping missions [8]. It can be said that Russia is the main threat to regional security and especially for the sovereignty of small countries like the South Caucasus states. Russia still justifies the use of brute force like during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. But Russia is also no less successful in the using of the methods of soft power. Even in the report of the Georgian Security Service in 2017, it is clearly pointed: "The influence of Russian special services in the country has been greatly strengthened by the use of soft power"[9].

“Soft Power” Methods of Russia in South Caucasus

In the South Caucasus, Russia is fighting with the well-adapted methods of "soft power". Russia's "soft power" instruments in the political field of the region are:

- *Religion*: One of the most important tools of the "soft power" of Russia is Christianity, which has always been conveniently used by Russia within the colonized policy.

- *Information war*: The Russian information machine has managed to find a strong base in the local Armenian and Georgian mass-media, which produce aggressive, anti-Western and anti-American information campaigns [10]. Large print media means have been established, whose anti-western rhetoric is part of a thoughtful editorial policy. For example, while discussing the Association Agreement with the European Union, their posters in the field of values and human rights emphasized the "legalization" by the West the homosexuality, incest, pedophilia and depraved lifestyle. They represent the West as a fighter against orthodoxy and, in many cases, this issue is discussed in the context of fighting against Christian Russia [11]. Russian TV channels are actively involved in this process. In the information war, the special attention is paid to the publishing of analytical articles in which the fate of Georgia and Armenia is presented by heavy forms, that those countries are under the threat of Islamic State and so on. Pro-Russian NGOs play an important role in this process. According to analysts, Spin Doctor's method is widely used within the information warfare. As authors Tatiana Zonova and Roman Reinhardt note [12], Anti-Western criticism has already become part of Russia's foreign policy since 2004 and a part of the information war.

- *Pro-Russian political parties and NGOs*: In the significant part of South Caucasian population, the most progressive ideas are not highly popular, so the parties, which are loyal to Russia in their ideological activity, prefer not to conduct openly an anti-Western propaganda, but they always are pointing the fact, that the Euro-Atlantic integration is impossible and not an achievable goal, the West will not confront with Russia for the South Caucasus small states, and the alliance with Russia or the declaration of neutrality is the best choice

to keep their identity. This is the main ideological line, which is typical for pro-Russian forces.

- *Russian investments and energy resources*: In the South Caucasus, the Russian capital [13] is mainly represented in the field of energy, oil products realization, metal production, mineral water production, banking sector, food industry [14]. Those Russian companies are functioning in the region, which have been included into the list of organization, against which the US and the EU have imposed the sanctions because of annexation of Crimea by Russia. Examples of those companies are "Lukoil", "Rosneft" and others [15].

“Soft Power” methods of Russia in the South Caucasus on the example of Georgia

If we take into account the example of Georgia, according to the official data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia [16], in 2014 Russia's investments to Georgia were about \$ 66 million, and the Russian capital took the eighth place among the main direct investors in Georgia. These data were changed in the following years: the volume of investments from Russia was \$50 million in 2015, \$42 million in 2016, but in 2017 the Russian share was significantly reduced and, that year, Russia was out of top-ten countries. According to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, Netherlands is at the first place among the investors in Georgia with 331 million dollars. However, as the Netherlands is an offshore zone, analysts think that the Dutch companies are actually standing behind the Russian capital [17].

The same organization has studied the influence of money transfers from Russia to Georgia related to the economic indicators of Georgia. According to the official data of the National Bank of Georgia, money transfers from Russia amounted to \$ 709.2 million in 2014, \$ 432 million in 2015 [18], \$ 394 million in 2016 [19], and \$ 455 million in 2017 [20]. As we can see, Russia's influence on the economic processes in Georgia is quite high.

“Soft Power” methods of Russia in the South Caucasus on the example of Armenia

Approximately the same methods are quite successfully used by Russia in Armenia. The Russian policy has managed to turn finally Armenia's foreign policy vector to Russia. But as for educational

and economic ties, Armenia has managed to break through in this regard [21]. According to official data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Armenia is ranked at the first place in the South Caucasus countries according to the works having been published in the US and Western scientific journals, and in terms of trade-economic relations with the EU, the EU is the number one partner for Armenia [22]. With this data Armenia is very proud. It should be noted that the effects of the EU economic and other types of projects were the events in Yerevan in the spring of 2018. The EU's "soft power" has prompted toward radical steps of the population, and the persistent desire for changes become the main force that could not be resisted by the political elite of Armenia. There are many interesting things related to the different interconnections. Georgian researcher Kakha Gogolashvili wrote: *"When Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan officially refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union on September 3, 2013, the impression existed that the country made its geopolitical choice in favor of Russia. Logically, the internal transformation of Armenia and the prospect of establishing it as a European state had to be finished, but the development of events showed us that neither Armenia nor the European Union refused to continue to cooperate and even deepen the relations."* [23] There is an impression that Armenia (as former president Serge Sarkisian, as well as his predecessor government [24]) has made a long-term commitment to the long-term objectives and aimed at the development of institutions in the country with the assistance of the European Union to promote self-consciousness and democratic norms and values in the population. Over the years these projects have worked very successfully: a big step towards development has been taken inside the country, and the society has been grown. The Western peaceful and progressive force has played a major role in the development of the country.

BARCIN YANNANÇ explained those processes by the existence of the following reasons: "The signs of changes of political stability in the Caucasus became an alarming signal to Armenia. The feeling of isolation due to the steps, which were taken by key regional players - Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan have been strengthened. Russia has recently made steps forward with Azerbaijan toward the improvement of the relations, while Turkey

tried to increase its own role within the Armenian-Iranian relations, which has caused the anger from the Azerbaijanian side" [25].

At that time, Armenia acted on two fronts: it was not resisting to Russia, while recognizing Moscow as the main strategic partner, and did not refuse the benefits that came from the EU. This process, of course, is unacceptable to Russia, and the Kremlin will use all the leverages to prevent the relations of Armenia with the West. Russia is not interesting in the existence neighborly progressive, democratic and western-type states for two reasons: first, because making influence of such governments and society is not easy for Russia, and second, there are possibilities that the influence of the progressive forces will be arisen in Russia. Russia is not yet ready for that. The consistent regional policy of the European Union will bring results in the South Caucasus in the long run, and the convenient base for the irreversible processes (if these processes are not already started) will be created.

"Soft Power" methods of Russia in South Caucasus on the example of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan's example is different: it means that religious differences and control over energy resources allow Azerbaijan to carry out a relatively independent foreign and domestic policy. Religious differences deprive Russia of significant leverage over Azerbaijan. Muslim religion is a public religion of a different mentality, rather than an orthodox one. However, the South Caucasus is a region where these two religions live peacefully, if their conscious use is not for political purposes. Because of religion, for Azerbaijan, not Russia but Turkey is a state whose model is acceptable for official Baku and the motto of "one nation, two states" determines close relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey. For Azerbaijan the European model of the state building is not acceptable as well. That is why its relationship with the EU (as well with Russia) is taking place in a different way than for Georgia and Armenia [26]. In this case, Azerbaijan is more a necessary partner for the West and Russia due to its energy resources, and the cooperation is mainly focused on this context. However, Russia has made many offers and proposals to Azerbaijan for the exporting its energy resources through the territory of Russia to Europe, but Azerbaijan still remains an exporter of

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energy resources through Turkey, and, if this issue is considered in a broader contexts, the US energy policy plans can be noticed. L. Zilpimiani pointed out that: *"The US activity is very straightforward and pragmatic: Washington maintains good relations with all three countries in the region, but at different levels. The US has good relations with the government of Armenia. Washington is particularly interested in the stability of Azerbaijan because this country is a major exporter of gas and oil. This relationship will become even more important when the construction of the new gas pipeline is officially announced ... This is a very delicate issue, as the project aims to diversify European energy supplies and partially decrease the dependence from Russian monopoly."* [27]

From the 90s of the last centuries, when the US-led energy companies in the South Caucasus began to realize the energy projects, the role of Azerbaijan has been somehow determined, and this country continues to play this role. The route of energy transportation via Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was supported by US President Bill Clinton, and oil and gas pipelines through those countries have proved to be viable and encouraged the world's interest toward the South Caucasus region. The issue of energy resources is a topic where

the US, Russian, Turkish and European interests cross each other. Russia considered this process in painful manner and implemented radical steps for preventing the fulfillment of the Caspian energy projects.

In August 2008, Russia-Georgia war has deteriorated the situation in South Caucasus taking into account Russia's recognition of the Tskhinvali region (so-called South Ossetia) and Abkhazia's "independence", and now it is easier for the Russian political elite to talk about "new reality created in the Transcaucasia". This so called "new reality" previews that there are five countries in the South Caucasus [28], and two of them (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) are newly formed, and Russia is the guarantor of their "independence".

If we summarize, the Russian arsenal is quite diverse, and its only goal is to control the South Caucasus region. In this process, every attempt of any external geopolitical player to establish closer relations with South Caucasus countries is considered by the Russian side as an attack on its interests, and in the automatic mode the official Kremlin activates its efforts to prevent integration of South Caucasus region in the global world.

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Where does the railway Silk Road go?¹⁸

An agreement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey on the intention to build a railway linking the three countries was signed in January 2005. Initially, the road was planned as a communication between Azerbaijan and Turkey. At that time, there was neither ambitious Chinese project One belt-one way, nor American Lazurite Corridor.

Although the idea of supporting the New Silk Road in the South Caucasus was first voiced by United States Senator Sam Brownback, the EU and the US refused to participate in the project because it was considered political. However, the officially stated reason that this project isolates Armenia is far from being the only one. The liberal part of the establishment, both in Washington and in the European capitals, was already suspicious of Turkey's desire to expand its influence on the former Soviet Union's Turkic space, and this project was considered in this plane.

The project was really political at its beginning, first of all for Azerbaijan. With its implementation, Baku solved several problems at once, which we will dwell on below, while let's just mark them. The first is the isolation of Armenia from basic transport communications. The second task is to establish a rail link with its main military-political ally and economic partner, Turkey. Third, the development of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey tripartite format for Azerbaijan. That is why, in February 2007, Azerbaijan signed a contract on construction and operation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railroad between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, both for the construction of a new section of the road and for the modernization of the existing one on its territory and in Georgia.

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How the road was built

According to an agreement signed in 2007, the Ministry of Transport of Azerbaijan has allocated a loan of \$ 775 million for this project. The loan is divided into two tranches: \$ 200 million for 25 years at 1% per annum and \$ 575 million for 25 years at 5% per annum. The loan is given to the company Marabda-Kartsahi Railway, which performs all the works on the construction of the railway and related infrastructure in Georgia. The Ministry of Economy of Georgia owns a 100% stake in this enterprise. The tasks of the company include only construction, not operation. Azerbaijani companies are involved in the construction of the road, that is, the finances are transited by the Marabda-Kartsahi company and returned to Azerbaijani subcontractors.

After the works are completed and the railway is started, a joint company will be set up to handle the operation of the road. Despite the fact that the road has already been started, no such company has been created yet, despite the fact that the road is already open, and not only in the test mode, the official opening of the road took place on October 30, 2017 at the Baku Seaport. According to the Azerbaijani side, the Georgian side deliberately delays the process of creation of this company, since after that the obligations to repay the loan come into force. The Georgian side also had claims against the Azerbaijani one: delay of the commissioning of road infrastructure and one of the \$ 94 million tranches in 2017.

The project is divided into two stages. The first involves handling loads up to 5 million tonnes a year, and the second stage, if necessary, involves upgrading and increasing this figure to 15 million tonnes a year. The first wheat train from Kazakhstan passed on BTK in November 2017. According to Ahalkalaki station chief Omar Osidze, in 2017, 70,000 tonnes of cargo were transported by BTK from Kazakhstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and China. Most of the cargo was from Kazakhstan. Accord-

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Fig.1 Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway.

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/KGNMB-and-Kars-Akhalkalaki-Baku-routes_fig1_311713311

ing to the director of the Georgian Transport Corridor Research Centre, Paati Sagareishvili, BTK is now loaded at 5%, and it will take 2-3 years to fully load the railway and establish contractual relations with its partners.

Problems and prospects of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway

The political situation in the world, which has changed since the inception of the project, has transformed the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway from a regional project into a rather promising direction for the Chinese One Belt – One Way megaproject and the American Lazurite Corridor project.

Recently, there has been an increase in container shipments through Georgian ports. In January-April 2019, container shipments through Georgian seaports increased by 37% compared to the same period of 2018, which is not a single fact but a trend in recent years. There is a noticeable trend of increasing freight traffic from China - of course, they are far behind the Russian Trans-Siberian Railways, but the trend is obvious. In particular, in 2016, 132 Chinese containers were transported

through the territory of Georgia, in 2018 - 1322, for the two months of 2019 - already 892.

The capacity of the port of Poti is 550,000 containers per year, Batumi - 100,000. In January-April 2019, 157,070 containers passed through the port of Poti, through Batumi - 25,293, which hinders the implementation of North Poti expansion projects and the construction of Anaklia port (which confirms the recent scandal with the issuance and cancellation of a permit for the construction of a new deepwater terminal in Poti, following a protest by Consortium of development of Anaklia), and Turkey plans to upgrade the railway Kars-Izmir and plans of BTK railroad tie to the Trans-Siberian Railway, which is below BTK prospects look very good.

Why does Russia need Baku-Tbilisi-Kars

Talks about the possibility of Russia joining the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project began almost a year ago. Thus, in June 2018, General Director of Russian Container Company JSC Ivan Hryshagin stated that thanks to BTK, economic relations between

Russia and the parties to the agreement could be significantly improved. He also expects that direct foreign investment will come soon as a result of connection of Europe and Asia. Experts at Russian Container Company evaluated the BTK rail route as the shortest way to deliver cargo from the Russian regions located in the Volga, Urals and Siberian Federal Districts to the Mediterranean ports of Turkey.

Initially, Russia was extremely hostile to BTK considering it a competing project. However, since 2014, the situation has changed: the annexation of Crimea and the hostilities in Donbas virtually closed the Ukrainian route of transit and delivery of Russian cargo to Europe. Thus, for Russia, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars became the most profitable transit destination for southern Europe. After attempts to open the Abkhaz railway section failed, Moscow had nothing left to do but negotiate with Baku and Ankara. A meeting in Ankara with the CEOs of the railways of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia confirmed Russia's readiness to actively participate in the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project and provide it with its own cargo. Such an agreement was concluded in May this year in Ankara, when the heads of the railway companies of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia signed a memorandum of cooperation in the field of railway transportation. The text of the memorandum was not published, but the meeting participants did not keep secrets from its results. According to Russian Railways Director General Oleg Belozorov: *"BTK is a European corridor that was bypassing the Russian Federation, but today the memorandum stipulates that this corridor will cooperate closely with Transsib."*

Georgia was rather sore about the fact that the Georgian side was not invited to this meeting. But most likely, this is not about ignoring Georgia's interests - it is practically impossible, because this road transpasses Georgia. Georgia's non-participation in the meeting of heads of railway departments is dictated by purely political pragmatism. First, given the nature of Russian-Georgian relations, difficult negotiations could be even more complicated. And secondly, for the Georgian government itself to participate in a joint project with Russia would be a disadvantage for domestic politics, especially

before the midterm elections to the municipalities and parliament that took place in May this year. This election was fundamentally important to the Georgian authorities, and they did not want to lose points in accusations of collusion with Russia.

Why the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project became relevant to Turkey

One of the shortcomings of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project was initially called the underdevelopment of railway transport in Turkey. The main reason for this situation was the presence of a powerful "car lobby" in this country. Turkish trucking companies were leaders not only in their country but also in Europe. The White Paper - Transport, issued by the European Commission in 2011, particularly emphasized the priority of rail transport over road transport. This document is a roadmap for the development of the European Union transport system. Of the ten priorities set by the EU, six are directly related to the railway transport. One of the goals is worded as follows: 30% of road transportation over a distance of more than 300 km should go to railway by 2030 and 50% by 2050. The reason is climate change and the fight for ecology. Rail is considered more environmentally friendly than road transport. Since 2011, TEN-T-funded Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund have facilitated the construction of high-speed rail lines. In fact, a pan-European market for rail transport was created.

In Turkey, it is well understood that the current state of affairs threatens to lose the status of transit country. A large-scale program for the modernization of the Turkish railways has begun since that time. In February 2015, Turkey officially announced the launch of the Grand Istanbul Tunnel, a high-speed rail link that connects Asian and European parts of the country for the cargo traffic. By that time, a Marmarai tunnel had been built for passenger transportation. To this should be added the construction project of the high-speed Edirne-Kars highway and the recently announced project for the modernization of the Kars-Izmir railway with access to the Mediterranean. Turkey is also interested in extending Baku-Tbilisi-Kars to Na-

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khichevani in order to further connect Nakhichevani with its eastern regions. This project is not so much economic but political in nature, so it is considered with great caution in Baku.

However, there are risks here as well. The aggravation of Turkey's relations with the European Union, and especially with the US, threatens grave consequences for the Turkish economy, which is now far from being in the best shape. Add to this the political tension and traditional distrust that exists between China and Turkey. Erdogan is very fond of large-scale infrastructure projects, but whether he will be able to implement them in the current environment remains questionable, at least for now.

Questions about building a new branch on the Kars-Akhalkalaki section

A much more complicated issue is the laying of an additional 1520 mm Soviet standard railway line from Kars to Akhalkalaki. On May 6, 2019, the CEOs of the railways of the Russian Federation, Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed on the possibility of constructing a second railway track with a width of 1520 mm on the section of Akhalkalaki-Kars with a length of 76 km through the territory of Turkey and the logistics terminal in Kars. This was stated by the CEOs of railways in Turkey and Russia. The logistics centre in Kars is being built jointly with the Azerbaijani railway. According to expert Rauf Radzhabov, annually the centre will be able to process 412 thousand tons of cargo. The logistics centre is expected to have 16 km of railway lines and will be connected to the Kars-Erzurum railway.

These statements have raised grave concern and public outrage in Georgia, and Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has hastened to reassure the public. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project is of strategic importance for Georgia. The Prime Minister expressed the opinion that the meeting was under different perspective, because under the agreement between Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, the new player can only join the project with the consent of all three countries. *"It's the terri-*

tory of Georgia where will be a connecting station of so-called European Standard and the railroad of our standard, and it will be in Akhalkalaki. No other option is being discussed," Bakhtadze said.

There are a number of problems behind these statements. Russia's decision to join the project means an increase in cargoes to which BTK route is simply not ready. The condition of the Russian side is to ensure the reliability of this transport artery, which either requires the development of an existing hub in Akhalkalaki, or the construction of a new hub in Kars. It is clear that the Turkish side is more interested in building a new hub in its territory. In addition, it is fundamentally important for the Russian side to minimize Georgia's influence on the route. It would be logical for Azerbaijan to take over the agreement with the Georgian side. Moreover, according to the project, the Georgian section of the road will be jointly managed by Georgia and Azerbaijan. At one time, this was done to prevent the appearance of Armenian cargo. However, given the recent tensions in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations, a powerful Russian business lobby inside Georgian authorities is likely to settle the issue, and politically this issue can be used to further worsen Azerbaijan's image in Georgia. Of course, the decision to build a new railway line from Kars to Akhalkalaki will face protests in Georgian society and will be used by the opposition to criticize the authorities. *"We have nothing to be angry about Azeris and Turks, we are exactly where Ivanishvili has defined us,"* commented the former president and actual leader of Georgia's main opposition party, Mikhail Saakashvili, as he responded to the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway memorandum.

Chinese megaproject

For China, the land part of the One Belt - One Way megaproject was political from the beginning. It was in response to the New Silk Road initiative, first publicly voiced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her speech on 20 July 2011 in Chennai, India. It was about linking India, Pakistan and Afghanistan with Central Asia and beyond with Europe. The US administration at the time seri-

ously regarded India as a counterweight to China's growing economic power. In fact, it was China's continental isolation project. Just over a year after Clinton's initiative, more than two million publications on Chinese roots of the Great Silk Road appeared in the Chinese press. In the fall of 2013, during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the One Belt - One Way initiative. Initially, Beijing did not consider the so-called middle route as an important element of its megaproject. It is clear that the main focus was on shipping. Sea transportation is the main economic component of the One Belt - One Way megaproject. From a political and security point of view, the land part is much more important than the marine one. It should not be forgotten that maritime communications are under the control of the United States Navy. And land transit from China to Europe is extremely important for the development of such a problematic region for Beijing as the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous District.

The northern (via Russia) and especially the southern (via Pakistan and Iran) routes were much more attractive. The Russian route is loaded almost completely and needs modernization. In Pakistan and Iran, infrastructure projects have been implemented that have created modern communications. It was then that Iran launched its Shiah Corridor project with access to the Mediterranean. The Syrian civil war made it virtually impossible to implement the Iranian Shiah corridor project, so the value of the middle route, which includes Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, is also increasing for China. It should be borne in mind that to transport its goods by the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, China may use not only transit through Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea, but also after the construction of the North-South corridor between Azerbaijan and Iran (Kazvin-Resht railway), it will have the opportunity to connect Baku-Tbilisi-Kars to the southern route of the One Belt - One Way project through Pakistan and Iran.

At a recent meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang I and Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze, the Chinese minister said

China welcomed Georgia's desire to be part of the One Belt - One Way project. What is behind this general protocol phrase, the parties did not specify, but China's interest is clear. It is so obvious that at the meeting of the United States Secretary of State and the Prime Minister of Georgia held in Washington on June 14, 2019, Mike Pompeo expressed concern to the Georgian Prime Minister about the increased influence of China and Russia in Georgia.

Some conclusions

From the above, it is clear that Russia's connection to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway can make this project very profitable, especially for Turkey and Azerbaijan. Georgia will also receive its share of profits, but any economic effect has its political cost. The political cost of joining the Trans-Siberian Railway to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is that Georgia freely or unwittingly helps the Kremlin to minimize the economic losses associated with the Donbas war and annexation of Crimea. The Russian side's involvement in the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project is nothing more than a detour of Ukraine.

In addition, if Georgia agrees to Russia's participation in this project, it will mean that the so-called "One Belt - One Road", which passes through the countries of Central Asia, the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, becomes out of date.

And most importantly, a new format of Russia-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey is being created under this project, at least as wildly political as it may seem. And the fact that Russia will try to expand this format does not cause any doubt, especially since China will be interested in this project as well.

Recent developments in Georgia have cast doubt on the possibility of the scenario described above, but to think that Moscow would easily refuse it would be, to say the least, wrong. And the fact that the authorities of the Russian Federation did not impose sanctions on Georgia after such "terrible offences", which came one by one is yet another proof to it.

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The Kuban People's Republic: History and Our Time¹⁹

Ukrainians in the Kuban

Historically, the Ukrainian Kuban (Kuban region) geographically includes the Krasnodar region, Adygea, and a part of the territories of Rostov and Stavropol regions, and Karachayevo-Cherkessia of the contemporary Russian Federation.

Tmutorokan Principality geographically located in the Kuban River delta and on the Taman peninsula was the “overseas ownership” of the Kyivan Rus of X-XI centuries. Colonization of Kuban was started by Ukrainian Cossacks in the late XVIII century.

September 7, 1792, the first detachment of Cossacks (3.847 people) under the command of Colonel of the Black Sea Cossack Cohort, Sava Bilyi, landed on Taman. Black Sea Cossack Cohort was formed on the initiative of the Russian courtier Hryhoryi Potemkin, partially of the Cossacks, who did not join Zadunayska Sich, formed after the destruction of the Zaporizska Sich on the orders of Catherine II. They were settled on the lands between the Buh and the Dniester. As those territories were claimed by the Moscow nobles, Cossacks started to request for the new lands.

The first detachment of migrants to Kuban, which had long been under the control of the Ottoman Port, numbered 3.847 Cossacks with the guns on 51 boats coming across the Sea of Azov. Three more detachments were moving overland. There were about 18 thousand people in total. Ukraini-

ans settled along the Kuban River, forming the usual huts (Kuren) and using the old Zaporizhzhia names (Kaniv, Uman, Baturyn, Pereyaslav, Poltava, etc.). Subsequently, the Russian government renamed the Kurens to villages by analogy with the Don Cossacks.

In total, the first wave of migrants, which lasted for several years, included 25.000 people. The government encouraged the resettlement both to colonize the new lands in Kuban and reduce the number of Cossacks, acquiring control over them.

The active migration of Ukrainians to Kuban continued in the next decades. In the late XIX century they accounted for almost 50% of the population [1].

Kuban's attempt to become a part of Ukraine. The Paris Peace Conference

In 2018, 100 years since the failure of Kuban's attempts to join Ukraine was marked. The proclamation of the Independent Kuban People's Republic in 1918 and its attempt to federally join Ukraine was a unique historical fact that has been largely overlooked and not yet used by Ukraine.

On February 16, 1918, the Kuban Legislative Council announced the creation of an Independent Kuban People's Republic. A few days later, on February 20, during a meeting of the majority of the members of the aforementioned body, a resolution on Kuban's unification with the Ukrainian People's Republic on a federal basis was made. At the time of the adoption of the aforementioned decision, a fierce armed struggle against Bolsheviks had already taken place in Kuban, and the local Cossack leaders knew about the proclamation of the IV Universal of Ukraine's independence by the

¹⁹ The publication was prepared within the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support from the Black Sea Trust Fund, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust Fund or its partners.

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Central Council. However, the proclamation of the Independent Kuban People's Republic became only a formal act. On the one hand, it was hostile perceived by the White Guard majors who then formed their troops on the Don, and on the other – a large part of the population ended up on the side of the Bolsheviks. This was the main reason for the fiasco of the Kuban independence idea and its reunification with Ukraine.

Before 1920s Ukrainian Cossacks, peasants and local mountain peoples lived in Kuban. As of 1914, there were 1.339 million Cossacks, 1.591 million immigrants from other provinces (peasants, or “gardeners”, as they were called by Cossacks),

and 50 thousand mountaineers (Cherchessian) lived there [2].

101 years ago, during the Paris Peace Conference the results of the First World War were summed up. Ukraine was represented by a joint delegation of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Western Ukrainian People's Republic. Despite the fact, that due to internal disputes the Ukrainian delegation has soon split, and there was no place on the political map of Europe for an independent Ukraine at that time, an interesting artefact of the event is a map, with which the Ukrainian delegation has come to negotiate, on which the Ukrainian Republic would include Kuban, based on the habitats of the ethnic Ukrainians (see Figure 1).



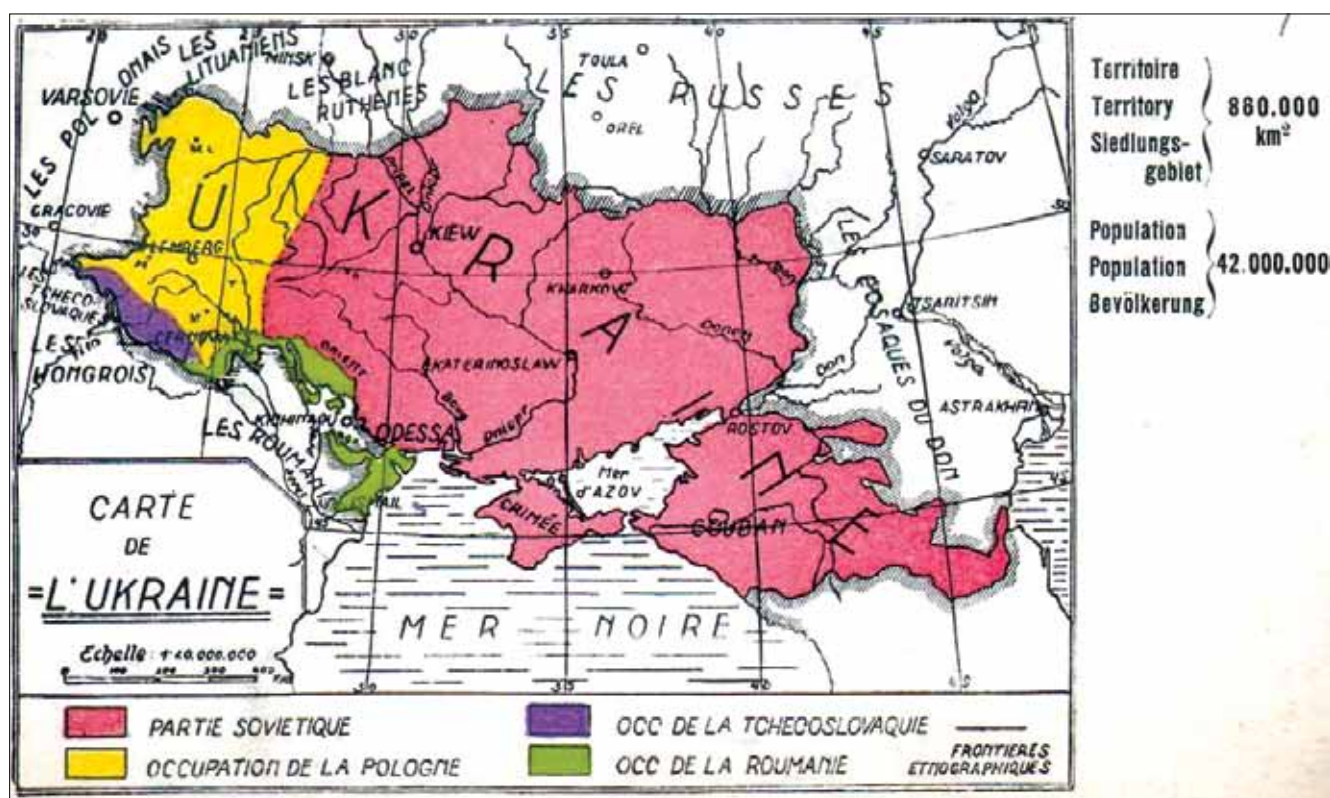
Fig. 1. Map of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-1920

Lands inhabited by the ethnic Ukrainians. The map is included in the document “*Mémoire sur l'indépendance de l'Ukraine présenté à la Conférence de la paix par la délégation de la république ukrainienne*” (“A Memo on the Independence of Ukraine Presented by The Delegation of the Ukrainian Republic at a Peace Conference”) issued in Paris in 1919.

The map shows the Ukrainian republic territorial plan – maximum requirements of the UPR Delegation, based on the vision experts of Hetman Skoropadsky times, considering the ZUNR declared borders. The main criterion for inclusion into the territory of Ukraine was the presence of the Ukrainian ethnic majority there, recorded by

censuses and ethnographic maps. Another criterion was consideration of the existing administrative boundaries, strategic and economic importance of the adjacent territories for Ukraine [3].

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The eradication of the Ukrainian Kuban

Based on the results of the all-Union census in 1926, 3.1 million of Ukrainians lived in the Northern Caucasus (37.1% of the population); in particular in the Krasnodar region - 103 thousand (83.9%), Tahanrog district – 192 thousand (71.5%), in the Kuban district – 915 thousand (61.5%), and Don district – 498 thousand (44.0%) lived.

On the initiative of Mr. Mykola Skrypnyk, Chair of the People's Secretariat of the Ukrainian SSR, Politburo of the CC CP(b)U in May 1927 raised with Moscow the issue of joining the Ukrainian-border territories of the Soviet Russia where the Ukrainians were the majority of the population to the Soviet Ukraine. Moscow's response was negative. Then Skrypnyk in May 1928 talked about the Ukrainization of the regions of the North Caucasus, where the Ukrainian population prevailed. Following Moscow's approval, the leaders of the region approved a three-year plan for the Ukrainization of thirty-seven districts, mostly with Ukrainian population. Local Ukrainians en-

thusiastically supported the USSR government's efforts to prevent their denationalization, and the measures envisaged by the plan were carried out with surplus, that stunned Stalin. The Kremlin could not refuse the policy of Ukrainization in the UkrSSR; the unrooted authorities acquired the occupational nature, and did not become "native" to the Ukrainians, as the Secretary General stated. As the titular nation of the Union republic, the citizens of Ukraine should have had the signs of sovereignty. But Stalin decided to stop immediately the Ukrainianization of the regions of the Russian Federation. The escalation of the grain-related repressions created a situation where this action was unnoticed.

On December 10, 1932, when the meeting of the Politburo of the CC AUCP(b) discussed the issue of grain harvesting in the Ukrainian SSR, in the North Caucasus and in the Western region, Stalin suddenly left the topic and blamed the main promoter of Ukrainianization in the Russian regions and reunification of the Kuban and UkrSSR

Mykola Skrypnyk of relations with nationalist elements. The resolution of CC AUCP(b) adopted by Politburo "On Grain Harvesting in Ukraine, the North Caucasus and in the Western Region" dated December 14, 1932 was not so much related to the harvesting as the Kremlin's national policy. Attention of the North Caucasian Regional Committee and Regional Executive Committee was drawn to the fact that *"frivolous, non following the cultural interests of the population, not the Bolsheviks 'Ukrainization' of almost half of the regions of the North Caucasus in the full absence of control over Ukrainization of schools and printing by the regional authorities has given the legal form to the enemies of the Soviet power to organize resistance to the activities and tasks of the Soviet Power by the kulaks, officers, Cossack re-emigrants, Kuban council members and etc."* The resolution demanded an "immediate translation of the North Caucasus documents of the Soviet and cooperative bodies of "Ukrainized" districts, and the published Ukrainian newspapers and magazines from Ukrainian into Russian as more comprehensible for Kubans, to prepare and transfer school teaching to Russian language by autumn." The following day, the resolution of the CC AUCP(b) and the PCC (People's Commissars Council) of the USSR on prohibition of the Ukrainianization in the Far East, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and other regions of the Soviet Union.

The Kuban was terrorized to starve in 1932-1933 simultaneously with Ukraine. The punitive action of the Stalinist regime there had two purposes: first, to end the "Ukrainian question" in the North Caucasus once and for good (during the subsequent censuses all local natives were recorded as Russians, not Ukrainians); secondly, to punish the peasants for sabotage of the grain harvesting and autumn sowing campaign, to make them work in the state-created collective farms.

The Holodomor in the Kuban

The Holodomor Research Institute describes the course of the dramatic events of 1930s in Kuban. On November 2, 1932, the Head of the Department of Agriculture of the Central Committee of the all-Union Communist Party (Bol-

sheviks), Lazar Kahanovich visited Kuban. There the meetings were held and a plan for grain harvesting was worked out. After these meetings, on November 4, 1932, a decree was released. This obliged the authorities to "to break the sabotage of grain harvesting by kulak counterrevolutionary groups, destroy the resistance of rural communists, who actually became the agents of sabotage."

A martial law was introduced in the Kuban. The system of "black boards" was introduced. In each village a "black board" hung with a register of villages that did not perform the harvesting plan. These villages found themselves in a food blockade. The transportation of goods to cooperative and state shops stopped completely, and those Cossacks, who miraculously survived, were moved to Siberia. Thus, the "black list" of the villages included Poltavska Medvedivska, Urupska, Umanska, Nezamasovska, Temyrhosovska, Ladozka, Novorozhdestvenska, Novoderevyanivska, Staroderevuankivska, Starokorsunskaya, Staroshcherbynivska, Platyryivska, Bokovska and Meshkovska villages. Thus, the population of 30 Kuban districts, among which were Nevinnomyskiy, Slovyansky, Bryukhovetsky, Pavlovsky, Ust-Labinskiy, Kropotkinsky, Novooleksandrivskiy, Yeiskiy, Krasnodarskiy, Kurganskiy, Korenovskiy, Otradnenskiy, Kanevskiy, Tikhoretskiy, Tymoshevskiy, and Novopokrovskiy were doomed to a terrible death. The Holodomor was accompanied by terror: punitive detachments of OGPU (Unified State Political Department) veterans - Latvians, Magyars, and Chinese, who were acting as conquerors in the occupied territory – were introduced into the mentioned areas. In the Tikhoretska village alone, about 600 Cossacks were shot in three days. Population of many villages was completely moved to Siberia. According to various sources, 50 to 200 thousand people were deported from Kuban at that time.

The tactics and strategy of Holodomor were obvious: to tame the Ukrainians, to deprive Cubans who speak Ukrainian of bread, to apply the social reservation regime (the black boards). In fourteen districts of the area, according to a transcript of the meeting with L. Kahanovich, the farmers lacked

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the grain, livestock die-off occurred, half of arable land was not sown. Moscow emissaries who came with L. Kahanovich, using the terms “Kuban” and “Kuban districts” also demanded the fulfillment of grain harvesting tasks, overcoming of the “Kronstadt phenomena”, that is, the resistance movement. L. Kahanovich suggested “to go offensive”, suspend goods delivery, apply “black boards”, justified the expediency of “great victims”.

The 1920s are a short period of Ukrainian national revival in Kuban. In 1926, in Krasnodar the Red Newspaper was published in Krasnodar in the Ukrainian language, which until 1927 was the only Ukrainian newspaper in the RSFSR. In the second half of the 1920s, the literary-artistic Ukrainian magazine *New Way* was published in Kuban. It was later renamed to “Leninsky Way”. But the Soviet authorities were not interested in preserving Ukrainian Kuban culture. Against the Ukrainian population the repressions started. In an effort to reduce it, the Russian Bolsheviks performed collectivization and provoked famine. In 1932, all

Ukrainian schools were closed in Kuban, Ukrainian books publishing ceased. The Ukrainian language was seen as a manifestation of “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism.” Thus, the Ukrainian national revival in Kuban was short. In 1926, Ukrainian ethnic group was still the biggest in Kuban, it included 45.48% of the population. During 1897-1926, this number in the region increased by 73.95%. In Kuban and Black Sea districts, they accounted for 61.48 and 35.66% of the population respectively. Significant part of the Ukrainians was in Armavir (32.27%) and Maikop (29.73%) districts. The post-war Kuban is a Russified region, where Ukrainians from over three million people number 145 000.

The Kubanian Ukraine:

A destroyer of the “Russian world” ideology

The revival of the national memory of the Ukrainian Kuban is toxic for Russia. A number of European cartographic products of the early XX century clearly demonstrate, which lands were Kuban and Crimea (see. Fig. 2, 3 and 4).



Fig. 3. The German map of Ukraine of the early 1918
Source: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29711978.html>

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This memory destroys the ideology of the “Russian world” from within, and such a move can be considered a mirrored response of Russia to its aggressive actions protecting the Russian-speaking population outside the Russian Federation, a measure required to strengthen the political subjectivity of Ukraine and the leading role of Kyiv as a

spiritual centre. The modern informational war is a war for the consciousness of the population, its national identity. Thus, the revival of the memory of the Ukrainian Kuban could become a powerful strike of Kyiv in response to attempts to foist “the Russian World” and so the “Novorosiya” projects.



Fig. 4. Ethnographic survey map of Ukraine, published in Vienna in 1916.

Author: Stepan Rudnitsky

Source: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29711978.html>

The Kremlin is trying to ruin relations between Ukraine and the Kubans. Thus, even during the conflict around the Tuzla Island the main role in the anti-Ukrainian provocation was entrusted to the regional administration of the Krasnodar Region of the Russian Federation, and in 2014 aggression in Crimea and Donbas the units of the Kuban Cossacks took an active part. Interestingly, that the so-called Kuban Cossacks first entered Donbas in May 2014, and the regular army units unmarked followed them.

Russia's war in Eastern Ukraine has led to an active flow of displaced persons from Donbas since spring 2014. Krasnodar region ranks second in the Russian Federation after the Rostov region in terms of the number of Ukrainian citizens admitted. As noted in the Press Service of the Chair of the Regional Administration, as of March 27,

2015, there were 41,332 IDPs from Ukraine registered in the region [5]. Considering the ethnic composition of the population and the historical past of the region, the increased migration from Ukraine is the point for the Russian authorities to see the threat of “socio-economic imbalance and changes of the ethnic-confessional composition of the population” [6]: “Given the border position of the region and the proximity of NATO countries, it is risky to create the enclaves of new diasporas, especially in the strategically important areas of the Black Sea coast, transport and pipeline routes. It is desirable to stimulate the dispersed placement of migrants...” [7]. For these reasons, the dispersed resettlement tactics in remote regions of Russia is applied to the forced migrants from Ukraine to Kuban.

Suppressed attempt of “Kuban Spring”

In Russia there is a growing sentiment directed to decentralization from Moscow. In this process Ukraine plays the role of the centre of gravity for its historical lands – Kuban, Belhorod, and Voronezh regions.

Decentralization movements in Kuban are actively suppressed by intelligence services. In November 2017, Kuban Liberation Committee announced the creation of a sovereign state – the Kuban People's Republic (KPR). The official portal of KPR declared the beginning of the struggle for the local elections, after which the Kuban Liberation Committee will be an executive body in the republic. At the same time, it emphasized the need for good-neighbourly, equitable relations with Ukraine, with which KNR was linked by “historical, cultural and mental ties”. Another impetus for the proclamation of the republic was “March for the Kuban Federalization” under the all-Russian slogan “No more Moscow feeding”, initiated by the activist, Daria Polyudova, in 2014.

In light of the public interest, caused by the signing of the “Steinmeier formula” with imposing an imperative imposition of local elections in the Donbas on Ukraine, which compliance with the international standards Ukraine will not actually be able to control, it is reasonable to bringing to at least the information space, not to mention the political agenda, the facts of the internal struggle in Russia at the regional level – struggle for local elections on the example of Buryatia, KPR, Idel-Urals, Tatarstan, etc.

In some regions of the Russian Federation – Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Tuva – the cause of decentralization movements is a national factor. In others – Komi, Yakutia, Yamalo-Nenetskiy and Khanty-Mansiyskiy region and Taimyr district these are conditioned by a desire of the local elite to earn on mineral resources' development independently [8].

In 2018 before Putin elections Russian Intelligence Services managed to suppress the first act of Kuban spring. Then, in the ranks of Kuban Cossacks the split occurred. It is still not overcome, but

not advertised. Kuban Cossack Army on the Glory of the Kuban portal urged the Russians to sabotage the presidential election in the Russian Federation, declaring support for the Kuban People's Republic: *“It's time to stop the bloody massacre with the fraternal Ukrainian people. Everybody should know about the attitude of the regime to the people of Russia, who were cheated, exhorted and threatened to target Ukraine and Syria, who are buried as dogs in nameless graves after death. Claims on the support of Kuban Liberation Committee and Kuban Peoples Republic! Only complete independence from the Kremlin will allow creating democratic state. We call upon you, brothers Cossacks and all Russian residents to support our protest against the “Putin regime”! If you wish to show you are free men – boycott the cynic act called “Putin Re-elections for Another Term”.* One of the addresses was the signed by Nikolai Kozitsyn, the leader of the International Union of Citizen Associations “Vsevelykoe Donskoye Voysko” (Great Don Troops), who supported Kuban People's Republic and Putin elections' boycott and then disowned his words under the pressure from the Intelligence services. This event demonstrated a split in the Kuban Cossacks environment into the radical and the pro-Putin wing [9].

Kuban today

In sectoral structure of the regional GDP of Krasnodar region transport and agriculture are leading. The ports of Novorossiysk and Tuapse provide transshipment of 75% of dry cargoes passing through the ports of southern Russia, serving one third of Russia's oil exports. In the overall economic concept of Russia, Kuban is distinguished as the most important agricultural region, which ranks first in Russia. Krasnodar area is a leader of the gross grain harvest (10% of all-Russia's) and sugar beet (17.3%), and one of the leading producers of sunflower seeds (15%) and grape wines (37%).

In 2018, Kuban was included in the top-10 regions, which form more than half of a regional gross domestic product of Russia, i.e. one of the ten largest donor regions by its contribution in the economy. This was stated in the forecast of

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the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation by 2024.

By results of 2017, internal regional product of Krasnodar region increased to 2.352 trillion rubles, by this indicator the region ranked fifth in Russia in terms of GDP. Only Moscow, Moscow region, Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Region and St. Petersburg ranked above [10].

While the region is in the top-10 of the largest donors to Russia's economy, the tax burden on the region and the Kremlin's ambitions are increasing. Therefore, this situation is currently contributing decentralization moods in the region. For example, in an article of the Russian media resource "Tzargrad" [11] it is noted, that the issue of uneven regional development keeps pace with the fruitless attempts to diversify the Russian economy. The power in the Kremlin recognizes that the main threat to economic safety is the uneven spatial development of Russian and "increase of differentiation of the regions and municipalities." Such formulations are contained in the Country Security Strategy. Here we just want to remind the slogan of the all-Russian rally "No more Moscow Feeding."

We can arbitrarily praise the donor regions, but it does not change the situation in the regions with difficult economic situation. Top-5 most "expensive" for budget regions does not

change for more than a year and they account for more than a third of all subsidies. Among the "lucky" ones in 2018 was the Republic of Dagestan, which received more than 9% of all subsidies. Yakutia ranked second with 44 billion rubbles. The third largest grant of more than 39.3 billion rubles went to Kamchatka. The annexed Crimea is also subsidized. In 2018, the share of the Russian federal budget subsidies to Crimea increased from 81 to 126 billion rubbles and exceeded 70% of the profitable share of the Crimean budget. [12]

Thus, the profits of economically viable regions go to regions of poor governance and management, and therefore, the first as well as the second have no incentive to develop their own economy, which is another drop of oil to the fire of independence sentiment in the developed resource-rich regions of the Russian Federation - Siberia, Far East, and Kuban. Although the current political situation and scrupulous control by the intelligence services provide no reason to speak of serious transformations within Russia, but national movements of the Russian Federation peoples continue even under pressure. Kuban People's Republic, even representing local patriotic initiative today, has a real historical background and economic basis for the existence and may in time of political turbulence turn into separate geopolitical player, the foundations for which are already laid by the poorly thought regional policies of the Kremlin.

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Venezuela: What is Russia looking for in the distant land?

The interests of the Russian Federation (RF) in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) can be roughly divided into two groups – political-military and business-economic. Commonly, it is believed that the first one significantly outweighs the last one, given that according to official figures and statements of the Russian officials, the economic activity of the Russian Federation in Venezuela is largely unprofitable. However, with respect to the second group, there are significant proportions of such activities, the revenues of which remain in the “shadow”.

The first group is primarily conditioned by Venezuela's strategic geographical location: in relative proximity to the United States, almost in the centre of the Western Hemisphere, with access to the Caribbean, a fairly large area (916,000 sq.km.), located mainly in the continental Southern America, and numerous islands. It borders with the first and third largest countries in the region - Brazil and Colombia. All this makes Venezuela attractive to the Russian Federation to create the image of counterbalance to the US in the Western Hemisphere and deploy military contingent, armaments and military equipment in the soft underbelly of the United States, if the need arises.

Among the interests related to the second group and primarily related to the production of Venezuelan mineral resources and to a lesser extent with trade, there are several main interests that the Russian Federation implements in both legal and illegal ways: “black gold” (oil and petroleum products), “yellow gold” (real gold, diamonds, bauxites, and other valuable minerals) and “white gold” (cocaine).

The interest in Venezuelan oil, which is the main legal economic interest of the Russian Federation in Venezuela today, is explained not only by the special properties of the Venezuelan brand, but

also by the strategic advantages that large-scale access to this resource can be provided in the OPEC country. First of all, according to some Russian experts (including the partner of the consulting company RusEnergy M. Krutikhin [1] and others), it is an opportunity to influence the formation of the world price policy in the energy sphere. Russia has recently expanded its presence in the Venezuelan oil industry, taking advantage of the fact that, due to the US sanctions and unfavourable internal situation in Venezuela, the companies from other countries have withdrawn from its market. In addition, the Russian Rosneft was licensed to produce natural gas for the next 30 years, and all produced gas is exported.

As for yellow gold, its official significance in Russian-Venezuelan relations is only starting to grow, as amid the political crisis in the country in December 2018, Russia was able to obtain the rights to develop deposits in the National Strategic Development Zone “Mining Arch of Orinoco”, where huge reserves of gold and other minerals (copper, diamonds, coltan, iron, bauxite, etc.) are concentrated. Although there is no direct evidence yet of Russia's involvement in illegal purchases of gold, diamonds and other minerals in Venezuela, this is possible [2].

Similarly, there is no specific evidence of Russia's involvement in the illicit trade of “white gold” – cocaine. There are reports of detention of some Russian citizens during cocaine transportation, including by Venezuelan authorities [3]. The United States and other states have repeatedly accused the current Nicolas Maduro's government of trafficking cocaine, linking it to the activities of illegal left-wing armed forces in the neighbouring Colombia - the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) [4]. Regarding the last one, it should be noted that, at the moment, in paral-

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lel with the significant revitalization of the Russian Federation's activity in Venezuela and three years after the peace agreement with the Colombian government was concluded in 2016, some of the leaders of this group announced their return to arms [5].

In addition, the activities of the Russian Federation in Venezuela are not deprived of a reverse side – corruption schemes of various types, the realization of which becomes possible and simplified by significant distance from the Russian Federation: sales of overpriced goods, including weapons, kickbacks, use of shell companies and persons, bribery of officials, concealment of real profits, misuse of money, money laundering, etc.

Trade and economic cooperation

1. Oil production and supplies

Venezuela's heavy oil deposits are located mostly in the oil belt of the Orinoco River. According to data released by the Venezuelan government, proven oil reserves in the country reach 300.878

billion barrels [7] that makes them the largest in the world. Proven gas reserves amount to 5.64 trillion cubic meters [8].

Most of Rosneft's projects [9] in Venezuela are related to the development of heavy bitumen oil reserves. These are the projects implemented with the Venezuelan state oil and gas company PDVSA within the joint ventures (see Figure 1):

- Petromonagas is an integrated project, Rosneft's share is 16.67%;
- Petroperija is a brown field, the share of Rosneft is 40%;
- Boqueron is a brown field, the share of Rosneft is 26.67%;
- Petromiranda is a new integrated project, Rosneft's share is 32%;
- Petrovictoria is a new integrated project, Rosneft's share is 40%.

The service of the joint production companies is performed by Perforrosven – a joint service company.



Fig. 1. Production projects of Rosneft in Venezuela.

Russia has used favourable political relations with the Venezuelan government to strengthen its presence in the country's oil industry. However, Russian companies working there have encountered numerous difficulties. In 2009, the Russian consortium of five leading oil companies – Lukoil, Surgutneftegaz, Rosneft, TNK-BP and Gazpromneft – committed to invest \$16.2 billion to develop the Junin-6 oil block in the bitumen sands of the Orinoco Belt, in the framework of a large-scale joint Petromiranda project. The agreement included the payment of \$ 600 million bonus to PDVSA. In addition, the Russian oil company Rosneft, as a member of the Junin-6 consortium, subsequently contracted with PDVSA for the rights to the Karabobo-2 unit, paying a royalty of \$ 1 billion, while Russia's Lukoil contracted to the Junin-3 block.

However, like other foreign companies in Venezuela, the Russians ones faced inefficient PDVSA management and suffered losses. As a result, in 2013, Surgutneftegaz and Lukoil left the project. Rosneft bought out their shares, and the shares of other Russian companies, which left the Orinoco Belt, and thus concentrated its activities in Venezuela's oil sector. In July 2014, Russian expansion continued with Rosneft's acquisition of Venezuelan assets of Weatherford International [10].

In December 2017, Rosneft's subsidiary received a license to develop the Patao and Méjillones offshore **gas fields** in Venezuela for a 30-year period with the right to export LNG gas. Geological reserves of the field are estimated as 180 billion cubic meters. During 2018, the company carried out works on the evaluation of drilling, development and field arrangement options [11].

2. US sanctions on Venezuela

The United States imposed first sanctions on the Venezuelan government in 2015. The sanctions, which have been imposed since then, have been directed mainly against the individuals and companies associated with Maduro administration. They were significantly expanded on January 28, 2019. The US Treasury Department has blocked all PDVSA assets and investments that are

subject to the US jurisdiction and prohibited the US individuals and entities the transactions with the company. Initially, the intention was to limit the direct impact on non-US citizens engaged in non-US trade. However, clarifications, made by the US administration in March and April 2019, included warnings that non-US citizens dealing with PDVSA may be subject to sanctions even in the absence of connection to US.

On March 11, the US Treasury Department included Eurofinance Mosnarbank to the sanction list [12] due to the services of bypassing the US financial sanctions provided by PDVSA. The bank also helped issuing El Petro Venezuelan crypto currency. All assets of a credit institution in the US jurisdiction were frozen, the US natural and legal persons were prohibited to have contracts or any other transactions with this bank.

The mentioned Russian-Venezuelan bank was established in 2009 to finance the joint projects (shareholders are Gazprombank, VTB, Fonden S.A. – Venezuelan National Development Fund) with the offices in Moscow, Caracas, Beijing, Nevinnomyssk, Pyatigorsk, Stavropol and Yaroslavl. 49.99% of the shares are owned by the Venezuelan state-owned Fonden S.A.; Russian VTB and Gazprombank in Eurofinance Mosnarbank owned blocking shares (25% + 1 share each), which they transferred to the Federal Property Management Agency free of charge after the imposition of sanctions [13].

The sanctions imposed on Venezuela in January 2019 were subsequently clarified. The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has issued general licenses for certain transactions and activities related to PDVSA and its subsidiaries, some of them for limited time. OFAC initially authorized operations with PDVSA's US subsidiaries – PDV Holding Inc. (PDVH) and Citgo Holding, Inc. – until July 27, 2019; in March 2019, the general license for these entities was extended for 18 months. At the same time, OFAC authorized these and other US companies to import PDVSA oil by April 28, 2019. However, the payments should have been made to a blocked American account. Initially, OFAC authorized several US companies, operat-

ing in Venezuela joint projects with PDVSA, including Chevron, to continue operations until July 27, 2019. This permit was subsequently extended until October 25, 2019.

All this was intended to prevent the emergence of the fuel crisis and the bankruptcy of PDVSA. As a result, Rosneft, in particular, could take over Citgo's share.

In March, US Secretary of State M. Pompeo accused Rosneft, which continued to buy oil from PDVSA, in violating sanctions imposed in January 2019 against Venezuela [14]. In response, Rosneft, in its statement [15], called these allegations “baseless” and stressed that it conducted only commercial activities in Venezuela without interfering with politics, and that those activities and supplies were carried out in accordance with international norms and treaties concluded before the introduction of the sanctions. In addition, Rosneft's lawyers referred to the PDVSA oil import permit mentioned above.

The sanctions were intensified on April 5 and 12, 2019, when the operating companies and vessels, involved in the transportation of Venezuelan oil to Cuba, came under them. A further intensification of sanctions took place on August 5, 2019 – the concept of “Venezuela government” was extended to PDVSA. Secondary sanctions (financial and visa restrictions) were also imposed on the US citizens assisting or supporting N. Maduro's Government, which could lead to US sanctions against the foreign energy companies, joint ventures with PDVSA of which kept Venezuela's oil industry afloat.

There is information that, as a result of these recent sanctions, China's Huanqiu Contracting and Engineering Corporation, a subsidiary of the state-owned China National Petroleum Corp., withdrew from the projects in Venezuela [16].

3. Increase in the Russian Federation income due to the US sanctions

After the US government started imposing sanctions on January 2019 against the government of N. Maduro and the companies affiliated with PD-

VSA or its trade counterparts, several companies withdrew from the projects in Venezuela. The others discontinued trade with the country. Against this background, Rosneft became the largest buyer of Venezuelan oil, overtaking the places of those companies. In July, Rosneft's share in the export of Venezuela's public oil and gas PDVSA company was 40%, and in August it was expected to reach 60%. Rosneft stresses that it does not violate the US sanctions because it purchases oil in Venezuela to settle the loans previously granted to the country.

According to some analysts, Russia not only loses nothing from the Venezuelan crisis, but benefits [17]. According to Bloomberg estimates, from November 2018 to July 2019, Russian companies received \$ 905 million of additional revenues due to increased exports against the background of oil prices growth [18].

According to Reuters, in the spring of this year, Rosneft started an independent lease of tankers and marketing of Venezuelan oil, while previously buying raw materials from PDVSA and selling it to the traders. Now Rosneft does not provide it for direct sale, but supplies it to refiners, primarily in India and China. In particular, Rosneft uses a high-tech refinery owned by Essar Oil Limited based in India (Vadinar, Gujarat) for refinery of Venezuelan oil, which it acquired (49.13%) in August 2017. More than a half of all product delivered to refineries is heavy Venezuelan oil. The refinery has all the necessary infrastructure (deep-sea oil terminal and power plant), a large retail network of more than 3.5 thousand Essar-branded petrol stations across India. Finished petroleum products come mainly to India and China. In this way, Rosneft bypasses the US sanctions.

According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), in the conditions of sanctions against Venezuela, Russia increased oil and petroleum exports three times (compared to the same period of the last year), bringing its deliveries to 5.7% of the US oil imports [19] (16.982 and 17.429 million barrels in April and May respectively [20]).

In general, between January and May 2019, the United States imported 61.749 million barrels of

Russian oil (which is 7.932 million more than the volume of imports in the corresponding period of 2018) and 33.584 million barrels of Venezuelan oil (which is 49.597 and 83.81 million less than imported in the same period of 2018 and 2017 respectively).

According to the EIA, the largest volumes of oil and petroleum products of the Russian Federation were exported to the US in 2010 (the maximum volume for the year was in August: 24.371 million barrels) and slightly less in 2011 (the maximum volume for the year was in October: 22.120 million barrels). Deliveries have declined significantly since the end of 2013 and reached a record low in November 2014 (5.102 million barrels), slightly increasing in 2016 (peaking in July to 16.697 million barrels); the decrease was observed again from October 2018 (the minimum volume was 7.611 million barrels in November) and a rather abrupt increase in April 2019 [20].

According to analyst of Raiffeisenbank, there are no direct contracts between the Russian Federation and the US for the supply of oil and petroleum products, Russian oil is sold to the United States by international traders. The analyst does not see a steady trend in increasing Russian oil supplies to the US [22].

According to the analyst of the consulting company FGE, D. Polgar, the reason for the increase in deliveries was that after imposing sanctions on PDVSA the American refineries had to compensate for the unsold volumes of Venezuelan oil, and therefore increased imports of brands similar to Venezuelan, including Russian. During the week, from February 23 to March 1, 2019, one oil tanker from Venezuela and at least nine from Russia were shipped to the United States. Oil supplies from Mexico and Saudi Arabia have also increased.

In addition, according to information published by Bloomberg on March 5, 2019, for the first time since the imposition of sanctions, the Russian Federation sent to Venezuela a batch of ligroin, which is used to dilute Venezuelan oil for its pipeline transportation for export. Before the US sanctions were imposed, Venezuela imported 2-3

million barrels of heavy oil per month to the USA; in 2018, the main suppliers were Reliance Industries Ltd., Citgo Petroleum Corp.'s, LDC Supply Trading, Vitol Group and Trafigura Ltd. [18]. The diluted oil will be delivered to the PDVSA-owned upgraders jointly with Rosneft, Chevron Corp., Total SA and Equinor ASA. Bloomberg notes that after Litasco SA, the trading company of LUKOIL Group, and Trafigura Group Pte, suspending trade with Venezuela due to sanctions, Rosneft overtook their position.

4. The problem of the Citgo Petroleum Corp.

In November 2016, Rosneft secured a pledge of 49.9% stake in Citgo Petroleum Corp. – at that time a subsidiary of PDVSA, located in the United States – as security for a \$ 1.5 billion loan. If PDVSA defaults, Rosneft may acquire control of Citgo, which owns three refineries (in Lake Charles, Louisiana; Lemont, Illinois; Corpus Christi, Texas), nine pipelines, 48 oil storage terminals and gas stations network. This entire network, according to the agency, produces 749 thousand barrels of oil daily, which is approximately 5% of the capacity of all US refineries [24].

Although Rosneft has stated that it does not want and cannot operate Citgo due to sanctions and the pledge is purely technical, the news has raised considerable concern in the United States. The US Congress has repeatedly expressed concerns that the controlling stake of this operator may be held by Rosneft, and several senators have written letters asking to clarify the situation. Following numerous appeals from the US congressmen to President Trump, the Administration in September 2017 announced its plans to block the implementation of Rosneft's deal on Citgo Petroleum.

A group of the Republicans and Democrats has drafted a Russian-Venezuelan Threat Mitigation Act [25] aimed at counteracting Rosneft's control of any US energy company. It involves monitoring and investigating Russia's growing involvement in the Venezuelan crisis. The bill was tabled in the House of Representatives on February 28 and approved on March 25, 2019. It has yet to be approved by the Senate and signed by the US Pres-

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ident to become a law. On April 8, 2019, it was transferred to the Senate Subcommittee.

Against the backdrop of the sanctions, several companies have filed lawsuits in Venezuela for reimbursement of the damages related to the expropriation, including the Crystallex mining firm, ConocoPhillips energy company and Owens Illinois glass maker. Although some of these lawsuits were filed against the state and not specifically targeted the PDVSA, due to precedent, the companies were able to claim equity in Citgo. ConocoPhillips sued \$ 2 billion and Crystallex \$ 1.4 billion and wanted to arrest a Texas oil refinery owned by Rosneft through a lawsuit in Texas, claiming that Rosneft owns the refinery by fraud.

The new sanctions, approved by D. Trump in May 2018, aided to keep Leaving Citgo in the ownership of the Venezuelan Government under the Head of the Venezuelan Parliament – the National Assembly – Juan Guido, recognized by many countries, including the United States, as Venezuela's legitimate president. Transactions related to the purchase of Venezuelan debt, including any secured debt to Venezuela, were prohibited.

5. Gold and diamond mining

Venezuela owns huge deposits not only of oil and gas, but also of various mineral resources and metals (Fig. 2).

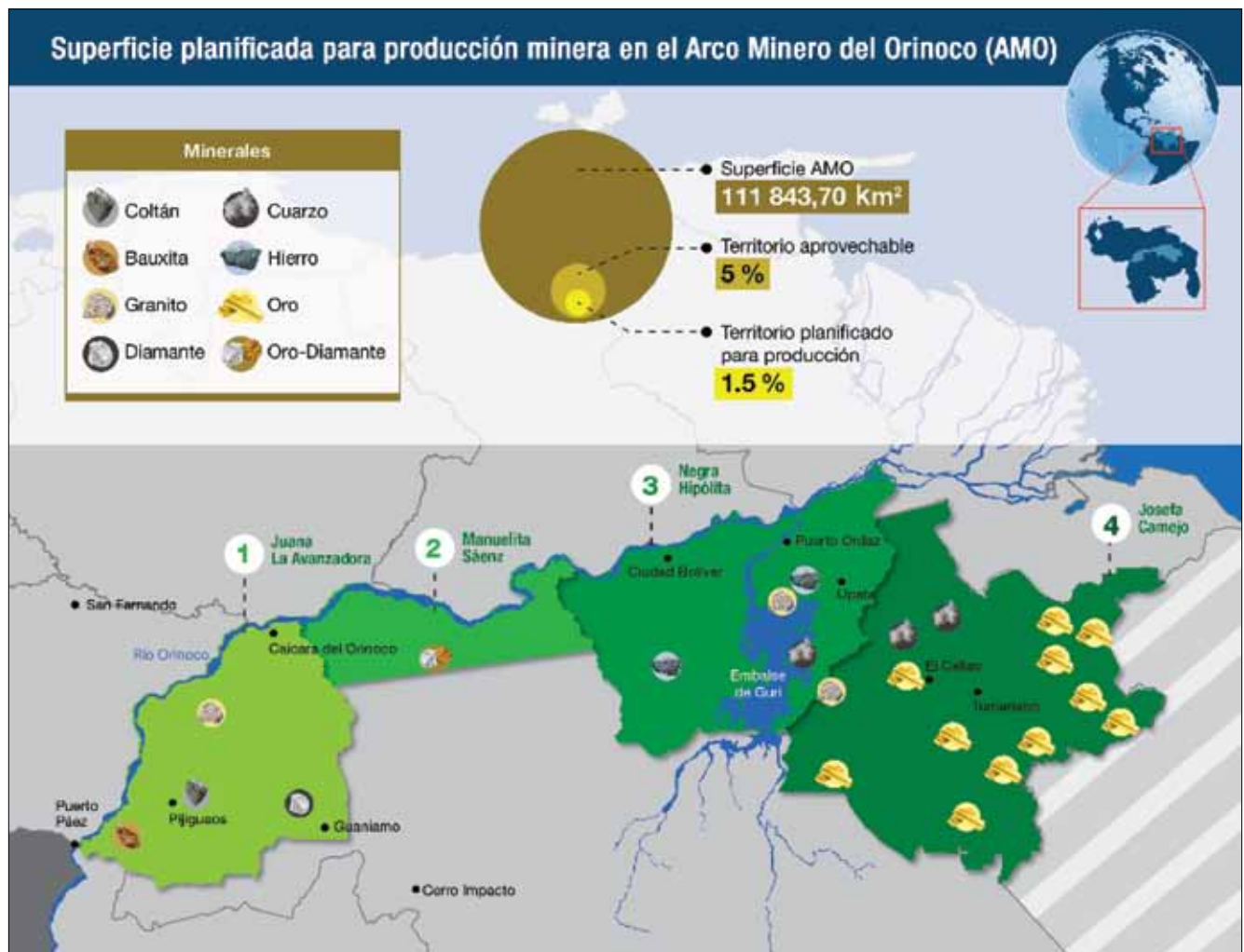


Fig. 2. Concentration of gold, diamonds and ore deposits in the Orinoco Basin.

First of all, this concerns gold and diamonds. Proven gold reserves in Venezuela, according to the government of N. Maduro, rank the first in the world: they amount to 2,236 tons and are estimated at 94 billion Euros. With regard to diamonds, proven reserves reach 1,020 million carats, ranking them the largest in the world. In addition, Venezuela ranks the first in the world in confirmed nickel reserves – 28.928 million tons. Additionally, the proved bauxite reserves are large – 321.34 million tons, iron – 14.605 million tons (fifth in the world), phosphates – 7.4 million tons, etc. [26].

On December 5, 2018, at a meeting in Venezuela, Presidents N. Maduro and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed Russia's investment of \$1 billion to Venezuela's mining industry, mainly gold mining. In addition, the Russian Federation is trying to gain access to the Kuchivero area, which has the largest diamond deposits in the country – 40 million tons of diamond-bearing rock.

There are many evidences to suggest that illegal gold and diamonds mining in Venezuela is large-scaled. One of the indirect evidences of this may be the abrupt drop in production [28]. According to a study on organized crime and illegal gold mining in Latin America carried out by the Global Initiative on Transnational Organized Crime in 2016, Venezuela has the largest gold production in the region and sells illegally 91% of the total mining. The data, which helped estimate the extent of illegal production, were obtained by the researchers from the reports of the Customs Services of Switzerland and the United States for 2013. While Venezuela's state authorities reported production of 2 tons, the US Customs Service reported imports of 3 tons from Venezuela and 10 tons from Switzerland [29].

For a long time, gold production in Venezuela was controlled by local criminal groups, which led to a significant decline in official production. With the fall in the oil prices, the Venezuelan government has stepped up to the mining industry. In March 2015, N. Maduro transferred PDVSA shares to the state-owned mining company MINERVEN. By Decree No. 2488 dated February 24, 2016, the National Orinoco Mining Arch Strategic Develop-

ment Zone was created. Its resources were expected to be produced by the joint ventures, in which the state's share should have been no less than 55%. Companies from different countries, including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, USA and others, were invited to invest. At the same time, the government concentrated production in the hands of small private entrepreneurs (approximately 40,000 people). However, small businesses continued to suffer from the activities of criminal groups, leading to numerous casualties. In 2017, the Armed Forces conducted series of punitive operations, establishing effective control over production. This helped to slightly increase official production indicators to 8.5 tons of gold in 2017 and 9.1 tons in the first half of 2018 [29]. Despite this, the volume of illegal mining and exports of gold and diamonds remains significant.

Military Cooperation of the Russian Federation with Venezuela

1. Stages of cooperation

The Military-Technical Cooperation Agreement (MTC) between the Russian Federation and Venezuela was concluded in 2001. It envisaged both the supply and joint production of Russian armaments, as well as services for the maintenance, operation, repair and modernization of weapons and military equipment; supply of equipment and materials for the construction and equipment of military facilities; training of military specialists; joint research and testing activities on the development of armaments and the like. Active cooperation started with the contract for the purchase of hundreds of Kalashnikov automatic guns, signed in May 2005.

Between 2001 and 2013, the amount of foreign trade contracts between the Russian Federation and Venezuela was estimated at \$11 billion, which made the country the main buyer of Russian weapons in the Western Hemisphere. This represents more than two-thirds of the total (\$14.5 billion) sales of Russia's Rosoboronexport.

Armament sales in 2006-2014 can be divided into three groups of purchases [30]. The first group is about 4 billion worth and includes helicopters,

fighter crafts and rifle armament. Venezuela has purchased 53 helicopters in the Russian Federation, including 38 multi-purpose Mi-17V-5 helicopters, 10 Mi-35M2 strike helicopters and 3 heavy Mi-26T2 transport helicopters. The number of helicopters sold to Venezuela was so significant that in 2011, Tranzas announced its plans to establish a regional training centre for helicopter pilots in Venezuela. The centre was officially opened only on March 29 this year. According to Rosoboronexport, it was established under the contract with the Venezuelan military industry joint-stock company CAVIM [31]. In addition to helicopters, the first group of purchases included twenty-four Su-30MK2 fighter jets, 100,000 Kalashnikov automatic guns AK-103, and Russian assistance in the construction of a plant for their production. Construction started in 2007. Subsequently it was suspended because of corruption but was recently restored. Construction completion was scheduled later this year [32].

The second group of Russian armament sales to Venezuela, delivered during 2008–2011, included twelve self-propelled Tor-M1 air defence systems, ZU-23 anti-aircraft autocannons, twelve 9K58 Smerch rocket systems, 2C23 Nona-SVK 120 mm self-propelled mortars, one thousand eight hundred complexes PADS Igla-C, air-to-surface missiles X-31 and ninety two T-72B1V tanks. Other Russian systems, acquired by Venezuela during this period, included one hundred BMP-3M armoured personnel carriers, one hundred and fourteen BTR-80A, and mobile missile systems S-300 Antey-2500.

The third sales group, agreed upon when H. Chavez's health deteriorated in 2012, was only partially sold due to deepening of the economic problems in Venezuela. This group included Russian speedboats, submarines and Yak-130 training aircraft, ten Mi-28 Night Hunter strike helicopters.

In May 2014, at the 10th meeting of the Russian-Venezuelan Intergovernmental High-Level Commission, additional agreements on the purchase of weapons were concluded between the Armed

Forces of Venezuela and the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation of Russia.

However, despite the loans provided repeatedly to Venezuela by Russia for purchase of the weapons, the economic and social crisis in the country has virtually stopped procurement. This allowed Chinese armament companies invading the market, where the Russian Federation once almost completely dominated, due to the fact that Chinese weapons were cheaper than Russian. Moreover, China had more potential to fund the large armament purchases than Russia, a factor that is increasingly important in Venezuela due to the crisis.

Despite a statement of the former US National Security Advisor J. Bolton on the conclusion of a new \$209 million armament purchase contract between Venezuela and Russia, no new agreements of this nature have been concluded in recent years, according to Russian and Venezuelan officials. According to information provided by the Russian Interfax Agency to the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation of the Russian Federation, in early 2019 Russia and Venezuela entered into new contracts for the repair of military equipment [33].

Venezuela's purchases of Russian weapons facilitated close friendship between the countries and created the preconditions for Venezuela's readiness to accept Russian military forces.

Since the Constitution of Venezuela prohibits the deployment of foreign military bases on its territory, there is no permanent official military contingent of the Russian Federation in this country. According to the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian military forces on the territory of the country and those, who come from time to time, are exclusively technical personnel servicing Russian military equipment purchased by the Venezuelan Armed Forces (primarily helicopters), training Venezuelan military and servicing this equipment, and also maintaining individual Russian facilities and property.



Photo 1. Russian militaries in Venezuela.

Source : <https://colonelcassad.livejournal.com/5039645.html>

However, the information about presence of the Russian military contingent and mercenaries' - contractors of private military companies of the Russian Federation, including those dressed in the form of the Venezuelan Armed Forces - on the territory of the country appears periodically.

2. Russian PMCs in Venezuela

According to Reuters, on the eve of May 2018 presidential elections, and later during government protests in January 2019 in Venezuela, the mercenaries of the well-known Russian private military company (PMC) Wagner arrived for protection of President N. Maduro. Various sources have reported different information: Chair of the Committee of the All-Russian Officers' Assembly Yevgeny Shabaev stated that there were about 400 soldiers in Venezuela, and that other persons were a small number arriving in several separate groups at different times [34]. Press Secretary of the President of the Russian Federation D. Peskov [35], the Rus-

sian Embassy in Venezuela, and other Russian officials and institutions, including the Committee on Defence and Security of the Federation Council, denied the allegations.

For many experts, the mere presence of Russian mercenaries – PMC mercenaries – in Venezuela is undeniable. Only their number and purpose remain in question. According to many Russian experts, Russian mercenaries in Venezuela are unlikely to protect President N. Maduro. More likely they have protected Russian facilities and property that could have been damaged or stolen during mass protests (training base for helicopter pilots, AK production plant, offices of Russian companies and diplomatic missions, etc.) [36]. It is suggested that the mercenaries, among other, were engaged in the training of military and civil units (militias) of the National Bolivarian Police. It was also suggested that the mercenaries could have provided security for the potential transportation of Venezuelan gold reserves. Some of the experts and some

interviewed mercenaries themselves suggested that their presence in Venezuela, and the spread information that Wagner's PMC members would protect N. Maduro, were used to create the impression of a "Russian presence" to confirm both support of the government by the Russian Federation, and the presence of special Russian interests in the country, which the Russian Federation was ready to defend.

Regarding the involvement of Russian PMCs in the illegal gold and diamonds trade in Venezuela, it is quite probable, although, according to some experts, it is unlikely to be large-scale. There are some evidences that Russian structures have not yet been able to gain direct access to Venezuelan gold, since it was, until recently, effectively controlled by the Chinese following 2012 government agreement with CITIC Group de China [2].

Escalation of tension in the US-Russia relations regarding Venezuela

An analysis of the events in Venezuela since late 2018 helps to conclude that, unlike previous the US governments, the current D. Trump Administration places particular emphasis on Russia's presence in Venezuela, deliberately exaggerating the scale of the threat it poses to the regional security. The US uses this to pressure Maduro Government and, simultaneously, escalate tension in its relations with the Russian Federation and pressure on the Russian Government with regard to both Venezuela case and other relating issues.

During the Russian military campaign against Georgia in 2008, Russia sent two Tu-160 supersonic strategic rocket launchers to Venezuela in response to the US naval presence in the Black Sea, which subsequently participated in joint exercises in the Caribbean. About a month later, four Russian Navy ships headed by the flagship of the Northern Fleet, the nuclear cruiser *Peter the Great*, and including the destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko*, a minesweeper and a cargo ship, arrived in Venezuela to participate in joint Russian-Venezuelan naval manoeuvres in the Caribbean. At the time, the US did not consider the Russian Federation a

power capable of creating a real threat to their security, so the official reaction to it was not fierce, including reaction of Secretary of State K. Rice, who said that "several Russian ships were unable to change the balance of power" [37]. However, State Department spokesman S. McCormack said that the United States were cancelling the so-called 123 Treaty (Treaty on Co-operation in the Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy) [38], pending approval by the US Congress.

On August 27-29, 2013, the Russian Federation also sent to Venezuela two strategic Tu-160 bombers and four Navy ships, including missile cruise *Moscow*. It was three months before the start of the Euromaidan in Kyiv, which was used by the Russian Federation as a pretext to launch aggression against Ukraine. It should be noted that during the bombers' flight from Venezuela to Nicaragua an incident occurred: they entered the airspace of Colombia without warning and were intercepted by Colombian fighter jets [39].

In December 2018, the Russian Federation sent two Tu-160 bombers to Venezuela again, according to the assurances of Russian officials, to participate in the Air Force manoeuvres. However, that time, against the backdrop of the political crisis in Venezuela and the significant escalation of tension between the Russian Federation and the US, this was considered by the US as a direct demonstration of its capabilities and intentions to threaten the superpower by the Russian Federation in the US "backyard", including preventing US intervention in territories that Russia considered its own sphere of influence, primarily Ukraine. Since then, the United States has been closely monitoring the movement of Russian military and transport aircraft and vessels to Venezuela, considering almost every Russian military transport as an evidence of an increased Russian military presence in the immediate vicinity of the United States.

Instead, Russian officials of various levels are very active in using every opportunity for denying the increase of the military contingent in Venezuela, emphasizing the reduction of the number of personnel and even the use of civil technical personnel

from the respective enterprises for maintenance of the military equipment in this country.

On March 23, 2019, two aircrafts of the Russian Air Force arrived to Venezuela, which brought Russian defence officials and one hundred military men. According to the witness - reporter H. Mallorca, V. Tonkoshkurov, Chief of Staff of the Land Forces, arrived on the first plane; thirty-five tons of cargo were delivered on the second plane [40]. Afterwards, the US accused Russia of “reckless escalation” in this South American country. US President Donald Trump has obliged Russia to withdraw all troops from Venezuela. In its statement, the Organization of American States called the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel “an act that could harm the sovereignty of Venezuela” [41]. In response, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the aircrafts transported only specialists for the service of weapons and military equipment acquired by Venezuela, in accordance with the previously concluded agreements.

A few days later, the US came to the conclusion that the arriving militaries were cybersecurity experts. According to Russian officials, IT specialists in Venezuela serviced equipment and trained Venezuelan personnel. The high likelihood, that Russian cyber-technology specialists in Venezuela did not only service equipment but also perform joint cyber-actions (cyber-attacks) with the Venezuelan experts, was confirmed by the studies conducted by the US, UK, Spain and other special intelligence services, on the spread of misinformation and fake news, malware from Russian and Venezuelan servers, in particular during the 2017 political crisis in Catalonia (Spain).

Since the beginning of 2019, various news agencies, including Russian, have reported repeated arrival of Russian military aircrafts (both fighters and transport ones) to Venezuela.

On July 9, 2019, the Commander of the Southern Command of the United States Armed Forces, Admiral Craig S. Faller, in his report to a meeting of the Committee on Armed Forces of the US Senate, stated that there were evidence of the presence of numerous Russian military contingent in the ter-

ritory of Venezuela [42], and that armament sales and trainings of personnel and technical personnel “could potentially provide Moscow a regional platform for recruiting intelligence sources and information gathering” [43].

On August 15, 2019, the Russian Federation and Venezuela entered into an agreement on a mutual permit to use ports for warships. The Venezuelan National Assembly, chaired by H. Guido, has already called that agreement illegal. The decision was supported by the Organization of American States.

On September 11, 2019, the United States announced the activation of the Inter-American Treaty on Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR). This is stated in an official statement of the US Secretary of State M. Pompeo [44]. Inter-American Treaty on Reciprocal Assistance was concluded at the Inter-American Defence Conference in 1947 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). The main principle of the Treaty is that an attack on any member state is treated as an attack on all member states. According to M. Pompeo, the activation of the decision was triggered by, among other, the started on September 10 large-scale training manoeuvres of the Venezuelan Armed Forces along the border of Colombia, which “threaten the peace and security of Venezuela's neighbours”. In addition to the United States and the Venezuelan opposition, ten other states supported the decision to activate the Inter-American Treaty on Reciprocal Assistance. This decision of United States can be seen as another lever of pressure on the Venezuelan government, and as means of increasing dissatisfaction with the policies of N. Maduro Government in the societies of Venezuela itself and in the regional and global communities, which shall prepare the ground for his removal from power.

Change of the Venezuelan Government as potential risks for Russia

The political crisis, that started in Venezuela following the election of President Maduro, significantly deepened at the end of 2018, when President of the National Assembly H. Guido declared himself the legitimate President of the country. He was supported by many countries in the world,

especially the United States. The US sanctions, imposed in January 2019, have worsened the socio-economic situation in the country. Against this background, the removal of N. Maduro Government from power became more probable.

In the case of change of the government, and especially in the case of change of the radical regime and the opposition coming to power, the new authorities are likely to challenge the agreements reached by N. Maduro with the Russian Federation and other states, in particular, China and Cuba. First of all, the agreements concluded after the 2015 elections of the opposed to N. Maduro's Government National Assembly, which did not ratify them. K. Vecchio, the representative of the President of the National Assembly, and self-proclaimed President H. Guido declared that the agreements, which were not recognized by the parliament, were illegal.

In particular, the \$500 million of increase of the share of Rosneft in Petromonagas JV from 16.7% (received from TNK-BP) to 40% and transfer to Rosneft of the development rights for Patao and Mejillones offshore gas area in 2017, agreed in 2016, could be challenged.

In addition, the National Assembly declared the military agreement of Venezuela with the Russian Federation on the mutual use of ports by warships, which was dated August 15, 2019, illegal as it was not approved by the established procedure: it was not considered by the Foreign Policy, Sovereignty and Integration Commission or the Parliament [45].

There are also other risks. For example, the fact that the current production levels for Petrovictoria and Petromiranda are much lower than the approved by the parliament in the agreements may give the new regime a formal ground for their termination [46].

There is no accurate data on the size of Venezuela's **debt** to the Russian Federation. Venezuela has never published all its debts information. Similarly, there is no complete data on Russian investments to this country.

According to Reuters estimates, made in August 2017, since 2006, the Russian government and the state-owned Rosneft have provided at least \$ 17 billion in loans or credit lines to Venezuela. That amount included \$6 billion pre-payment that Rosneft paid PDVSA in advance for oil supply.

PDVSA repays Rosneft a debt by raw materials. In 2014, Rosneft and PDVSA signed a contract, under which the last one committed to supply 1.6 million tons of oil and 7.5 million tons of petroleum over five years, and under a contract signed later the same year also for a five-year period – 1.6 million tons of oil and 9 million tons of petroleum products. However, delivery was delayed in 2018. In April 2018, Rosneft and PDVSA signed a debt restructuring agreement, under which the Venezuelan company committed to supply Rosneft more oil to compensate the delayed supplies – estimated at about 380,000 barrels per day instead of the previous 310,000 barrels, according to Reuters.

In November 2017, the Russian Federation approved the restructuring of Venezuela's debt, agreed to delay by 2027 the payment of \$ 3.15 billion on a loan granted in 2011 for the purchase of Russian weapons [47].

According to information, published by Rosneft, the debt of PDVSA at the end of 2018 (excluding interest payments not disclosed by Rosneft) was \$ 2.3 billion. [48] At the end of the first quarter of 2019 it was 1.8 billion [49]. According to the first Vice President of Rosneft, P. Fedorov, during 2018 PDVSA returned \$ 2.3 billion and since the beginning of 2019 repaid over \$ 500 million by the oil supplies [50].

Conclusions

For all the ambiguity and contradictions of the Russian Federation's activities in Venezuela, its specific features can be summarized as follows:

1. Despite the widespread belief that the activities of the Russian Federation in Venezuela pursues purely political goals, including the deployment of military contingents and weapons at a relatively short distance from the United States (in the Amer-

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ican “backyard”) and permits to use Venezuelan ports and airspace, there are reasons to believe that financial and economic benefits are not less important for RF.

It is about gaining strategic advantages in legal economic activities (above all, increasing the ability to impact oil market pricing; restraining the US from establishing control over Venezuela's oil fields, and further increase in the impact on oil market pricing opposed to OPEC, broad access to the country's mineral resource base – gold, diamonds, coltan, uranium, etc.) and illegal profits (drug trafficking, money laundering, and corruption schemes).

Accordingly, it is likely that the losses, associated with Venezuela's debt on loans and the failure to meet the planned revenues in the oil industry, are offset by the Russian Federation from other sources or are not significant in view of the objectives achieved.

2. As a result of the sanctions, imposed by the US government in January 2019 and subsequently expanded, the Russian Federation has not only suffered insignificant losses, but was able to substantially expand its operations and increase several times its revenues, including from oil supply to the US. In the Russian Federation, the sanctions were insignificant: a joint Russian-Venezuelan bank and Eurofinance Mosnarbank were sanctioned. The volume of cooperation between Russia and Venezuela has not decreased. Russia justifies trade with Venezuela by its receipt of the compensation for the debt on the loans granted from Caracas, and fulfilment of the agreements concluded before the

imposition of sanctions. Overall, there is a significant increase in Russian activity in Venezuela and an increase in its presence in major areas of the country since the end of 2018.

3. Although, according to the Russian officials, in case of change of the Government in Venezuela, the Russian Federation will not suffer significant losses, since its agreements were concluded in accordance with all requirements of international law, it will be to challenge the agreements concluded after the 2015 elections of the Parliament - National Assembly oppositional to N. Maduro's Government, since these agreements have not been ratified.

4. It is likely that the sanctions, imposed by the United States on Venezuela this year – primarily the blocking of PDVSA property in the US, including its Citgo subsidiary, were not only directed against the Venezuelan Government of N. Maduro, but also used to prevent Russia receiving a significant share of Citgo (49.9%) in the case of PDVSA bankruptcy and therefore the opportunity to influence the US oil refining and sales within the United States.

5. The US focus on Russia's military presence in Venezuela is aimed at legitimizing the removal of the N. Maduro's Government, which, by resorting to military assistance from the Russian Federation, poses an additional threat to stability and security in the region, and preventing Russia from receiving significant strategic benefits both in bilateral and global relations.

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Hong Kong: Anti-totalitarianism

On October 1, China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China under the leadership of the Communist Party. Protests in Hong Kong are ongoing.



Photo 1. Residents of Hong Kong oppose the idea of the Communist Party rule, CCP Secretary General Xi Jinping inspects a military parade on the Tiananmen square in Beijing

Source: <https://comments.ua/en/news/world/china/633845-kitay-zvinuvativ-zahidni-kraini-u-finansuvanni-protestiv-v-gonkonzi.html>; <https://ca-news.org/news:1569419>

Despite the statement of the Head of the Hong Kong Government Carrie Lam on formal withdrawal of the bill on extradition, the protesters insist on the performance of the remaining conditions: Carrie Lam has to resign, the government should recognize that the protests are not riots, carry out an independent investigation of the police actions during protests, release arrested protesters and hold democratic elections.

The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce has supported the protesters' demand for an independent investigation of the police actions. Even the business circles, traditionally pro-government and pro-Beijing see the danger of an extradition law.

Hong Kong residents understand that their window of opportunities for change of the Basic Law of the Country is narrowing every year, since the signing of the Joint Chinese-British Declaration on Hong Kong in 1984, the local democratic parties and the central government in Bei-

jing have incompatible goals. Beijing wants full integration of Hong Kong into the PRC; locals want to defend themselves against the Chinese political system and introduce democratic elections of the Legislative Council and the Head of Administration.

In 1941 and 1946, Hong Kong under the British rule was one step away from the universal electoral franchise and direct elections. Business representative, which were involved by the government, have successfully resisted these changes every time. And after 1949, China, which became communist, opposed the reform.

However, in 1993, a few years before the transfer of Hong Kong to China's sovereignty, Beijing's representative in Hong Kong, Lou Ping, asserted: "In which way Hong Kong will develop democracy in the future, it is a matter that falls exclusively within the competence of Hong Kong's autonomy, and the Central Government cannot interfere". A year later, the Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs of China made a similar statement that the democratic election of all members of the General Council by universal election franchise is “a matter that should be resolved by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and does not require guarantees from the Chinese government.”

In 1997, the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom signed the Joint Declaration, and the city was transformed from a British colony into a Special Administrative Region of China. Beijing has agreed to give Hong Kong “considerable autonomy” by 2047 under the “one country - two systems” scheme. Under the agreement, Hong Kong will retain its Basic Law, the capitalist economic system, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary power, multiparty status, the status of the international financial centre and democratic rights and freedoms (freedom of speech, press, assembly and association, movement, religious belief, etc.) Articles 45 and 68 of the Basic Law, approved in 1991, set as a goal of the introduction of the universal election franchise in the elections of the executive head of the Administration and the members of the local Hong Kong Legislative Council.

Despite past statements made by Chinese officials and in contradiction to the Basic Law, Beijing is seeking to gain more control over Hong Kong. The 2014 Umbrella Revolution arose from the government's plans to carry out a pseudo-democratic reform that would allow locals electing an executive head in a direct general election, but only from candidates previously approved in Beijing. The law was adopted in 2017. The lack of confidence in Carrie Lam and the crisis of her legitimacy were caused by the fact that local voters did not elect her and all previous heads of the government also.

For 22 years after the conversion of the British colony Hong Kong SAR, Hong Kong citizens went on mass protests four times against the encroachment of Beijing to limit the autonomy of

the city - in 2003, 2012, 2014 and 2016, respectively.

In 2017, the Spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC stated that the Joint Declaration had lost its practical meaning and imposes no commitments on the Chinese Government. Beijing's efforts to integrate Hong Kong with economic and cultural instruments have eroded the local autonomy, therefore Hong Kong fears that the central government will abandon the “one country - two systems” by 2047 scheme and transform Hong Kong into an ordinary Chinese city. Nevertheless, Beijing is interested in maintaining Hong Kong's special economic and financial status, which is an important link between Beijing and the outside world. Some two thirds of the foreign investment in China and from China goes through Hong Kong; the role of the city as a re-export hub with a special tariff regime has increased due to the trade war between the PRC and the USA. 70% of Chinese mainland companies entered the global stock markets through Hong Kong; 60% of Chinese companies placed their foreign bonds in Hong Kong, two thirds of offshore Yuan deposits are in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's value to China and its attractiveness to international financial circles were based on the rule of law, sufficiently independent institutions, including the judiciary, and relative transparency. But! Hong Kong's share of China's GDP has fallen from 18.4% in 1997 to 2.7% today. That is, as the Chinese proverb says “a chicken (Hong Kong autonomy) that must be killed to scare off monkeys (potential protesters in mainland China) has much smaller eggs.”

The Hong Kong government would like to reach an agreement with anyone, but the protest movement is trying to be as formless as water, open-ended and leaderless. The Hong Kong protest has no organization or structure; its participants rally around the idea, not a leader. The protests are still ongoing as the government does not know with whom to negotiate or whom to

arrest. Protesters use online communication to coordinate their actions, where anyone, whose idea has gathered the most votes, can be a temporary leader. Much of the demonstrators are educated young people, most of them support Democrats or locals (supporters of a separate Hong Kong identity idea, different of the Chinese continentals).

It is difficult for Beijing to believe the possibility of such a spontaneous unanimous expression of the will of the citizens. Chinese officials denounce the “black hand” of the United States and other “foreign powers”, which want to prevent China’s restoration fomenting the protests. The Xinhua Government News Agency accuses “rebels and their patrons” of agitating Hong Kong and threatening the “one country - two systems” principle, spreading the “colour revolution” to mainland China.

In fact, at first, the US reacted quite coldly to the events in Hong Kong. In August, President Donald Trump called the protests in Hong Kong an internal affair of the PRC, but on September 24, in a speech to the UN General Assembly, the US President supported Hong Kong. In early September, former US Secretary of Defence James Mattis said the anti-government protests were not China’s internal affair, and that the US should at least morally support the protesters. Of course, protesters would like to receive something more substantial than words of support. They called on the US Congress to approve the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which requires Washington to annually review whether Hong Kong is sufficiently autonomous from the Chinese mainland to maintain the US trade and economic privileges. The Act can also harm the internationalization of the Yuan. A group of the US senators appealed to the US Department of State and the US Department of Commerce with a request to review the US rules of export to Hong Kong and expressed concern that China has the ability to acquire sensitive US technology due to Hong Kong’s special conditions. Hong Kong risks becoming a pawn in the US-China trade war.

Beijing uses all possible means of propaganda and intimidation of the protesters: rappers controlled by the party, supported the police and disgraced Hong Kong residents, trolls attacked Hong Kong women on social networks, Chinese bots fruitfully worked in twitter and on Facebook (not stopped by the Chinese Firewall blocking more than three thousand websites), China's largest Xinhua News Agency has paid for promotional videos on Facebook and Twitter and jeans in Western media, policemen with sticks and iron bars smacked everyone in a row at the train station. Under the influence of propaganda, public opinion on the mainland has changed from sympathy to protesters’ condemnation.

At the same time, the sympathy of the world community is on the side of Hong Kong. On September 29, anti-totalitarian marches were held in more than 40 cities around the world. Thousands of people went out to the streets of Taiwan, Australia and Japan to support the protests in Hong Kong. In Singapore and Macau, police did not allow demonstrations. Meanwhile, if Hong Kong is called an example of the failure of the “one country - two systems” scheme, in Macao this deal is working. Macao, which is also China’s Special Administrative Region under “one country - two systems” terms, lacks a distinct sense of self-identity and separation from the rest of China like Hong Kong, since about half of Macao's people come from mainland China (in Hong Kong - slightly more than 20%), almost half of the students are enrolled in pro-Beijing, and the city’s economic system is based on the gambling industry, not its links with Western economies. For Macao conservatives, economic development is more important than preservation of civil liberties. Young Hong Kong sympathizers either go to Hong Kong and participate in protests, or remain silent about their views not to be persecuted. Ho Yatsen, newly elected Chairman of the Macau Administration, said before his appointment that “Macao should show Taiwan the success and benefits of “one country - two systems” scheme, as Beijing hopes to persuade Taiwan to ally with the PRC. Taiwanese

are sceptical of Beijing's proposals. More than one hundred thousand protesters participated in the anti-totalitarian march in Taiwan's capital of Taipei. Participants carried posters with "Free Hong Kong" and "Taiwan with Hong Kong" slogans. Senior members of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which stands for Taiwan's independence, also joined the march. Its organizers believe that Taiwan should reject the "one China" formula (according to which Taiwan is not a separate and independent country) and the peace agreement with China.

The CCP seeks to control the narrative by insisting on the "order" over democratic rights. Beijing wants to reassure the world and Hong Kong that the protesters will only be calmed by the economic and social development of Hong Kong. In other words, the townspeople should focus on narrowing the income gap, providing people with affordable housing, education reform and other issues. At the same time, the weak local government, which is a servant of several lords, is unable to resolve any of them. After all, only 40 of the 70 members of the Legislative Council are elected in Hong Kong by general election in geographical districts. Another thirty are nominees for functional constituencies – trade and professional unions, closely associated with Beijing. As a result, since 1997, pro-Beijing parties have won most seats in the Legislative Council, and locals do not believe that the government is able to protect their interests and rights against big business or Beijing. In their view, the key to a stronger, more responsible and independent government is a democratic election.

Obviously, the victory of the protest movement, at least in some aspect, will show the entire country that a pressure on the party can lead to achievement of goals. In the CCP's view, any concessions will give legitimacy to an "illegal violent rebellion" and sow resistance in the rest of China. The likely reputational losses or economic damage to the PRC will not prevent a possible forceful suppression of protests, which will be a lesson for the dissatisfied by mainland Chinese government.

Pragmatists believe that Hong Kong shall obey Beijing not to stay out of China's economic development and prevent the loss of its international financial centre status. After all, the protests will only accelerate the loss of liberties and reduce welfare. Economic development encourages democratization, therefore Hong Kong should compromise with the CCP and delay its democratic aspirations for several decades for the sake of enrichment, pragmatists say. Hong Kong residents, coming under China's sovereignty 22 years ago, also apparently hoped for its gradual liberalization. However, since 2010, Chinese authoritarianism has not only become more violent, but transformed to neo-totalitarian in certain parts of the country. If Beijing tries to do the same in Hong Kong, its most enterprising residents may leave the city, following the example of their ancestors, who fled from Shanghai to Hong Kong at the end of the first half of the 20th century. It was the first "escape of Chinese capitalism." We will soon find out whether socialism with Chinese traits will cause a new escape not only for Chinese capitalism but also for international business. It should be remembered that in its actions the Communist Party of China is primarily guided by its own self-preservation.



Photo 2. Ukrainian flag on protests in Hong Kong

Source: Stanton Sharpe. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1-vV8wgYWy/>

Meanwhile, the protesters in Hong Kong, among other, follow the example of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine. The Ukrainian flag was spotted in protests. The *Winter on Fire* movie about events in Ukraine in the winter of 2014 was shown from the huge screens in the streets and squares of Hong Kong as a successful example of the fight for freedom against the repressive regime.

Negotiations between the Hong Kong government and the protesters have stalled, and the likelihood that Beijing will sooner or later forcefully suppress protests increases after the anniversary celebrations on October 1.

REVIEW OF THE FOREIGN SOURCES ON THE BLACK SEA REGION

“The Russian president blackmails his Ukrainian counterpart like his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, blackmailed Leonid Kuchma in the mid-1990s. Yeltsin knew that Kuchma, who came to power under pro-Russian slogans, simply needed a visit of the Russian leader to Kiev and signing of a so-called "grand treaty". And he reached signing of the treaty on the Black Sea Fleet, which turned the Fleet into an occupation contingent and caused annexation of Crimea. In a similar way Putin, who knows that Zelenskyy promises to end the war and considers the "Norman Summit" as a step towards this, can count on the Ukrainian counterpart to make decisions that will be in Russian and not in Ukrainian interests,”

Vitaly Portnikov, Leading Ukrainian journalist.

Source - https://espreso.tv/article/2019/09/03/vitaliy_portnykov_putin_shantazhuye_zelenskogo



"We got a piece of paper ("Steinmeier Formula" - Ed.) – Russia is not mentioned there that means that we are moving to an "internal war" format. All the obligations there are for Ukraine. The Russian Federation is not there. We will be involved, and Russia will supply weapons, ammunition, Russian troops there,”

Roman Bezsmertnyi, Politician, Member of the Trilateral Contact Group for two times.

Source - <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2791704-roman-bezsmertnij-politik-u-minulomu-clen-tristoronnoi-kontaktnoi-grupi.html>

“For the time being, the boats and ships of the FSB and the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation in the Sea of Azov force us to act adequately. This is our sea and our people in the Azov region,”

**Commander of the Ukrainian Navy
Admiral Igor Voronchenko, for Radio Liberty.**

Source - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30040039.html>



REVIEW OF THE FOREIGN SOURCES ON THE BLACK SEA REGION

“It is critically important for Ukraine to maintain support of both US political parties. It is not just because today nobody can predict the outcome of the 2020 elections in the United States. Supporting the presidential branch and the parliamentary majority is a necessary luxury for Ukraine, given our economic and security problems,”

Yulia Mostova, Editor-in-Chief of the leading Ukrainian edition “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia” (Mirror of the Week).

Source - <https://dt.ua/internal/mizh-stilcyami-324771.html>



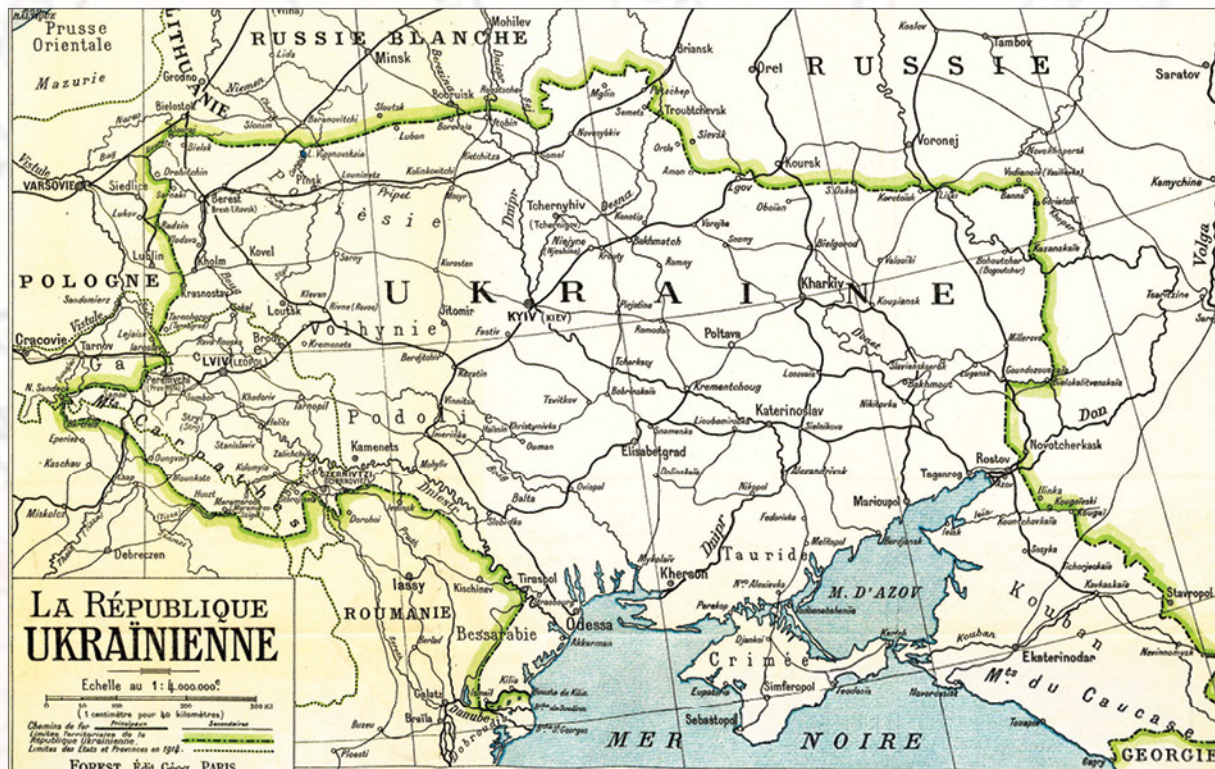
“I believe that the main assistance is the frequent activities of ships of the Alliance in the Black Sea. It shows Russia that it is not a dominant force in the Black Sea region,”

Commander of the Ukrainian Navy Admiral Igor Voronchenko, for Radio Liberty.

Source - <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30040039.html>

NOTES

[illegible]



The territories inhabited by the ethnic Ukrainians. A map is contained in the document "Memoire sur l'indépendance de l'Ukraine presente a la conference de la Paix par la Delegation de la Republique Ukrainienne" (Memo on the independence of Ukraine, presented by the delegation of the Ukrainian Republic at a peace conference), published in Paris in 1919. <http://diasporiana.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/books/16238/file.pdf>



Ethnographic survey map of Ukraine, published in Vienna in 1916. By Stepan Rudnytskyi.



According to the 1897 census, Ukrainians made up more than 60% of the total population of the region, and on the right bank of the Kuban - from 78 to 90%.



The Cuban Cossacks under national flag in fight for freedom of Kuban against Bolshevik Russia.



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Sardegna

Cagliari

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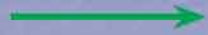
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