

SYNERGING



ENERGIES

BLACK SEA SECURITY

ANALYTICAL JOURNAL №4 (36) 2019

THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

FOCUS ON:

BLACK SEA CHALLENGES

OCCUPIED CRIMEA

ENERGY PROBLEMATICS





The man in the photo is Ronald Wendling, 58 years old, a former political prisoner of the East German regime. Every Thursday, he protests near the pompous building of the Russian Embassy in Berlin. He started his actions in October 2014.

«I am protesting not against, but rather for something, for example, for the release of Ukrainian citizens held in Russia or in the occupied territories of Crimea and the Donbas,» Ronald says in an interview to a Ukrainian journalist. He adds that he will stand there until the release of all prisoners.

The Editorial Board of the “Black Sea Security” journal is grateful to R. Wendling, because there are photos and names of Oleksii Bessarabov and Dmytro Shtybylov, members of the Editorial Board of the journal, as well as Volodymyr Dudka, who are detained in the Russian colonies of the strict regime under the falsified “sabotage case”, on his posters.



Two of the three political leaders in another photo could address the issue of stopping Russian aggression against Ukraine and releasing of all Kremlin prisoners by putting forward an appropriate ultimatum to Putin. But they are not capable of doing so. They are more interested in Russian gas, Nord Stream 2, than fundamental principles of freedom, human rights, democracy, which they mentally mention during their visits to Eastern European countries.



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Members of the editorial board Oleksii Bessarabov
and Dmytro Shtybylov 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 of the magazine closes the year 2019 and opens the year of 2020. Forecasts, as always, are enough. Not all of them will come true. Or they will come true, but not in 2020, later. However, there are forecasts that need to be spoken out loud just so that they would never come true.

Such forecasts cannot be ignored. Our Sevastopol colleagues, prisoners of the Kremlin Oleksiy Bessarabov and Dmytro Shtybylykov, predicted Russian aggression against Ukraine immediately after the Russian invasion of Georgia. And they were not the only ones who warned about the Russian threat. Such forecasts did not receive due attention either in Ukraine or abroad. And the aggression against Ukraine took place. It lasts. Russia is not going to stop, despite the sanctions. And more and more openly declares it.

Moreover, the intentions to continue aggression in the post-Soviet space are becoming more and more obvious. The Kremlin's hybrid technologies work, especially in the context of Putin's rather successful chaotic propaganda and subversion from within the EU and NATO countries over the past five years. Russia has successfully planted chaos in Moldova and brings Chisinau to the pro-Russian orbit of influence. It is active in Georgia. In 2019, it activated the crypto war against Belarus, preparing a scenario of an Anschluss under the Ukrainian model during the time of Yanukovych.

However, the main object of Russian aggression continues to be Ukraine. In December 2019, Putin said that "...during the creation of the Soviet Union, the native Russian territories that had never had anything to do with Ukraine at all (all the Black Sea region, Western Russian lands) were transferred to Ukraine...". In January 2016, he already mentioned the illegality of the "transfer of Donbas to Ukraine", the wrong borders within the USSR. So, we can sum up that the Kremlin has prepared a restart of the "Novorosiya" project, which failed in 2014. The "Russian Western lands" designated in Putin's speech mean the modern regions of the left-bank part of Ukraine.

Since 2014, it was clear that the Kharkiv, Khereson and Odesa regions, where Russia failed to proclaim the relevant "People's Republic", will be in the focus of the Russian propaganda and intelligence services. The change of power in Ukraine

in 2019 opened a new opportunity window for the Kremlin. The mechanism of false-target programming of the new, incompetent and populist Ukrainian government has started with the new force, pushing to capitulate course under the slogan "we did not start this war, but we will finish it". Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that by "this war" the Ukrainian authorities do not mean Russia's aggression against Ukraine. According to Russian propaganda cliché, this is an "internal civil conflict" that was provoked by the authorities in 2014, when Kyiv sent the troops to Donbas. The year of 2020 will show whether the new Ukrainian power elite understood, that the nature of "this war" is quite different; that it is Russia's aggression of a hybrid type, and Kyivan capitulate course only whets the Kremlin's appetites.

In this issue, in a number of publications, our authors point out the growing threat of the new waves of Russian aggression. The more people in Russia talk about fighting for worldwide peace, the more it means Moscow preparing for war. Everything is Orwell-like. In October 2019, one of the modern Putinism creators, Sergei Karaganov, noted that the general idea of Russian foreign policy should be to formalize the fact that "Russia is the main supplier of the international security for the world and itself." "The idea that Russia is the main stronghold of peace and strategic stability should become one of the key ideas that will unite both the people and the international community," Karaganov says. Such is the opinion of Putinism adherents the mission of Russia in both domestic and foreign policy may be.

Against the background of a surge in the civil activity in Russian regions, this means the actualization of Putin's slogan of "rubbing terrorists out in the outhouse." The Kremlin gained relevant experience not only during the two Chechen wars. In foreign policy, this means the continuation of "security creation" according to the Syrian and Donbas patterns. And all this will be presented as a struggle for peace, against nationalism, fascism, and terrorism. And there will be those who will be tempted to take this approach. French President Macron was the first.

Not accidentally Moscow is preparing to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the victory in World War II, attracting a number of G7 leaders to this propaganda show. Probably, the Anniversary of the victory over Nazism is a disguise of the certain scenario

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preparation. It will be similar to 2014, when after the Sochi Olympics, Russia launched an invasion to Ukraine, occupying the Crimean Peninsula. According to the Kremlin's plan, the presence of the leaders of at least three G7 countries – the United States, France, Italy, as well as China and India, will give Russia an indulgence to "establish peace" and "fight against terrorists" wherever it pleases.

I suggest boycotting of the "Victory-Putin-show," on May 9, 2020, will be on the agenda for people of goodwill – for those who have not forgotten the Russians' destruction of civilian MH17 flight, the brutal bombing of Aleppo, Syria by Russian civil aviation, the organization of assassinations of political opponents in various countries, preparation of coups, the organization of espionage and sabotage networks in Europe, repression against dis-

sidents and Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories. The Azov-Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Baltic will be the regions of increasing tension, as Russia tries to assert its dominance in them and oust NATO. Russia's attempt to complete the corrupt Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline could lead to a casus belli for US-German relations in 2020.

Therefore, the Doomsday Clock is inexorably approaching midnight. Happy New Year 2020! And we, as in the previous years, will show on the pages of our analytical journal the deep essence of the events and processes taking place in the Black Sea region and not only.

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Legal Mechanisms of Russian Aggression against Ukraine¹

The obvious fact is that the Russian Federation is actively using the juridical means of aggression against Ukraine in the universal and regional international jurisdictions, as well as within the legal systems of the Russian Federation, Ukraine and third countries. Generalization of directions and actions of Russia in public discussions has not been carried out yet. Therefore, it is important to have a comprehensive analysis of the relevant processes, intentions and measures of the aggressor and to work out effective legal and other counter-measures.

The most critical and impressive are the forms of juridical work of the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian jurisdiction. Among other things, they indicate not only the complete absence of the organized legal or anti-corruption policy in this area but also the complete degradation of domestic counterintelligence activities. Additionally, these forms of work once again return us to the question of the expediency of the stay of the diplomatic and consular representatives of the aggressor state in Ukraine. After all, the most important legal actions of the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian jurisdiction should be attributed to its active participation in both allowed (hiring lawyers, representatives, attracting consular opportunities) activities and through corruption risks and the use of pro-Russian officials and its own direct agents among high officials of the law enforcement agencies and judges in certain categories of judicial proceedings.

The first direction is the proceedings in administrative courts on the alleged illegality of the sanctions against the economic entities and individuals. In

the interests of the Russian Federation, individuals file appeals against the normative and individual decisions of the state bodies of Ukraine on the application of sanctions, and managerial acts on the implementation of sanctions and relevant management decisions on these issues. Bright examples are initiated administrative cases "False-Aksenov", where the double of the Crimean Gauleiter filed an appeal against the decree of the President and the decision of the National Security Council of Ukraine regarding the "Head of the Republic of Crimea" [1], as well as the appeal of the alleged "ship-owner" against the measures aimed to block the "Mechanic Pogodin" tanker as the property of the sanctioned person [2].

The case of the Russian Maritime Shipping Register (RMSR) has also become characteristic. Its subsidiary in Ukraine managed, through manipulative claims of the alleged independence from the RMRS, to cancel in court the sanctions imposed on it by the order of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade [3]. It is interesting that the General tactic of the Russians in sanctions cases is the fabrication of plaintiff's information on the classic principle of "we are not here", which is absolutely uncritical of both the courts and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, even if the court decision does not satisfy the fabricated claims of the Russians.

The second area of activity of the Russians is the so-called Maritime criminal proceedings concerning the attempts to bring to justice the violators of the ban on commercial shipping to Crimea, especially the captains of the relevant commercial (cargo and fishing ships) and attempts to confiscate the relevant commercial and fishing ships by Ukraine. Examples of pending proceedings in respect of the detained ships "Sky Moon" [4] and "Nord" [5; 6] show that if the Russians want, it is enough easy to break up the relevant criminal proceedings, taking an advantage of the individual errors and inaction

¹The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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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of the law enforcement agencies, and clearly artificially creating them.

The third extremely relevant area of work of the Russians is criminal proceedings against the persons who are brought to justice for cooperation with the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation in Crimea and in the East of Ukraine, as well as other high-profile proceedings related to the conflict. Statistics show a general unjustified tendency when the state prosecution and the court abuse an opportunity to apply the interim measures not related to detention and suspended sentences to persons suspected of treason and encroachments on the territorial integrity of Ukraine (art. 110 and 111 of the Criminal Code) [7; 8].

It is impossible to imagine the relevant soft position of the state prosecution and the court, without the direct influence of the Russians on the appropriate officials. The situation around the resonance for Russian proceedings, like a "case of Yanukovych" and "May 2 case", where the main tactics of the Russians are not only working with prosecutors and judges, but the procedural delays in complex cases should be indicated [9; 10; 11].

As the fourth direction, it is necessary to point out separately the proceedings initiated by the persons controlled by the Russian Federation on the alleged illegality of restrictions on trade with Crimea and supplies of water and electricity to Crimea with the further prospect of reaching global and European human rights structures. As an example, we can cite the attempt of the Crimean Fish Processing Plant controlled by the occupiers to sue the North-Crimean Canal for alleged violations and losses caused by the termination of water supply to the Peninsula. In this case, after the refusal of the Ukrainian courts to consider the case on the merits (the "plaintiff" did not pay the court fees), the Russians claimed an alleged complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) [12].

Lobbying through public organizations, People's Deputies and other interested officials of a number of the legal status has become a separate non-judicial direction of the legal work of Russians in Ukraine. First of all, the adoption of legislation that minimizes the level and practical prospects of responsibility for collaborators in Crimea and the East of the country has been lobbied for several years by abusing the concept of "transitional justice". In practice, they plan to leave the responsibility only for those who have entered, apart from the

fact of working for the enemy, international crimes or crimes against human rights (which, of course, has no real procedural prospects and makes such persons completely unpunished), and to relieve the responsibility of "99% of the population" [13].

It is also important for Russians to approve the legislation of Ukraine, which would legalize documents issued by the Russian authorities in Crimea and the East [14]. The Russians are unconditionally interested in the further preservation of the current legislation of Ukraine that legalizes economic activity in the temporarily occupied Crimea [15], as well as in the further non-participation of Ukraine in the Rome Statute and non-submission of the relevant changes in the Ukrainian criminal law [16].

Special attention is paid to the preservation of the position of the alleged expediency of further participation of Ukraine in the Agreement on Cooperation in the use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait of 2003, in the Agreement on Fishing in the Sea of Azov in 1993, allegedly by virtue of these documents. Their main tool is the corresponding Ukrainian-Russian Commission on fishing in the Sea of Azov and the existing lobby of officials who have either business or corruption-controlling powers in this area [17; 18]. Strengthening the public outcry from this cooperation with the enemy, the endorsement of the statement of Mejlis of Crimean Tatar people about the need to consider indigenous peoples' rights to marine resources [19; 20], as well as the new policy of the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation in the Donbas, embodied in the "law" of "DPR" on "state border of the DPR" on November 29, 2019 [21], currently making this activity of the Russians maximum turbulent.

And, of course, the Russians will do everything in their power to reduce the quality of the authorized bodies' preparation of the materials in interstate cases in the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and the ECHR, initiated by Ukraine because of Russian aggression, as well as to influence those key officials who are involved in these processes and are not now controlled by the Russians. It would be extremely imprudent to expect another from the aggressor.

Among the special legal means that the Russian Federation applies in its jurisdiction, the integral formation of an illegal regulatory system in the ARC and Sevastopol should be separately attrib-

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uted. But within this very broad phenomenon, it is necessary to point out a number of particularly important for the enemy activities. First, it is the gradual destruction of all Ukrainian organizational and administrative acts as grounds for the implementation of human rights (citizenship, residence in Crimea, land and other real estates, etc.) with the subsequent violation of such rights [22].

Second, it is the mass involvement of Ukrainian citizens, despite their own desire, in the positions of the occupation authorities in violation of the regime of the occupied territory ("election commissions", "conscription commissions", "jury courts"). Other key legal measures of the occupiers include:

- prohibition of the representative bodies of the Crimean Tatar people;
- application of the legislation of the Russian Federation in Crimea that significantly restricts political human rights and establishes responsibility for "extremism";
- normative imitation of observance of the rights of ethnic groups of Crimea for foreign policy purposes;
- retrospective application of normative acts of the Russian Federation on the events in Crimea 1991-2014 [23].

A separate direction was the preparation by the Russian Federation of the "legal" grounds for declaring the maximum space of sea areas around Crimea as allegedly belonging to Russia. This was manifested by the Russians in the regulatory setting of "nature reserves areas" on the sea [24], "the lines of Maritime search and rescue region", as well as in documenting the actions of Russian forces on the objects of "Chornomornaftogaz" [25], in the "procedural" consolidation in the occupation jurisdiction of actions against Ukrainian fishermen on the sea [26].

Nobody should forget the use by the Russian punitive bodies of the "universal jurisdiction" against Ukrainian soldiers and other officials for allegedly committing of "international crimes" on the territory of Ukraine' [27]. The important measures of the Russian Federation in its own jurisdiction remain issues of approval within the Russian legal system of acts aimed at "legalizing" the existence of the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation in the East of Ukraine as "state entities" (recognition of "passports", "diplomas", etc.) [28].

Obvious means of legal assistance to the Russian aggression were also the adoption of regulations of the Russian Federation, granting the right to a significant part of the residents of the East and South of Ukraine to receive Russian citizenship [29].

In the jurisdictions of the third countries, the Russian Federation also seeks legal activities against Ukraine through legal means (lawyer, diplomatic, consular activities), as well as through corruption risks and the use of pro-Russian officials. First and foremost, it is the formation of the organizational and legal precedent practice to recognize de facto the attempt of the annexation of Crimea by promoting the conclusion of contracts with Russian-controlled Crimean structures, re-registration of the property of the residents of third countries according to the legislation of the Russian Federation, decisions of national courts (case of Scythian gold [30], etc).

Also, the Russians are actively taking measures to form organizational and legal precedent practice that does not qualify the conflict in the East as Russian aggression and confirms alleged committing of "international crimes" by officials and militaries of Ukraine, as well as measures to counteract taking of fair decisions in similar cases by the courts of third countries (Markiv case [31], MH17 case [32], etc.). It should also be noted that the Russian Federation actively opposes the issuance, entry into force and enforcement of the international arbitration decisions initiated by property owners in Crimea under the Ukrainian-Russian Agreement on Investment Protection in the relevant national jurisdictions [33].

Interesting and creative legal activities of the Russian Federation abroad, which were carried out according to the preliminary standards of the work of the Soviet special services, were the fake "public international tribunals" for high-profile events of the conflict ("Tribunal for "Boeing", "Tribunal for the Kerch provocation") [34]. They are active attempts of the Russians to transfer the cases brought in the Russian Federation against Ukrainian activists and military personnel for their implementation in third countries with the use of the framework of international police and juridical cooperation, including Interpol [35].

In international jurisdiction, the Russian Federation focuses on cases initiated by Ukraine and Ukrainian residents against the Russian Federation in the UN ICJ, ICC and ECHR, UN Committees,

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Marine Law Arbitrations and Investment Protection. But this relatively legal activity of Russia is accompanied, in particular, by the mass fabrication of statements against Ukraine from individuals and legal entities in the ECHR in connection with the events in Crimea and in the East through false "human rights structures". It is worth citing a unique case in the practice of the ECHR of Ukrainian lawyer N. Tselovalnichenko, who was banned by the ECHR from representing the interests of individuals in this international body after her mass statements against Ukraine related to the conflict in the East, some of which the ECHR identified as probably falsified [36].

Also, the current self-restriction of the Russian Federation's participation in the mechanisms of international humanitarian law does not formally violate international law. This is both the withdrawal of the Russian Federation's signature from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [37] and the termination of the Russian Federation's recognition of the powers of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission under the Geneva Conventions [38]. But the obvious goal of such actions is the impossibility of judgment of Russian officials for international crimes, both military and against humanity.

A separate factor is the Russian Federation's abuse of international Maritime law in order to consolidate its dominance in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Russian manipulatively interpreted and applied the rules of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Montreux Convention, the Black Sea Memorandum PSC, as well as the alleged valid above-mentioned "Azov Agreements" of 1993 and 2003 [39]. The Russians also massively abuse the institutions established by the Law of the Sea, such as peaceful passage, security zones of platforms, pipeline protection, notification of closed areas to seafarers, etc. [40].

A typical way of juridical work of the Russian Federation was the abuse of regulations of international organizations to ensure the participation of collaborators from Crimea as members of Russian delegations and for mass presentations of fake positions about events in Ukraine by the Russian-controlled "civil and human rights structures", holding fake conferences and presentations on "Russian Crimea" [41; 42].

The absence of a coordinated legal policy to counter Russian aggression under such conditions inevitably leads to irreparable and large-scale negative legal consequences. During the discussion of the above-mentioned issues, like the expert meeting "Legal War: Ukrainian-Russian Context" on December 13, 2019 in the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, it was proposed to create a body responsible for coordinating the appropriate legal response to Russian aggression. At the same time, such a structure has not been defined or created for the five years of the war, and such an authorized body in this area as the National Security Council of Ukraine has withdrawn from coordinating activities, it is unlikely to expect changes in the public administration in the nearest future.

In addition, special high-level commissions formed on certain legal issues related to the conflict, such as the Inter-ministerial Commission on the application and implementation of international humanitarian law in Ukraine [43] and the Inter-ministerial Commission on Ukraine's derogation from obligations under international treaties [44], which met in the "once a year" format, proved to be completely ineffective and impossible to respond to current challenges. Much more effective is the practice of Russians that form working groups of lawyers at their own authorities, in particular at the occupation administrations, such as the "workforce on international legal issues at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Crimea to the President of the Russian Federation".

Such lawyers are not officials. They provide representation of various authorities, "independent" lawyers and experts and the achievements of such groups, operating informally and in a constant working mode, and in the Russian Federation they are supported both by the special services and the Foreign Ministry, and "independent structures" with strong funding. The absence in Ukraine for five years of war even officially voiced ideas about creating such quasi-state structures for the organization of legal counteraction to Russian aggression clearly indicates both the real "motivation" of national officials on these issues and the level of the domestic model of public administration.

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Creeping Annexation of the Black Sea²

The situation in the Black Sea is rapidly changing. Russia's actions to transform it into a "Russian lake" are a direct consequence of the occupation of Crimea and its further militarization. All the processes of the last 5-6 years are developing on this basis. In a short form, it looks as follows.

In February 2014, in the result of the special operation of the Russian Federation, the Crimean Peninsula was occupied; the ports in Crimea and drilling platforms on the Black Sea shelf between the Peninsula and Odesa were seized. On March 18, 2014, Crimea was illegally annexed and the ports were expropriated. In April of the same year, Ukraine declared that the customs checkpoints in the ports of the Peninsula were closed. Crimean ports were included in the international sanctions

lists, and visits to them by commercial ships were prohibited. Territorial waters of Ukraine (12-mile zone), adjacent to the Crimean Peninsula, received the status of occupied water area.

The Russian Federation violated the sanctions and organized sea transportation to the Crimea. This was the subject of monitoring by non-governmental organizations "Maidan of Foreign Affairs", "Black Sea Institute for Strategic Studies", the Internet edition "Black Sea News", and later – the Naval Forces of Ukraine. There was a "Crimean blacklist" of ships-violators. A corresponding response began in different countries.

A few attempts of the "blacklistships" to entry the ports of mainland Ukraine ended with their arrests and confiscation. Ship-owners began to refuse going to the Crimea, and countries offlags- to deprive such ships of their registration. This has affected the reduction of participation of foreign (except the Russian Federation) ships in the Crimean traffic (Fig. 1).

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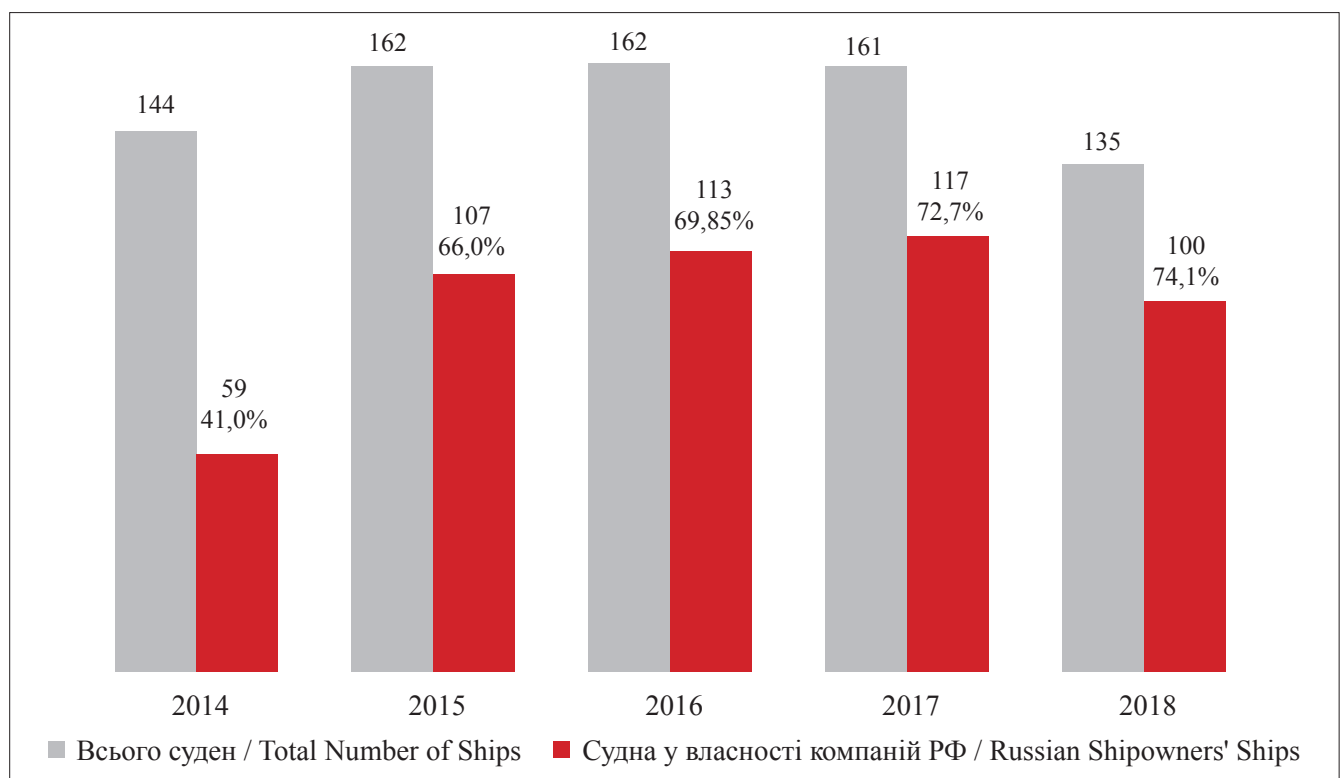


Figure 1. Dynamics of the number of ships violating the "Crimean sanctions" in 2014-2018

FOCUS ON: BLACK SEA CHALLENGES

Some ship owners, to prevent record of the violations of the sanctions regime, started sailing to Crimea with the transmitters of the mandatory international ship identification system (AIS) turned off and falsification of the information about the destination ports, indicating the Russian port of Temryuk and other ports of the Russian Federation instead of the Crimean ports. Crimean ports stopped publishing information about port visits. The ships, deprived of a flag, began to carry out the Crimean sails without any flag or raising a flag of any first country.

In General, attempts to circumvent the "Crimean sanctions" formed a "gray zone" in the Black Sea with a bouquet of violations of the Maritime Law: visits to prohibited ports, turning off the AIS, falsification of information about the ports of destination, sailing with a falsified flag.

The Russian Federation organized predatory use of natural resources of the occupied 12-mile zone of

the Black Sea and the sea shelf – natural gas, sea sand and seafood. Gas production is carried out in the conditions of direct support of the armed marines and surveillance systems located on the marine platforms, and the areas around offshore gas fields are protected by ships of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation [1], sand mining is guarded by ships of the Coast Guard of the FSB of the Russian Federation.

Few people pay attention that the captured Odesa field is located closer to the coast of the Odesa region than to occupied Crimea. The distance from the nearest captured by Russia drilling rig to the coast of the Odesa region is 77.6 km (41.9 miles), to the Snake Island is 50.3 km (27.1 miles), and to the Cape Tarkhankut in occupied Crimea is 121.5 km (65.6 miles). The distance from the coast of the Kherson region to the nearest captured rig is 52.2 km (28.2 miles) (Fig. 2).

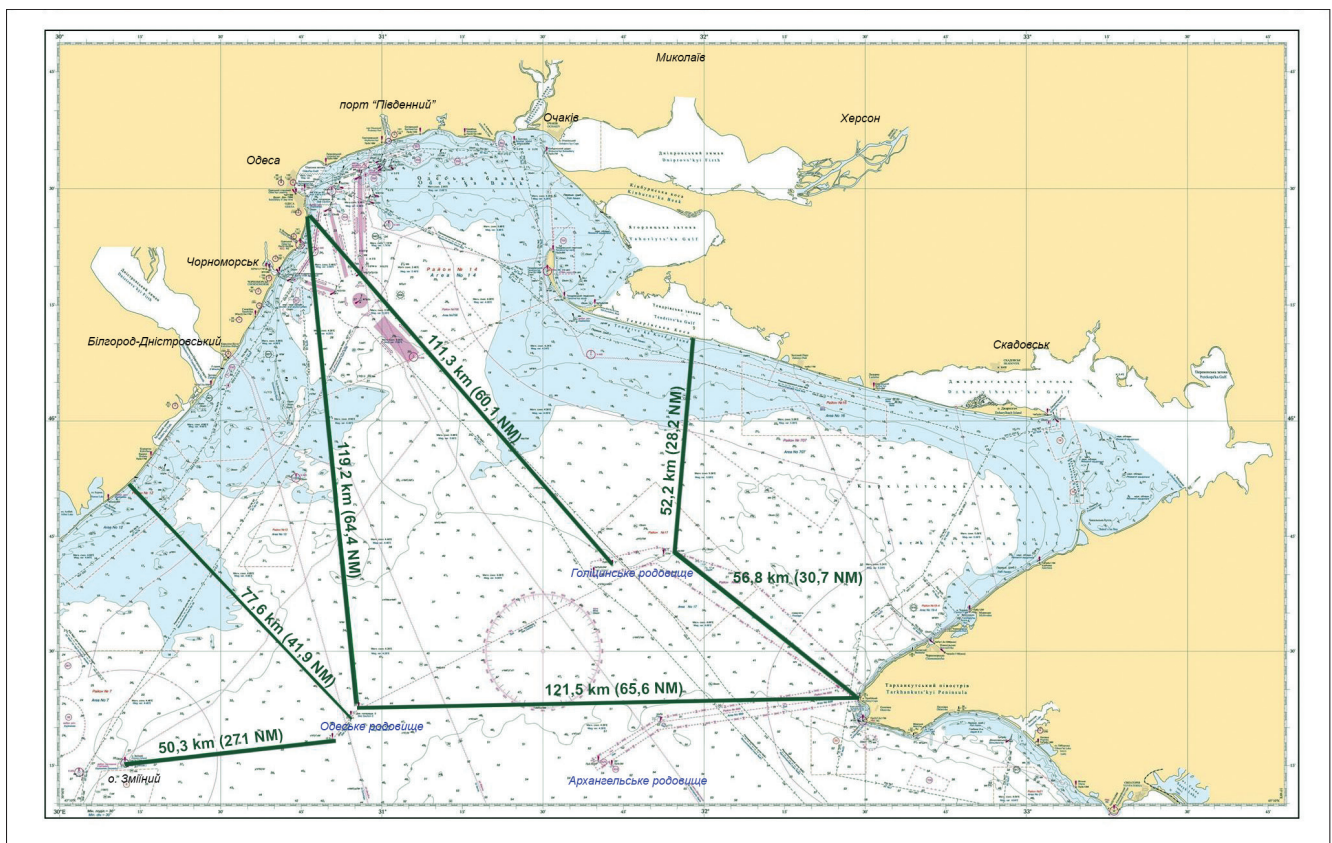


Figure 2. Dislocation of the Odesa gas field captured by the Russian Federation

After the occupation of Crimea, the Russian Federation immediately began designing a bridge across the Kerch Strait. In addition to the connecting function, the project also has a function of "filter" and "barrier" to the entrance and exit from the Sea of Azov. In April 2016, construction began,

and in May 2018, the road passage was opened. At the end of December 2019, the railway component was added. The bridge is designed to prevent the passage of large ships to the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk-the height is limited to 33 meters. This geometry cut off a half of the com-

FOCUS ON: BLACK SEA CHALLENGES

mercial visits to the Ukrainian ports – they are the only ones in the Sea of Azov that can be visited by ships with a draft of up to 8 m.

The ports found the smaller ships, and then, in April-May 2018, Russia began a *de facto* economic blockade – mass stops of ships at the sea and artificial long-term holding of them in the Kerch Strait under the pretext of "a terrorist threat to the Kerch Bridge". This prompted the relocation of Ukrainian Navy boats to the Sea of Azov and escorting merchant ships at the sea. This quickly removed the problem of detentions in the Sea of Azov – from Mariupol and Berdyansk to the Kerch Strait and back. But the occupation of the Kerch Strait has led to the fact that the hindrance to navigation was used as part of a package of Russian demands in the formation of future negotiating positions on other issues, such as the resumption of the Dnieper water supply to Crimea.

In July 2019, the "Black Sea creativity" of the Russian Federation acquired new manifestations. During the US-Ukrainian exercise *Sea Breeze 2019*, one of the areas of the exercise in the Black Sea was blocked by Russia. The Russian Federation issued an international warning about the exercises with the shooting of its Black Sea Fleet.

Further, using the same technology, the Russian Federation blocked five areas in the Black Sea, including the exclusive Maritime economic zone of Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, and the Eastern part of the Black Sea from Sochi to Turkey to prevent the Georgian-American exercise *Agile Spirit 2019*. The areas of the sea, which were blocked by the Russian Navy, only in July 2019 exceeded 120 thousand square kilometers, or more than ¼ of the entire Black Sea area (Fig. 3). At the same time, there were no exercises or shooting in those areas.

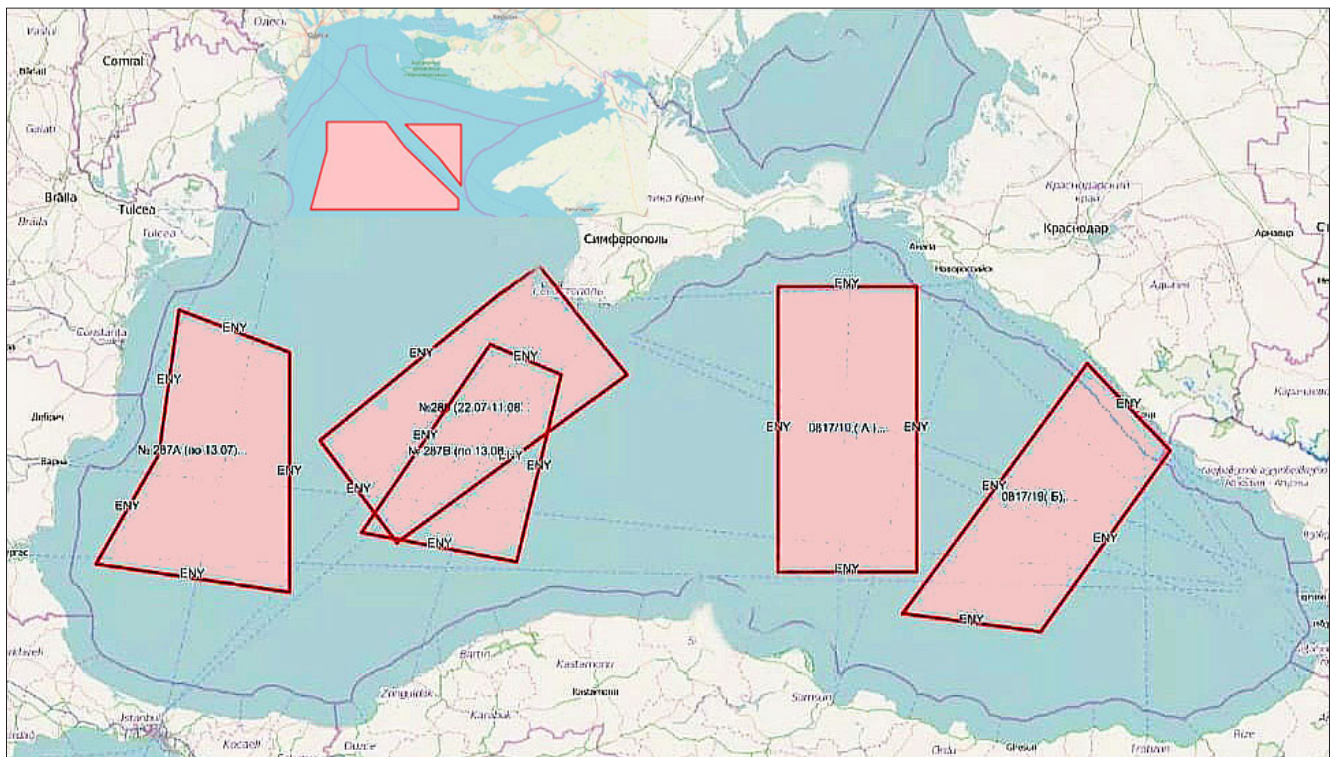


Figure 3. Areas blocked by Russia in July 2019

The purpose of these actions was to impose the "usual" perception that the entire Black Sea is a zone of influence of Russia. The further occupation of the entire exclusive marine economic zone of Ukraine, the displacement of NATO from the Black Sea, and the use of the sea for future gas blackmail

of the Black Sea region are in the Russian agenda. The situation is developing with such a speed that the traditional foreign policy of Ukraine, its Black Sea neighbors, NATO and the EU, not to mention the UN, simply do not have time to react and, therefore, require renewal and creativity.

FOCUS ON: BLACK SEA CHALLENGES

Crimean Maritime sanctions, their compliance, and violation

The number of violators. As of January 1, 2019, 348 sea ships were included in the "blacklist". The data by years is as follows: 2014 – 144 ships; 2015 – 162 ships; 2016 – 162 ships; 2017 – 161 ships; 2018 – 135 ships (see the Table below).

27 of 135 violators in 2018 were ships permanent-based in the ports of Kerch, Sevastopol and Yalta

(19 of them were ferries of the Kerch Strait, 4 - dredging ships), 38 were ships that entered the Crimean ports only for long-term repairs, or those that are in a standstill, and all of them had the flag of the Russian Federation; 70 of those ships transported the cargoes and passengers in 2018 to and from the Crimean ports. 100 ships were owned by Russian companies, and other 35 ships – by the ship-owners from other countries.

The number of ships violating the border of Ukraine and international sanctions by flag state over the entire period of occupation, and separately in 2018

	Flag	2014 – 2018		2018	
1	Antigua & B	1	0,29 %		
2	Cambodia	1	0,29 %		
3	Cayman Is	1	0,29 %		
4	China	1	0,29 %		
5	Cyprus	1	0,29 %		
6	Italy	1	0,29 %		
7	Portugal	1	0,29 %		
8	Saint Vincent	1	0,29 %		
9	Tuvalu	1	0,29 %		
10	Ukraine	1	0,29 %	1	0,74 %
11	Greece	2	0,57 %		
12	Korea	2	0,57 %		
13	Singapore	2	0,57 %		
14	Sri Lanka	2	0,57 %		
15	Vanuatu	2	0,57 %		
16	Syria	2	0,57 %	7	5,19 %
17	Bulgaria	3	0,86 %		
18	Marshall Islands	3	0,86 %		

	Flag	2014 – 2018		2018	
19	Liberia	3	0,86 %		
20	Cook Is	3	0,86 %		
21	DR Congo	4	1,15 %		
22	Turkey	4	1,15 %		
23	Malta	5	1,44 %		
24	Belize	5	1,44 %		
25	Moldova	6	1,72 %		
26	Saint Kitts	6	1,72 %		
27	Mongolia	7	2,01 %		
28	Tanzania	10	2,87 %	3	2,22 %
29	Palau	11	3,16 %	4	2,96 %
30	Comoros	12	3,45 %	4	2,96 %
31	Panama	12	3,45 %	1	0,74 %
32	Sierra Leone	15	4,31 %	3	2,22 %
33	Togo	24	6,90 %	12	8,89 %
34	Russia	193	55,46 %	93	68,89 %
	No Flag			7	5,19 %
	Total vessels	348	100 %	135	100 %

Sanctions and the flags. 348 sea ships from the "blacklist" at the time of the violation of the border of Ukraine were registered under flags of 34 countries. We should note that 135 ships, which entered the Crimean ports in 2018, were registered under the flags of only 8 countries – Russia (93 ships), Togo (12), Syria (7), no flag (7), Palau (4), Comoros (4), Sierra Leone (3), Tanzania (3), and Panama (1). One more ship under the flag of Ukraine was included in the "blacklist", although it was on the raid transshipment in the Kerch Strait. Reducing from 34 to 8 of the number of countries whose flags have been seen in Crimea is the effect of the international sanctions.

During the years of occupation, the flags of the EU and NATO countries disappeared from the ports of Crimea. They were last time seen on March 18, 2017, in Kerch on the mast of a Bulgarian BRIZ gas tanker (IMO: 8899720) carrying liquefied gas

to Bulgaria. The flags of Greece in Crimea were last time seen on July 27, 2015, Turkey – on April 6, 2015, Cyprus – on March 26, 2015, Italy – on October 5, 2014, Portugal – on September 17, 2014, and Malta – on August 19, 2014. The rest of the EU and NATO member states avoided this fate. In addition, the flags that are respected in the Maritime world – Panama, Singapore and Liberia, completely or almost completely disappeared.

Due to the fact that the foreign fleet has almost left the ports of the Peninsula, there is nothing to replace this fleet, except by ships under the flags of the Russian Federation. In 2014, the Russian flag accounted for 45.3%, in 2015 – 62.6%, in 2016 – to 66.5%, in 2017 – to 67.7%. In 2018, this trend continued – 68.9%. As for the analysis of the state registration of shipowners, the situation looks even more expressive (Fig.4).

FOCUS ON: BLACK SEA CHALLENGES

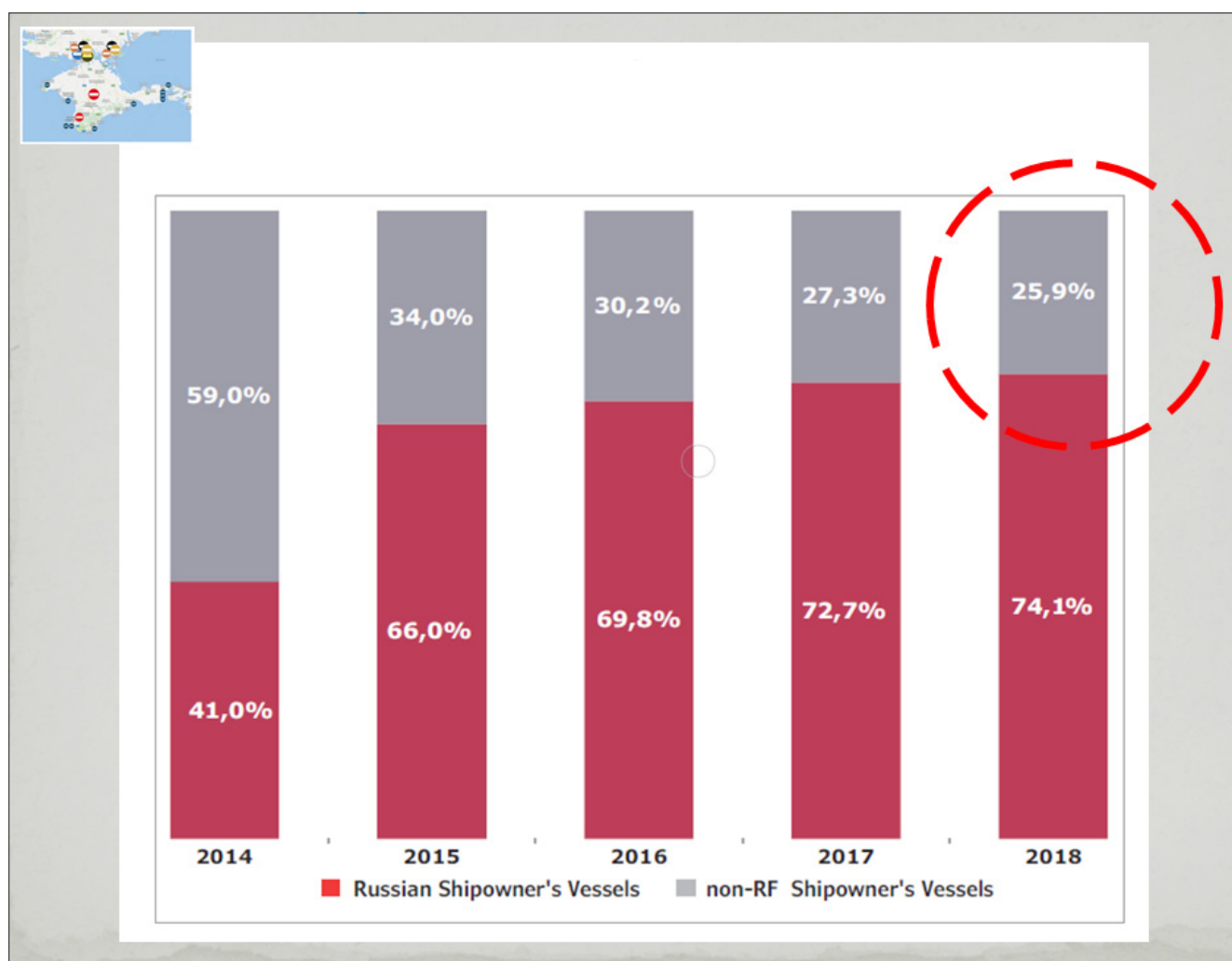


Figure 4. Dynamics of the share of Russian ships-violators of the "Crimean sanctions" in 2014-2018

A peculiarity of 2018 was the decrease of the number of violating ships registered under the fixed in the "blacklist" flags of Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Togo and Comoros. That was not an accident. At the end of 2017 and in 2018, 21 of 35 foreign ships, except those of the Russian Federation, which visited the Crimean ports, were deprived of flag registration in those four African States. The mass exodus of appeals from Ukraine was observed for the first time during the years of occupation. In 2019, another 15 offending ships were deprived of their flags.

Tanzania and Togo had the highest reaction rate. They deprived 12 and 11 offending ships respectively of their flags. That created a new problem for violators: it turned out that it was not so easy to re-register a ship from the Crimean "blacklist" in another country. Some ships could not find a country that would provide them its flag for 9-10 months. This led to interesting consequences. One of them is the appearance of such "newcomers"

as Honduras and Cameroon among the flag-registration countries. At once five ships-violators of sanctions didn't find other options except for registration under the flag of Syria. *But still, the main consequence is the mass appearance of a whole flotilla of ships without any flag in the Black and Mediterranean Seas and ports of these seas. This is an extremely serious violation of the Law of the Sea.* In 2018, 21 ships entered the ports of occupied Crimea, which at the time of their stay in the port did not have a flag of registration in any country in the world. Overall the Monitoring group recorded 54 such cases.

This problem requires rationing at the international level. International law should contain a direct prohibition of ships that do not have a flag registration at sea. In addition, all Black Sea and Mediterranean ports, navies and coastguards of the countries of the region should receive prompt information about the revocation of the ships registration.

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Sailing of the shipsto Crimea with AIS transmitter deliberately turned off. An automatic identification system (AIS) is used to identify ships, their size, course, and portsof destination. According to the SOLAS Convention 74/88, AIS is mandatory for shipsover 300 register tons engaged on international trips, ships of over 500 register tons not engaged in international trips, and all passenger ships.

Note. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) is the most important of all international agreements on the safety of merchant ships. Every ship that makes an international trip and is subject to this document must comply with its requirements. Otherwise, it may be delayed, and for some items-not allowed to the port.

Since the beginning of the occupation of Crimea, there has been a growing disregard for the requirements of the SOLAS Convention on AIS use. In 2018, this became absolute from the part of ship-sowned by foreign (except the Russian Federation) ship owners. In 2018, 33 of the 35 foreign (except the Russian Federation) ships, which entered the Crimean ports, in all (!) cases turned off the AIS transmitters. Those ships carried out 146 visitswithout AIS to the ports of Crimea. 21 ship 62 times visited the ports of Sevastopol. 13 shipsvisitedthe port of Feodosia 30 times. 20 ships visitedthe ports of Kerch 54 times. In most cases, AIS was turned off immediately after entering the Black Sea from the Bosphorus. In all cases, during the passage of the Bosphorus, falsified information was entered into AIS concerning the destination port – it was indicated as one of the ports of the Russian Federation.

The total nature of these violations, on the one hand, confirms the efficiency of the sanctions, and on the other – requires immediate intervention by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Obstacles to navigation freedom in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov

Since May 2018,the perception of the crisis in the Sea ofAzov has passed several phases: from the protests of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to the recognition and the official response

of the Ukrainian authorities, the US and EU, and specific events — the decision of the NSDC of Ukraine, strengthening of naval presence of the Naval Forces of Ukraine in the Seaof Azov, the European Parliament resolution, incidents between the warships and discussion on international sanctions against Russian ports in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

Spot checks of the ships in the Kerch Strait began on April 27, 2018. We are talking about ships that wentto Mariupol and Berdyansk under different flags and belonged to different owners, mostly non-Ukrainian. On May 17, 2018, the Monitoring group started recording unusual stops of ships in the middle of the Sea of Azov. They were carried out by ships of the Coast Guard of the FSB Border Service of the Russian Federation under the pretext of "terrorist threats". By the way, the day before the start of the stops in the Sea of Azov, on May 16, Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the automobile part of the Kerch bridge. Since May 17, 2018, the Monitoring Group has recorded 110 such stops. Each of them is described and entered into the databases on the web-site www.blackseanews.net (Fig. 5).

At the end of June 2018,it was not enough to stop the vessel in the middle of the seafor the Coast Guard of the FSB of the Russian Federation. On June 23-27 it started stopping and checking every shipin the Kerch Strait. Previously, a shipwas waiting for the permit to pass the Kerch Strait during 2-5 hours, and from the end of June 2018 – already 10-18 hours. The permit was granted only after a ship was approached by a FSB boat, and the sea border guards performed the same procedures as during stops on the open sea: interviewing crews, checking documents, an inspection of premises and checking cargo. At the same time, an act was filled out that ships' captains had no claims. This explains why the captains did not complain.

The procedure took place both at the entrance to the Sea of Azov and at the exit from it. It got to the point that in November 2018, the average waiting time both at the entrance and at the exit was five days (!). But individual ships were delayed even longer: the record belongs to the Canadianship detained at the exit to the Black Sea for almost 13 days.

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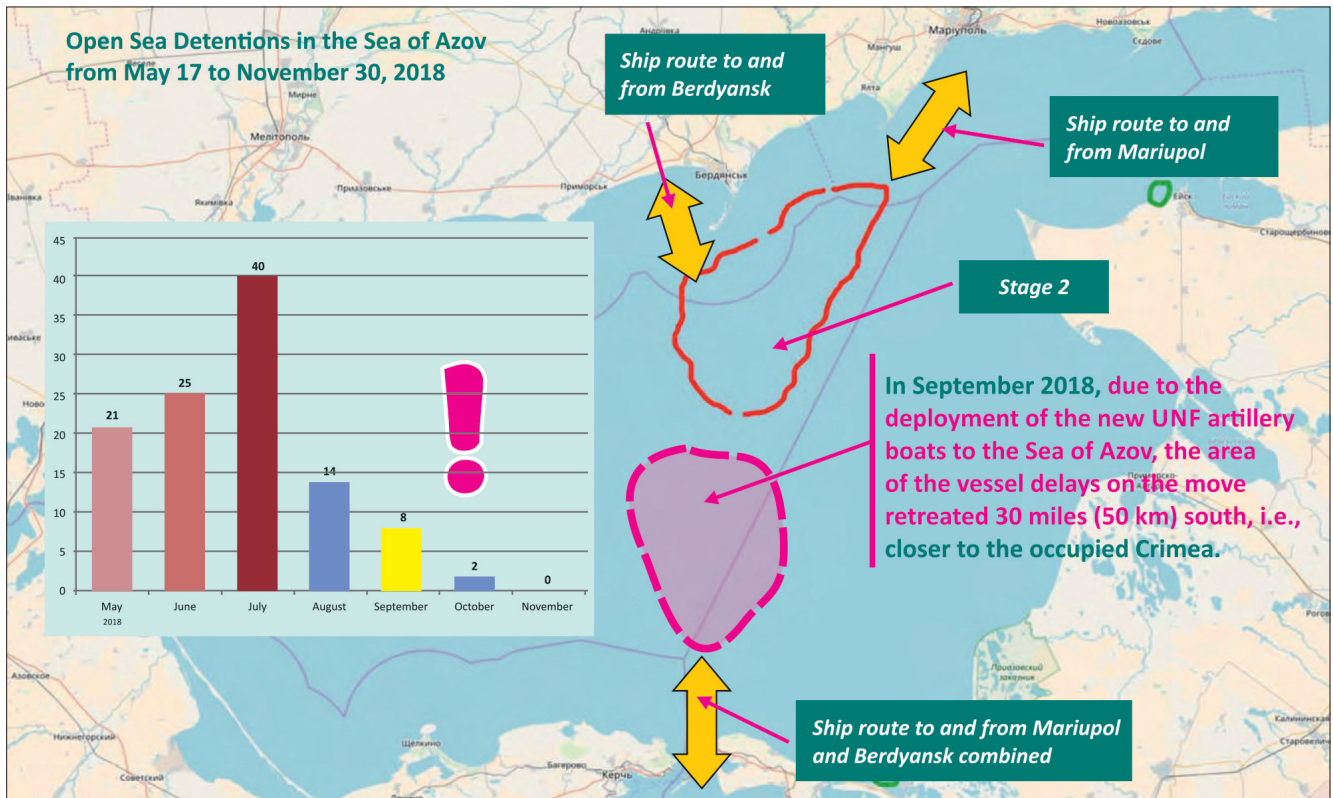


Figure 5. Areas of detention of civil ships by the Coast Guard Border Service of the FSB of the Russian Federation

Note. Traffic control in the Kerch Strait was carried out from the Kerch port in Crimea. That work was performed by the "Kerch Ship Traffic Control Center" of the Crimean Basin Branch of the Federal State Unitary Enterprise "Rosmorport". The Kerch port, which was owned by Ukraine, was captured by the Russian Federation during the occupation, expropriated and now operates under the name "Branch of the Federal State Budgetary Institution "Administration of Sea Ports of the Black Sea" in Kerch". It is under Ukrainian and international sanctions. Its current parent organization - "Administration of Sea Ports of the Black Sea" can be found in Novorossiysk, Russia. It is subordinate to the state Executive Authority of the Russian Federation, which has the name "Federal Agency for Sea and River Transport" (Rosmorrechflot), and the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation.

Detention of ships in the middle sea continued from May to October 2018 (Fig. 5). Then they were stopped. This is a direct consequence of the ships' escorting in the Sea of Azov by Ukrainian Navy boats, which were relocated to the Sea of Azov by

land in September 2018. As a result, particularly audacious detentions of ships by FSB ships within a few miles of the Ukrainian coastline, recorded in May-August 2018, also stopped.

This was confirmed during the briefing by the First Deputy Head of the Coast Guard Department of the Border Service of the FSB Vice-Admiral Alexey Volsky on December 8, 2018, in Moscow, (transcript – editorial Blackseanews.net, in the language of original):

"...The next round of tension and provocations, escalating tensions in the Sea of Azov began around August of this year when on the air Ukrainian border boats began regularly declaring that if Russian border ships or boats approach them at a distance of fewer than 20 cables, they will use weapons. 20 cables is 4 km.

...On October 24, 2018, another attempt of provocative actions was carried out, which consisted in the fact that two armored boats of the Ukrainian Navy "Lubny" and "Kremenchuk" escorted the ship under the flag of Bulgaria, which left Mariupol. And this escort, again, was carried out with the threats

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against our ships. Moreover, in addition to the threats, which were heard on the air, the combat readiness of artillery was demonstrated to the Russian border ships. Artillery was directed to the sector where our ships and boats were located. It should be noted that from the Russian border ships there were no threats of the use of weapons against the boats of the State Border Service and the Ukrainian Navy..."

A similar incident, when the Ukrainian Navy armored boats prevented the attempt of the FSB Coast Guard ships to stop two Lebanese ships in the Sea of Azov, took place on October 21, 2018.

The decrease of waiting time in the Kerch Strait (after its maximum in November 2018) began in December 2018 as a result of Russian concerns about the imposition of sanctions against Russian ports in the Sea of Azov, as mentioned in various international statements. The decrease in waiting time at the end of December 2018 and in January 2019 coincided with the forced public responses of Russian officials that Russia "does not violate anything", in connection with:

- Joint statement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President E. Macron (27.12.2018);
- Their subsequent phone conversations with Putin (28.12.2018, and 02.01.2019);
- Visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany G. Maas to Moscow (18.01.2019);
- Visit of the EU delegation and the Ministers of the EU countries to Mariupol (28–29.01.2019).

The average duration of artificial delays in terms of one vessel at the entrance to the Sea of Azov as of December 1-15, 2018 decreased by almost half as compared to November 2018, when the absolute maximum of 124.2 hours/ship was reached. The situation at the exit from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea has also changed significantly in the first half of December 2018. The average loss of time per ship was reduced by 2.4 times compared to November when the absolute maximum for the period of the blockade of 115 hours/vessel was reached.

However, the "Azov package of sanctions" did not take place, with the exception of personal sanctions against the authority of the FSB Coast Guard

– those sanctions had only a symbolic meaning since the Russian military was long forbidden to travel abroad.

The decrease in the delay time of ships was observed during January-July 2019, but in August-September 2019, the threat of the "Azov package of sanctions" seems to have ended. In August 2019, compared to July 2019, the average duration of artificial retention "at the entrance" to the Sea of Azov increased twice, and "at the exit" – 2.4 times. In September, compared to August 2019, the situation worsened: the "entrance" indicator increased by another 1.2 times, and the "exit" – by 1.4 times. However, in October 2019, the average duration of artificial retention of ships compared to August-September period again significantly decreased (Fig. 6). However, it remained 2-4 times higher than the normal level of 5-7 hours that existed before the beginning of the blockade.

According to the Monitoring Group's conclusions, the reasons for reducing the delay time are:

- 1) Significant increase in the duration of artificial delays in August-September 2019 was widely publicized, including abroad, where they believed that the "Azov crisis" was resolved;
- 2) The Russian Federation has tried to demonstrate its "peacefulness" in recent months to lift sanctions, which negative impact on the economy is constantly growing – it has already led to a recession and a catastrophic outflow of capital. Reducing the duration of ships delays in the Kerch Strait in October 2019 after a significant increase in August-September is one of the components of this package of arguments (together with the first exchange of prisoners, consent to the beginning of the withdrawal of troops in the Donbas, the return of captured boats of the Ukrainian Navy);
- 3) This decrease is also due to the coincidence of the events including:
 - the first hearings at the UN International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) on 21 November 2019;
 - Russia's readiness to participate in the meeting of the "Normandy four" in early December 2019.

It is quite obvious that the Russian Federation acts quite formulaic: first, it creates a problem, and then, when international sanctions threaten, it slightly loosens the noose around the neck in sync with the solution of its tactical tasks.

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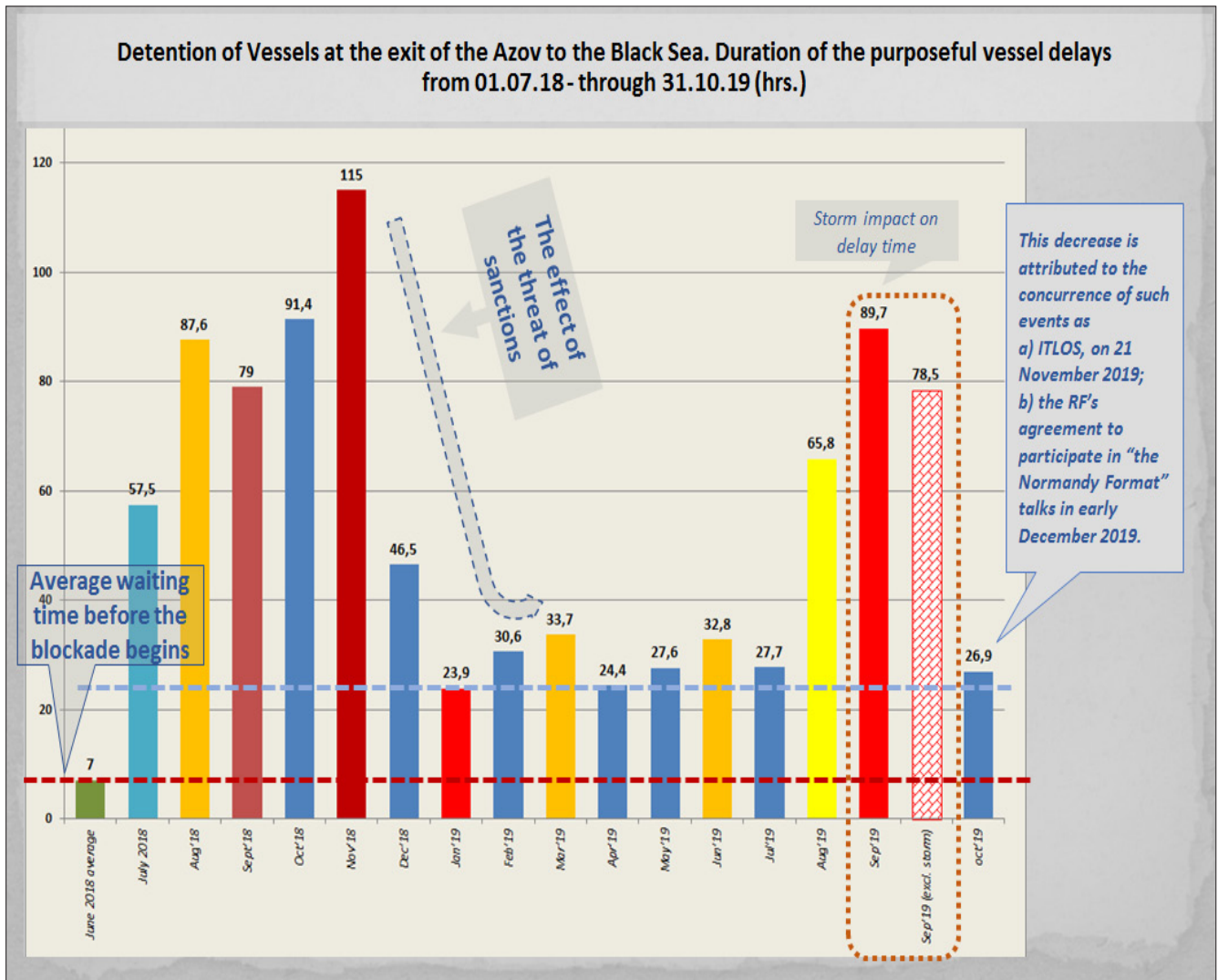


Figure 6. Delays of ships at the entrance to the Sea of Azov

We should note that, despite the decrease in the overall indicators of the blockade, both indicators of artificial downtime are still measured in days, not hours, as it was before. And, of course, all this can change at any moment, depending on the fluctuations in Moscow's mood or the specifics of the current situation in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

According to the Monitoring Group, the critical number of violations of the Law of the Sea and safety of navigation in the Black and Azov Seas are consequences of the traditional underestimation by the Russian Federation of the fact that freedom of navigation is one of the cornerstones of the civilized world. This opens up opportunities to strengthen the international response to these issues.

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Figure 7. Ukrainian gas platforms seized by Russia in the Black Sea

Source: <https://dpsu.gov.ua/ua/news/VIDEO-Korabel-Morskoi-ohoroni-proviv-planove-obstezhennya-Viklyuchnoi-morskoi-ekonomichnoi-zoni-Ukraini-v-rayoni-gazovih-rodovishch/>

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Black Sea Security: Vision and Ideas³

Contemporary international relations witness many changes at the regional level. Black Sea in particular has generated the interest of many countries over the past decade. Talks about the security system within the Black Sea region have been visibly activated by many states, experts and scholars. This short article aims to generate the existing attitudes of many thinkers about the current challenges and opportunities in the Black Sea region.

One could barely find the similar small region in the planet, where so many juxtaposed ideas and interests collide. The presence of harshly diverse political landscape steers the instability and unpredictability of the Black Sea region. While navigating through this hostile environment, comparably small countries like Georgia have quadruple efforts to make in order to ensure their foreign and security interests. Unable to agree that Russia is a shared threat, some of the Black Sea countries lag behind to cooperate and attract outside support to deter Russian aggression. Turkish invasion in Syria and current Russia-Turkish agreement further complicate the understanding of the state of affairs in the Black Sea region. It is clear though, any instability in the region affects the NATO Alliance and European security in large.

Russia's illegal and brutal annexation of Crimea was an unexpected move for many NATO memberstates. This was due to the widespread assumption that, despite the intrusion in Georgia in 2008, Russia would no more violate the principle of territorial integrity, a part of the European security order [1]. This has fanned the flames of NATO's strategic concerns in the region. At the 2016 summit in Warsaw, member states pledged to develop a "tailored forward presence" in the Black Sea promising support for the littoral states (including

Georgia and Ukraine) in their efforts to enhance their security. On this account, both countries regularly participate in NATO exercises or host them on their territory, and both have offered to allow NATO to station its forces in their ports [2]. Nevertheless, a lack of common threat perception could easily be observed (unlike Baltic and other Nordic states), which impedes enhanced defense cooperation. For example, Bulgaria was eager to scuttle the Romanian proposal to expand NATO naval exercises in the Black Sea in the run-up to the Warsaw Summit, while Georgia and Ukraine welcomed it [3].

Natalia Bekiarova has argued that previous years have witnessed an arms race between key countries of the Black Sea region. Security risks in the region have become more pronounced against the backdrop of Russia's swift military buildup coupled with Turkey's ambitions to (re)establish itself as a regional superpower. In 2018 Russia's Ministry of Defence launched a new rearmament program to be completed in 2025, which set a target to introduce highly-accurate weapons for A2/AD and widen intelligence potential. Meanwhile the Black Sea Fleet has received a sizable quantity of new ships, including six new submarines of the type 877 "Paltus" and four new frigates equipped with newest Russian multipurpose cruise missiles Kalibr (a range of 2500 km). Currently Crimea hosts the most state-of-the-art Russian anti-aircraft complex C-400 (a range of 400 km). *Bekiarova* notes that Turkey still enjoys an edge with its 69 naval ships and 14 submarines. *Bekiarova* asserts that regardless recent rapprochement of Russian-Turkish relations, Turkey is still considered a loyal member of NATO, enabling clear NATO superiority vis-à-vis Russia's forces (if we add up Bulgaria plus Romania plus the temporary US presence) [4].

Russia perceives increased NATO presence in the Black Sea as a continuation of an effort to besiege the country [1]. Moscow has put into practice the model of "non-claimed" attacks, which sometimes amounts to physically invading territories it vies

³ The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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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for. Recognizing Turkey's role as a gatekeeper of the straights (promised by the Montreux Convention), Russia grants it a preferential treatment offering occasional treats (such as new pipelines, armament acquisition and etc.).

According to *Joja*, Ankara hasn't updated its Black Sea security strategy since the end of the Cold war. It remains highly resistant to any increase of NATO presence in the region. *Joja* underlines that a significant majority of Turks sees US (rather than Russia) as their main security threat, a stance that was stiffened after the purported coup attempt in 2016. Ankara is open to cooperating with other countries in the region in a bilateral framework (particularly Georgia and Romania).

Klimenko theorizes that protracted conflicts are to be held partly responsible for the emerging militarization of the region. It has resulted in a surge in military activities, a tendency especially reinforced by the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. After August 2008, Russia has reestablished sway over the eastern part of the Black Sea. Although Russia's Black Sea Fleet does not base its ships in the ports of occupied Abkhazia, this opportunity remains if there is a need or desire [2]. By taking over Crimea, Russia has secured several hundred kilometers more coastline along with the crucial port of Sevastopol. These reinforcements have far-reaching ramifications as they allow Russia to project military actions not only in the Black Sea and Caucasus, but also into the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Russian forces of the Black Sea region have already participated in a number of operations in Syria.

Russia's strategic objective in the Black Sea region has been labelled as imposing a "new Iron Curtain" along the maritime lines of NATO's Article 5 by operating below the Alliance's threshold of conflict [5]. As part of the strategy, Russia disrupts freedom of movement and navigation jeopardizing energy security and trade connectivity. As a response to the US-led military exercises *Sea Breeze* and *Agile Spirit* (conducted in Ukraine and Georgia respectively), Russia closed most of the Black Sea, blocking international shipping routes to all littoral states. The Kremlin holds a hostile attitude to the idea of developing the deep-water port of Anaklia to be led by US-Georgian consortium. Moscow spared no effort to publicly intimidate Georgian authorities to discourage the project [5].

Cohen champions the cause of boosting US assistance to allies (esp. Georgia) in the Black Sea region against the backdrop of Russia's strategic encroachment. This, among others, may involve deploying a permanent NATO squadron in the Black Sea and shaking up the 1936 Montreux Convention (which currently limits presence of non-littoral countries' ships by tonnage and number). The importance of Georgia's active engagement in strategic discussions on the Black Sea was later reiterated at the NATO summit in Brussels in July 2018 [6].

It is argued that Ukraine lacked a well-defined Black Sea strategy but illegal annexation of Crimea has galvanized Kyiv's strategic thinking. In the aftermath of October 2018 event dubbed "Azov incident" (Russian coast guard violently intercepted three Ukrainian naval ships making a legal passage through the Kerch Strait), Ukraine gained additional awareness of its vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia "on shore and sea" [3]. Given the current circumstances, Ukraine would definitely embrace an increased NATO presence in the Black Sea.

There are various scenarios, which (if they ever materialize) risk an escalation, and spillover of conflicts in the Black Sea region, claims *Melvin*. First, the arms race may not be confined to conventional forces but also involves nuclear-capable weapons. The deployment of the NATO ABM system in Romania has tempted Putin's Russia to touch the topic of deploying Russia's "new generation of weapons designed to overcome US anti-missile systems" in southern Russia, possibly targeting facilities in Romania. According to *Melvin*, military exercises offer another source of potential instability. Russia previously made use of exercises to preposition forces ahead of fighting in South Ossetia (Georgia) and ahead of the annexation of Crimea.

As the brief conclusion, while considering the possible scenarios and suggestions for Georgia and other allied countries in the Black Sea region, it is important that Georgia and Ukraine should further coordinate their efforts and activities in Black Sea with NATO. For Georgia, it is pivotal and strategically important to increase the presence of NATO and the USA in particular in Black Sea to counterbalance and deter Russia in the region and become closer to the Alliance.

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Figure 1. Ukraine and Georgia aspire to be NATO members

Recent polls in Georgia suggest that support for the country's membership of NATO is more than 70 per cent. Euro-Atlantic integration is Tbilisi's near-term objective. The longer-term strategy to move closer to NATO is non-negotiable for the state. Considering its geographic location, in the company of a hostile neighbour, Georgia adamantly wants to gain security by joining the Alliance. However, NATO is not only a security choice for Georgia, it is also a reflection of its political values and foreign policy.

Using brutish force, Russia attempts to mark its sphere of influence in its immediate neighbourhood. Shortly after the August War in 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed decrees recognising the independence of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states. That step marked an important change in Russia's approach as it now openly started to support separatist regions and use these conflicts as political leverage for influencing Georgia's foreign policy. The Kremlin views this process as an attempt by post-Soviet countries to escape Russian influence. As in the 2015

Russian National Security Strategy report stated: *"A determining factor in relations with NATO is the unacceptability for the Russian Federation of the Alliance's increased military activity and the approach of its military infrastructure toward Russia's borders"*.

There are different scenarios, which could lead Georgia to unconventional ways of joining NATO. The way, which is dominant among security policy experts, foresees inviting Tbilisi into the Alliance without Article 5 commitments (which states an attack on one state is an attack on all) towards the occupied regions; at least before any official jurisdiction of Georgia is restored on Abkhazia and the Samachablo regions. In this way, NATO would only take full security responsibility for 80 per cent of the country.

However, one should not limit the options and the West should re-think and consider how much things have changed since the first Washington Summit in 1949. It is high time to prove that NATO is committed to its decisions, especially its Open Door Policy.

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Perceptions and Reflections of the Security Crisis in the Black Sea Region⁴

Introduction

The first reflection about the geopolitical environment that Bulgaria faced thirty years after the tectonic systemic shifts in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is that the efforts of the country to influence the transformation of the Balkans into a regional security community were successful. The second reflection is that Bulgaria was not able to influence effectively a similar development in the Black Sea area. Both the Balkans and the Caspian Sea-Caucasus-Black Sea area were conflictual knots of relations inherited from the Cold War divide. While the traditional European great powers, which polarized the Balkan system of international relations, pushing the small countries one against the other, and the United States had the strategic interest of pacifying the South Eastern region of Europe, the dominating great power in the Black Sea area – Russia, aimed at preserving the opportunities of coming back to the territories that the Soviet Union lost after its collapse by preserving various degrees of conflicts in the neighbouring countries. Depending on the general condition of the Russian economy and state as well as its domestic political status, different opportunities were either designed or just used to preserve the profile of Russia of the empire that sooner or later will be back.

What are, in this regard, the perceptions in Bulgaria of the annexation of Crimea?

Assessment of the annexation of Crimea

The official Bulgarian position about the Black Sea region and Crimea can be followed in the text of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (GSEUFSF) of June

2016, in the paragraph "The European Security Order" of part "3.4 Cooperative Regional Orders", which clearly states: "*We will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, nor accept the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine*" [1]. In the Strategy, as well as in the Joint Report of the European Commission (EC) and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HREUFASP) on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review of 18 May 2017, the approaches and the instruments of action by the EU for dealing with the challenges are formulated in details [2]. This EU position fundamentally reflects the Bulgarian assessment of the developments in the Black Sea area after 2014.

It deserves to mention also the assessments of the State of the National Security of Bulgaria in 2016 Report, adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria in the end of the summer of 2017 and approved with the Decision of the People's Assembly (the National Parliament) after majority voting in the autumn of the same year: "*The activities of Russia are a source of regional instability and threaten our fundamental objective for a united, free and peaceful Europe. The challenges to the security – first of all in the regions of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, are intensifying, as well as in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, where Russia is enhancing its military capabilities and is increasing its military activities... The intensive augmenting and modernization of the Russian military capabilities on the territory of the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, the continuing activities of its integration in the economy, the social and political life of Russia, as well as the widened outlet of this country to the Black Sea area, including to its energy resources – all this continued to lead to a long-term disruption of the geostrategic and the military balance in the Black Sea region. The lack of progress in the arrangement of the "frozen" conflicts in Trans-*

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nistria, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia and in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements on Eastern Ukraine also contributes to the preservation of the high levels of the conflict potential in the region” [3]. The similar report, adopted in the autumn of 2019 about the state of the national security of Bulgaria in 2018, goes further in outlining and criticizing the aggressive Russian policy in the Black Sea region and world-wide [4].

The popular perceptions – excluding the Russia-instigated hybrid-warfare-style by pro-Moscow media and fifth-column economically attracted “Bulgarian patriots” – are that a nuclear superpower attacked a non-nuclear neighboring country and grabbed part of its territory. Despite the traditional call for having more Russian tourists to the Bulgarian Black Sea resorts, despite the mounted globally military power of the Russian Federation (RF), this country has lost its attraction and respect that traditionally entertained in Bulgaria. The sympathy and solidarity with the Russians striving for democracy and respect for human rights has not diminished but the state and its economic resources are treated just as a fact of our geopolitical and geo-economic surroundings that have to be taken into account by our small country. The more educated Bulgarian public is aware of the long list of violated international political and international legal norms by Moscow⁵.

The Bulgarians do not trust the explanatory notion of “the historical belonging of Crimea to Russia” – not necessarily because Crimea has not been part of an empire and its Soviet continuation, but, first, because reviving historical dreams and the territories linked to these dreams is a policy from previous centuries and leads to chaos and wars. Second,

5 The Helsinki Act of 1975 provides inviolability of borders unless peaceful negotiations lead to other solutions; The Belovezh Agreement of 1991 for the dissolution of the USSR provides for guarantees of the territorial integrity of the constituent Soviet republics and for the inclusion of Crimea as an autonomous part of the Ukrainian state; The Lisbon Protocol of 23 May 1992 of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belorussia, the Russian Federation and the United States about the mechanism of formalizing the accession of all 5 states to the START, and for Belorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan – to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 as non-nuclear states; The Budapest Memorandum of 5 December 1994 of the United Kingdom, United States, Russian Federation and Ukraine that guarantees the security of Ukraine in light of the country’s accession to the NPT against nuclear attack and of its territorial integrity; The Bilateral Treaty of the Russian Federation and Ukraine of 2003 for the regulation of the border between the two states – signed by Putin and ratified by the Russian Duma, and, The Harkov Agreement of 2010 between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, signed by Medvedev and Yanukovich, about the right of Russia to base its Black Sea Navy in Sevastopol by 2042.

no less unconvincing is the concept of the “Russian world” and how strongly Ukraine, Belorussia and Russia constitute the single body of this landmass together with its culture, spirituality, etc. Bulgarians understand well that the Byzantine world/Third Rome did not teleport itself, but had something to do with the Bulgarian Kingdom – one of the two great European powers at the time of the birth of Kyiv Rus. Orthodox Christian religion, Bulgarian letters and literature, even some strategic support were decisive for the establishment of Kyiv Rus. And it is a matter of the relations among Ukrainians, Belorussians and Russians today who is/are the heir/heirs of this historical wealth. And thirdly, the interpretation of the term “power” by the present regime in Moscow resembles an absolutely unacceptable political philosophy of the Russian empire about Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. All these three explanatory variables contradict the Bulgarian political philosophy of democracy and human rights, established in our Constitution, laws and international treaties.

Reasons of the aggressive Russian policy

An analysis by a Russian academic concerning the Baltic Sea region states that Moscow has “love-hate type relations” with its neighbors of this area [5]. In an interview in 2014 former Russian Prime Minister Primakov discards the perception of analysts that Russia has aggressive policy towards its neighbors and adds: “*During the time of the Ukrainian crisis an opportunity appeared, and Russia used it*” [6]. There are so many Russian “theories”, explaining how legal and normal it has been to simply carve a piece of land from another country due to the ‘coincidence’ this territory has been part of the Russian world for ever. Furthermore, the aggressive (as always) West, especially NATO, have been threatening the security of the nuclear superpower.

The theoretic opportunism makes invalid any claim by Moscow of logical background of the aggression against Ukraine and the security crisis in the Black Sea region that followed. NATO’s strategic posture in Europe before the Russian invasion in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea has been in no way threatening Russia’s territory and sovereignty. The Alliance has been actually disarming on European territory while Russia has been pumping already its military muscle for years.

The explanation of the Russian aggressive policy is rather in the unsuccessful domestic social, political and economic model and the generated un-

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attractive integration capacity out of it. It is no secret that the European integration – widening and deepening, demonstrated by the European Union, has geopolitical consequences too. Thus the western coast of the Black Sea is for more than ten years also the coast of the EU with Romania and Bulgaria becoming full members in 2007. The aggressive Russian act in Crimea precluded for the time being the peaceful geopolitical competition of the EU and the RF about the future of former Soviet constituent republics and satellites. Obviously for Russia the economic, financial, standard of living arguments could not serve effectively in this peaceful competition and cooperation. Silencing the attraction of the EU, the active economic and trade relations between the Union and Ukraine was considered possible only within the logic of the violent military toolbox Russia possessed as know-how, experience (after the aggression against Georgia in 2008) and materially preparing the “opportunity”, of which Evgenyi Primakov spoke about. It has never been a problem for the Russian propaganda machine to “explain” the “defensive” Russian actions by the creeping danger of NATO’s enlargement to former Russian allies. Despite the fact that joining NATO and the EU has been carried out according to the free will of the new member states, their integration in the two institutions has always been portrayed by Moscow’s propaganda as non-voluntary and anti-Russian activity.

The inability to project integration around the ‘Russian nucleus’, for example, in the framework of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), or the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – a clear reminder of the deficiencies of the Russian social, political and economic model when compared to the enlargement of the EU, shows why Moscow embarked on the military way of reaching foreign political goals. The attraction of the EU to the Russians has been becoming dangerous for the Russian regime itself. Unfortunately, in the meantime before Ukraine joins as a full-fledged member the family of the European Union nations, the country has been divided and treated by Russia as a war zone, needed for guaranteeing the ‘strategic depth’ for defense from an imaginary enemy. Keeping this enemy alive in the conscience of Russian society is vital for the prolongation of the existence of the present regime in the Kremlin. And the anti-NATO propaganda becomes more effective in the process of brain-washing Russian

society after NATO reacted materially to the real aggression from Russia.

There is another significant explanatory factor of the devastation of peace and security in the Black Sea region by the Russian aggressions in Georgia and Ukraine: the positioning of Moscow in the global strategic bargaining game. With the two aggressions – in 2008 and 2014, Russia definitely placed itself among the capable actors of spoiling regional peace and international arrangements. Demonstrating this potential, in addition to the policy of weakening the EU and individual EU members, may eventually provide a place for Russia as an equal in the “Board of Directors”, governing the world – together with the other two major power centers: the USA and China. In this situation Ukraine could be just one of the Russian bargaining chips. The specific feature of this situation is that, unlike the USA, China and the EU, Russia is an economically insignificant player whose image of a dangerous military force cannot elevate Moscow to the status of a global superpower. However, by accentuating on strategic ambiguity, blackmailing globally, Russia hopes to guarantee at least its regional imperial comfort.

Consequences of Russia’s aggression

Russia is a global nuclear superpower, and its aggressions in the Black Sea basin rose the regional and international tensions. The negative example of the nuclear giant brought the world back to an arms race that existed only during the Cold War.

The concerns of the countries of the so-called B-9 or “Bucharest Nine” – the three Baltic states, the Visegrad Four, Romania and Bulgaria, are real: Russia is pushing the international relations back to dividing into “spheres of influence” among the military power centers. Once Russia has tested its geopolitical whims by using force and reaching “territorial successes”, it may lead to the temptation to try again – why not on EU or NATO territory. This perception is undeniable in the countries of the so called “Eastern flank”. The historic experience of these countries during tense conflictual periods has been with tragic consequences and always within the big powers’ formula of using these countries as terrains for bargaining and dividing into “spheres of influence” in order to serve as “strategic buffers” in eventual military conflicts. The sovereign decision of the B-9 states to become members of NATO and the EU has been motivated

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by the will to never allow this geopolitical fate be repeated again.

Russia's aggression in Georgia and later in Ukraine aims at precluding the dreams and sovereign will of these countries to join the EU and NATO. The brutal reality of insecurity that Russia created in the Black Sea region is like to confirm the success of this policy. The dialectical logic that Soviet and later Russian politicians missed to understand and implement, is that no foreign political aim would be possible if not backed by a prosperous and unified *democratic* society. The plan to guarantee generationally the Russian military successes abroad by moulding a *Young Army* (Yunarmiya), while failing to develop a successful economy and attractive soft power, is, in fact, the design and preparation for the next tectonic geopolitical failure of Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The perception that events and the general development of Russia is getting out of control leads to efforts to compensate these trends by purposeful governmental activity. What potential worst-case scenario, driven by real and observable factors, might realize in the Black Sea region?

The first factor is the influence of the domestic deficiencies in Russia on its foreign-political behavior. The stagnating Russian economy, the growing social discontent from the lack of democracy and respect for human rights may push the top decision-makers in Russia to seek solutions for the prolongation of the ruling regime by unifying the nation via enlarging the territory of the federation further to the West: Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, Transnistria are not only hypothetical, but also real geostrategic and military stepping-stones to lightening-up Russian patriotism "Putin style"/revived Ekaterina the Great style/Stalin style. This would be necessarily portrayed as a needed act of saving Russia's territorial integrity.

The second factor is the re-written already by the Russian leadership in the last 20 years history of the country, the new historical myths on which the present social brain-washing and real policy are based on. Every day the Russian propaganda is giving "proofs" that certain pieces of the globe have once been parts of Great Russia and it is not bad thinking about next opportunities – similar to the one that Primakov spoke about, concerning Crimea. Soviet internationalism is forgotten, claimed as harmful and well placed in the rubbish-heap of history. So we have the new, formulated

by Putin's regime historical and conceptual framework of mobilizing the nation – in place and under control.

Thirdly, it is the leadership factor. This President of Russia is programmed to be in power for years to come. He is well known of the ambition to have Ukraine back into Russian possession – with all the negative consequences for the Black Sea regional security situation. Putin is known for his revisionist ambitions. He is also well known for his readiness to take something from other countries without giving anything in return. His conscience is at ease as all this may lead to elevating Russia to a super-power status – unfortunately for him only militarily. Putin is knowledgeable enough to understand that developing and sustaining Russia as a leading military superpower requires a strong economic and financial background as well as a leading forward general, not just for military purposes, science. As both are not present in the Russian case and as his regime is under growing stress, he might be tempted to hurry and reach big success now.

Conclusions

The security situation in the Black Sea region will continue to be highly dependent on Russia's policy. However, the broader regional situation, the development of Ukraine, the persisting processes inside Russia as well as the internal evolution and interplay of the other global power centers – the USA, the EU and China – all these factors will also influence the state of security in the area of the Black Sea. Bulgaria's motivation of joining NATO and the EU was to guarantee the security of South East Europe and to contribute to the stability of the Black Sea region. Being a motivated member of these two institutions, despite all various issues, Bulgaria will continue to press the case of turning the Black Sea area into a regional security community – similarly to what happened on the Balkans – an area of the EU and NATO enlargement, a territory of interconnected democratic states, economies and societies. The unfinished business in this regard in the Western Balkans has united the efforts of the EU and the United States with the will of the local countries. The attraction of the western coast of the Black Sea will grow in the future for all coastal states.

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The Big Game over the Azov – Black Sea Waterway⁶

Russia's annexation of Crimea is frequently looked at as a spontaneous mindless reaction to the overthrow of the Russia-leaning Kyiv government in 2014 and rising concerns about the steady eastwards advances of the US, NATO and western allies over the decade before the regime change. As such Ukraine's leaders and global allies have expected that Russia would easily give up to the pressures to leave the Crimean peninsula, underestimating the long-term, carefully orchestrated Russian military and geopolitical buildup along its longstanding highway from North to South. The latest development in the region encompassing the Caspian Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea may become a Russian game changer that may subjugate Ukraine to Russian interests in the Black Sea for years if no comprehensive far fetching actions are undertaken.

Russia's Southward Grand Design

In fact, the Azov and Black Seas have historically constituted the centerpiece of Russia's grand strategy of power projection towards the warm water of the Mediterranean and the southern hemisphere. The Volga-Don and the Azov-Black Sea waterway has formed the backbone of this policy through centuries. And subduing Ukraine has always been a substantial part of the means to secure the route [1].

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 turned the global focus away from its wider Grand strategy consisting in the design of a large exclusive zone spanning from the Caspian Sea through the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, consequently to open into the Mediterranean Sea and North Africa. The Black Sea has become the frontline of the standoff between Russia and the western countries. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula to turn it into a forefront in its battle for vital geopolitical

space in the eastern and southern hemispheres. The General Assembly of the United Nations has warned during its special sitting on December 17, 2018, that the construction and operating of the Kerch Strait bridge, connecting the peninsula with mainland Russia, has increased the Russian capacity to further expand its military firepower in the occupied territory [2]. The ignorance of this wider strategic context ends up in failure to design any effective policy for Ukraine in its regional standoff with Russia, including a settlement strategy for the conflict in Donbas and for the Sea of Azov.

Russia's recent moves in the region have indeed revolved around several purposes, namely:

- creating a no-access area for its global competitors,
- securing a battle territory, which should be inconvenient for its stronger competitors but advantageous for the resource-constrained Russia,
- reconfiguring its geopolitical assets for maximum efficiency,
- fostering new global alliances to counter the western-led order.

Russia is aiming at consolidating its forces in the triangle consisting of the Caspian Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea with several goals in mind:

- 1) managing Russia's turbulent Caucasian region,
- 2) achieving strategic preeminence over Ukraine and its allies in the Black Sea and surrounding areas,
- 3) regrouping the Caspian countries of the former Soviet Union and Central Asia overall under a Russian umbrella,
- 4) locking the Chinese westward projects, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) above all, and other East-West Asia-Europe trade routes on Russia, and thereof involving China onto the Russian side in

⁶ The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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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its standoff with the West, especially over Ukraine. 5) projecting power through the Mediterranean Sea and Western Asia. The cruise missile shot to Syria from the area of the Caspian Sea in 2018 was a highly symbolic demonstration of this endeavor. In the meantime, Russia has formed a wide denial zone for the US and its allies covering the

three seas and the Mediterranean one thanks to the dissemination of its anti-aerial missile defense system S-400. Among others, this Russian strategy has been noted by James Appathurai, Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, NATO, during an event organized by the Chatham Institute in March 2019 [3].

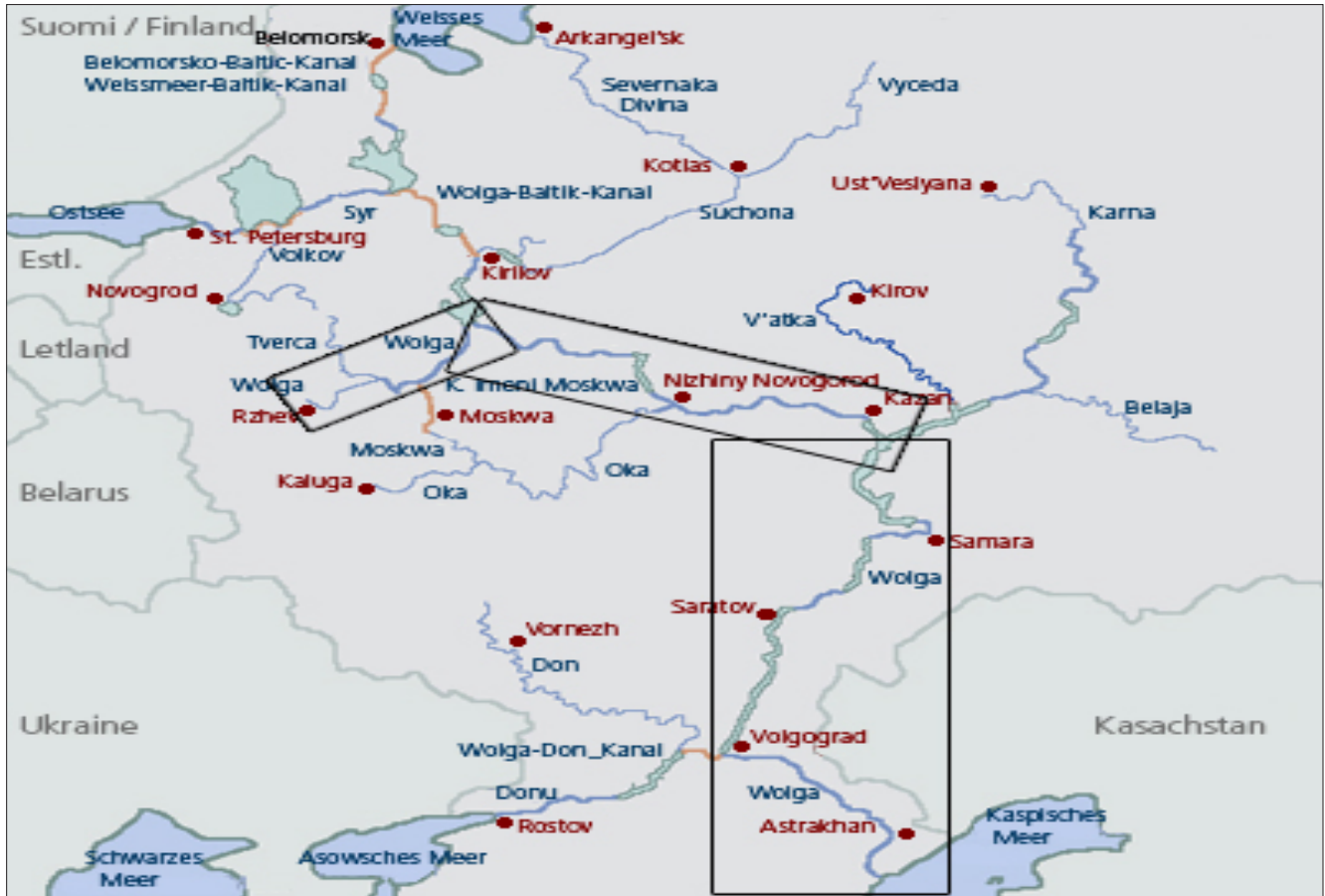


Figure 1. Russia's waterway from northern seas to the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea and further to the South, to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea

Source: <http://www.european-waterways.eu/e/info/russia/wolga.php>

It is worth noting that the collapse of the INF Treaty and the ABM Treaty together with the failure of the Iranian nuclear deal has indeed played in the hand of Russia's global ambitions. This allowed to start deploying nuclear capacities along the perimeters of the seas in a manner which may deny access to whole continents by competing powers (notably the US). Russia is already using its nuclear argument as a deterrent against third party encroachment on its near abroad zone of interests, particularly Ukraine and the Black Sea. Russia is striving to gain a long-term geostrategic advantage in the Black Sea, at least in its Eastern and Northern parts adjacent to its territory and encompassing

Ukraine, as part of its overall expansion towards the Middle East and Southern hemisphere. It is striving to compel the international community to accept the inclusion of the Crimean peninsula into Russia as a *fait accompli* and complicate the access of western countries and the US to the continental territories along the eastern shores of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. For this aim it has beforehand secured a nearly undisputed regional hegemony in the Caspian Sea and the Sea of Azov, while fostering regional processes intended to keep third parties to the region at bay.

Under these circumstances, the latest convergence between Turkey and Russia raises concerns about

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the repercussions on Ukraine's and Black Sea security. Any alliance between the two countries is susceptible to dramatically undermine Ukraine's security in the region and turn the Black Sea, together with the Sea of Azov, into a condominium of Russia and Turkey. Ukraine is doomed to fall into this hellfire for long without expedient global solution to stop this Russian endeavor.

Securing the Azov-Caspian Interconnect

The tricky issue with the Azov consists in its peripheral position relative to the main center of interests of the international community, in this case in relation to the Black Sea. This circumstance leaves Ukraine in a weaker regional power balance. Currently, Russia has unilaterally changed the rules of the game in the Sea of Azov; the issue has become a thorny trap for Ukraine, especially in the light of the Russian long-reaching vision. In case of rising tension over the sea, the overall investment and growth prospect for Ukrainian southern regions might become depressed, fueling domestic discontent along the east-west divide. The conflict in the East of Ukrainian has painfully affected the Ukrainian ports, above all, especially the ports located in the Sea of Azov [4]. Russia virtually exerted a double strike on this industrial backbone of Ukraine, first, through the war in Donbas and, second, by imposing a maritime blockade through the newly erected Kerch bridge. The major Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov, Mariupol and Berdyansk, lost over 50% of their merchandise turnover in the years following the onset of the war in Donbas, from 2014 to 2018. As a result, the share of the ports in the total turnover of Ukrainian sea ports fell from about 11% in 2014 to 6% in 2018 (Fig. 2).

Meanwhile, the current status of the Sea and the situation around Crimea do not allow a decisive and straightforward foreign engagement with Ukraine against the Russian military advantage here [5]. A general concern has emerged that Russia might be successfully turning the Sea of Azov into its military lake [6]. The Sea of Azov and the passage through the sea has become highly instrumental in upholding Russian firepower and presence in the Black Sea, while giving Russia the ability to circumvent western trade sanctions [7]. In opposite to the Black Sea, the opportunities for Russia to expand military resources here is uncheckable, especially by Ukraine only.

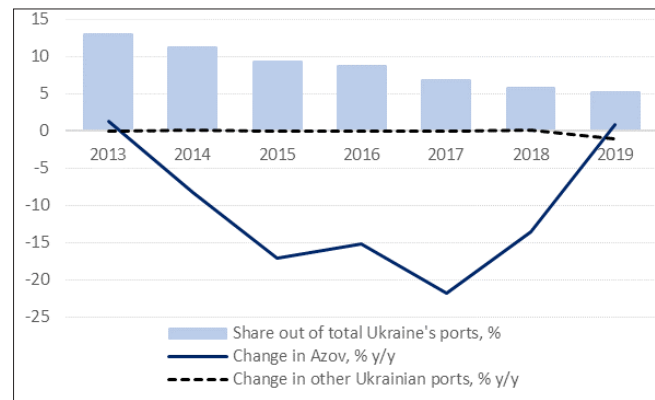


Figure 2. Merchandise Turnover at Ukrainian Azov Sea-ports (thousands of tons)

Source: Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority

* Data for January-September 2019

Russia is consistently expanding its military presence in the Sea of Azov, particularly with the help of its Caspian flotilla, the Russian National Guards and the Federal Security Service (FSB). It is using the water area for modern weapon testing. Besides maritime expansion, it has extended its airborne capacities in the region, according to Boris Babyn, former representative of the Ukrainian President to Crimea [8]. Vassil Servatyuk, First Deputy Head of Ukrainian Border Services, assumed that Russia had over 120 military ships in the Sea of Azov in October 2018, [9]. At the same time, Russia uses all means to deter Ukraine from building up its defense and security capacities in the region. The incident with the capture of Ukraine's border ships by Russia in the Kerch Strait in 2018 was particularly telling of this instance.

The Russian strategy in the Caspian region is also subordinated to its main goal of securing the transit route from continental Russia to the Black Sea through the Sea of Azov. Russia is trying to engage the whole Caspian region to escalate the pressure on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. A new Russian naval configuration is emerging in the Caspian Sea, right in a time when the long-negotiated agreement about the status of the Caspian Sea was at last embraced by Russia [10]. The wording of the document specifically indicates that geopolitical concerns and willingness to insulate the region from third parties to the Treaty is behind the spirit of the agreement. That was especially underscored by the Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Summit of the Heads of states [11]. In fact, the agreement may bound the countries of the region economically

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and strategically to Russia [12]. Four out of the five Caspian countries have manifested interests in a long-term strategic alliance with Russia. Soon after the signing of the agreement, by early 2019 Turkmenistan stopped transporting oil to the global market via the BTC pipeline through Azerbaijan [13], instead reorienting it towards the Russian port of Makhachkala and then onto the Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk.

The latest development seems to indicate a Russian willingness to consolidate its Caspian and Azov naval forces into one maritime power with more opening to the Sea of Azov and projection into the Black Sea. During the summer of 2018, Russia relocated five ships from the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Azov [14]. At the same time, Russia is reconfiguring and upgrading its Caspian flotilla to align it with the country's global aspirations and more specifically with Russia's southwards expansion strategy. The Caspian flotilla joined the Black Sea Fleet in the Russian Mediterranean military drills and Syrian operations, sailing through the Sea of Azov. The significance of the Russian Caspian flotilla has long been underestimated by the international community. This vision has been brutally refuted in 2018, when Russia demonstrated the global reach of the flotilla by firing its sophisticated Kalibr cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea to hit targets inside Syria in the Middle East. Russia is currently building a modern naval base in the city of Kaspiysk (Dagestan), which is set to become the main location of its Caspian Flotilla [15].



Figure 3. The Caspian-Azov Connection

Source: <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11916/Connectingthe-Caspian-%26-the-Black-Seas>

Looking forward, Russia will most likely continue its push to dominate in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, especially considering that this route represents the final front door relaying Moscow and Russia's Northern gates to the warm southern water and to global markets. Through its developed internal river interconnections, the Volga-Don channel may become an effective and the shortest way from Russian peripheral regions to the global markets (Fig. 3). Russia is projecting to expand the capacities of this transport channel through the launch of an additional branch of the channel, the construction of another channel connecting the Caspian Sea and the Sea of Azov, and the development of a multimodal transport infrastructure and transport hub in the perimeters of the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

Capturing the Azov-Black Sea Artery

Russian interest in promoting the Azov-Black Sea artery is also related to its willingness to invalidate any alternate European, western or east-west project aimed at challenging Russia in the south, in the Caspian region, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Notwithstanding the current limitations on Russia's foreign trade attributed to the Ukraine-related western sanctions, it is still intensively developing its Novorossiysk Black Sea port, the largest maritime port of the Russian Federation, turning it into a dominating transport hub in the region, while at the same time maintaining the traffic along the Azov-Black Sea waterway. And the 2018 incident between Russia and Ukraine in the Kerch Strait demonstrated, how Russia had locked this territorial zone to Novorossiysk and how far it may proceed to assert its right on the strait and the water beyond it.

Russia may look forward to expand the reach of the Black Sea port by locking the Caspian trade and economic region to the port. Kazakhstan is highly instrumental in this case, generating the idea of a newly built Eurasia Channel in 2007. Despite Russian endorsement, however, the idea may be a mere trap, with the final endpoint to be the extension of the current Russian Volga-Don Channel connecting the Caspian and Russia's Northern territories to the Azov and Black Seas. The probability of this Russian scenario is high, at least, for two ponderable reasons, presumed by the newly adopted Treaty on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. First, it is the ecological red line, and second, it is Iran's opposition stemming from its

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energy interests and western-imposed sanctions. The most complex issue lays in the integrity of the project, had it passed through the highly volatile Russian Caucasus. The clause of the agreement on the Sea of Azov and the result of the Iran position leave the region with the only viable solution of a global transit corridor through Russia, more exactly through the northern part of the Caspian Sea towards the Volga-Don Channel and the Sea of Azov. Russia is hardly to depart from its traditional grand strategy of locating highly sensitive and strategic objects preeminently in the secured terrain of its European heartland.

The Russian masterplan may succeed, having attracted the interest of the Russian Defense Ministry, China and the littoral states of the Caspian Sea. Recently Russia has more actively used the water

channel linking the Caspian and the Azov Seas to expand its military presence in the proximity of the Black Sea and in projecting its military power up to the Mediterranean Sea. The maintenance of the channel is high on the Russian Federal Program for water transport infrastructure development in 2019-2024, coming second only after the Moscow related water transportation programs. Russia's Federal expenditures on the development of the channel is planned to consume over 20% of the entire projected budget for river transport programs in 2019-2024 [16]. Russia intends to increase the capacity of its Azov and Black Sea ports by 29,1% over the period [17]. Earlier, the Russian President Vladimir Putin has supposed expanding the capacity of the channel by adding a second line to it.



Figures 4. Russia's southern strategic Triade

Source: <https://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/maponline/base-maps/west-central-asia>

The trilateral alliance of Russia, Iran and Turkey should also provide additional provision for the Russian hegemony in the perimeter of the Caspian, Azov and East-Northern Black Sea (Fig. 4). An analysis of Russia's policy in Crimea, especially of its military activity in the Black Sea, has shown the water area to be predominantly captivated by Russia [18]. It has been gradually expanding its denial zone for geostrategic opponents through a wide corridor stretching from the Caspian to the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing the Azov and Black Sea in between. The Russian S-400 missiles have been instrumental in this policy: Russia has successfully installed the weapon along the line of the Caucasus, Crimea and the Black Sea, as well as Turkey and Syria, and is aiming at expanding fur-

ther the perimeter which the Russian denial system may cover towards Egypt and Saudi Arabia and beyond [19].



Figure 5. Russian anti-aircraft weapon systems S-400

A counterstrategy for Ukraine

Russia will most likely push further to strengthen its hold on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, considering that these two seas are part-and-parcel of its longstanding grand strategy connecting its five sea gates in one integrated critical transportation infrastructure, using the Volga-Don Channel [20]. The artery provides a critically vital window to the south, together with a breathing room against western trade and economic sanctions. More dramatically, the integrity and sustainability of the highway may happen to be critical for the survival of Russia itself, as it is the rarest overarching natural economic vessel that is stitching up the territory together from North to South and from East to West.

The current development in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov hardly plays in favor of Ukraine, with all stakeholders engaged preeminently in short-termism militarist discourses, speaking basically in terms of balance of power against Russia, which plays the long game. The nuclear component of the equation leaves no reasonable computational solution. In other words, handling Ukraine's security in this complex and longstanding environment is hardly efficient neither in military, nor in purely bilateral terms. Reducing the issue to local/regional one may hardly help, considering that the Azov and Black Sea security issues are deeply ingrained in the East-West standoff discourse and have already transcended the local/regional dimension.

The current military buildup and escalation, as well as the creeping trade war is turning into a race to the bottom for all involved.

Though reasonably adopting a national strategy of security buildup in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, which should serve as a deterrent or containment to Russia, Ukraine may hardly relay on this solution given the evident power mismatch in favor of its northern foe. Attempts at compelling Russia to bend to rules, which would erode its dispositions relative to the seas, have little chance for success.

It might be time for Ukraine to engage in global dialogues and initiatives of common humanitarian interest, to foster multilateral negotiations on such issues as denuclearization, demilitarization, weapon reduction, as well as cross-regional environmental, trade and economic, and peaceful treaties in the three-water areas of the Azov, Caspian and Black Seas. A new dialogue seems to be opportune on maritime transport and resources, as well as on trade rules, especially in the light of the seismic changes in the European Union and US foreign policies. These global issues seem to be deeply rooted and must be factored in the design of Ukraine's Black Sea security in order to provide for sustainable long-term security. And engaging Russia into such endeavor of common interests would help diffusing the currently short-sighted militarist view of strategy development.

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Russia's "Demographic Weapon" in Crimea⁷

In the history of Crimea, Russia has repeatedly used "demographic weapons", changing both the numerical and especially the national composition of the Peninsula. The Russian government used various options for demographic policy—from creating unbearable conditions for the life of the local population, which was forced to emigrate, to the forced deportation of entire peoples and voluntary forced relocation of other population on the Peninsula. The Kremlin has continued a similar policy after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The number of the local population has reduced due to the high level of mortality and migration outside the Peninsula, and massive immigrants coming from different regions of Russia to replace them.

Mortality and fertility rate

In 2018, for the first time during the Russian occupation, the population of Crimea decreased – its number was equal to the figure of January 2014 – 2 million 355 thousand people. Even large-scale migration of Russians to the Peninsula cannot correct the situation: the natural decline of the population after the annexation was growing rapidly.

During 2014-2019, the rate of natural population loss increased almost three times – from minus 1.5 to minus 4.4 [1, p. 55; 2]. This was due to the high mortality rate and the reduction in the number of births. If during 2014-2016 the number of newborns actually coincided with the indicators of the pre-occupation period, then after 2016 the birth rate began to decline. So, in 2018, 18% fewer babies were born than in 2014. In the eight months of 2019, the number of babies decreased by another 5% compared to the same period of 2018.

During 2014-2016, the number of deaths in Crimea was increasing – it reached 28-29 thousand people per year, which was one and a half to two thousand more than in 2012-2013 (Fig. 1) [3, p. 52]. Despite the decrease in the mortality rate in 2017-2018,

due to the low birth rate, the natural growth of the population of the peninsula did not occur.

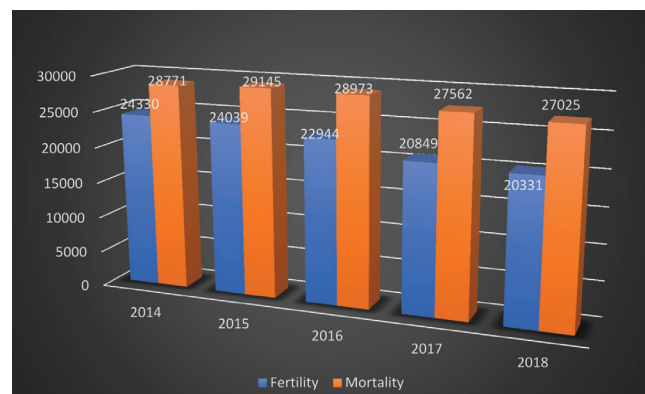


Figure 1. Fertility rate and mortality in the ARC in 2014-2018, people

The saddest demographic picture has developed in the industrial cities of the Crimea. In Kerch, the death rate exceeded the birth rate by 1.8 times, in Armyansk and Krasnoperekopsk – by 1.6 times. The situation in resort cities is not better: in Yevpatoria 1.4 times more people die than are born, in Alushta and Yalta – 1.5 times. The most optimistic situation is in Simferopol, where the number of deaths is only 4% higher than the number of newborns [4].

In rural areas, the situation is not better: in one area of Crimea, the birth rate exceeds the death rate. The situation is problematic in the North and East of the Peninsula, where the number of deaths exceeds the number of newborns by a third. This is due to water scarcity, poor environmental conditions (in the Northern regions) and general depression in the regions.

In Sevastopol, the demographic situation is different: the population of the city grew during the annexation from **383.9 thousand to 443 thousand people** (by 13%) [1, p. 49; 5, p. 52]. However, this increase is not due to natural factors, but to migration growth.

By 2019, the situation with the ratio of newborns and deaths in Sevastopol was better than in the whole of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC): the indicator of natural population de-

⁷ The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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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cline was minus 2.7 in 2018. That is, last year, 1153 fewer people were born in the city than died. However, in the eight months of 2019, the rate of natural population decline has rapidly increased to minus 3.9 (Fig. 2.).



Figure 2. Fertility and mortality rate in Sevastopol in 2014-2018, persons

In total, during 2014-2018, 170,295.00 people died on the Peninsula (in the ARC and Sevastopol) [4; 5], and in the eight months of 2019 – another 22,238.00 people [2; 6]. Thus, the population of the Peninsula decreased by **192.5thousand** due to natural causes. Almost **153 thousand** people were born during the annexation period that was 21% less than the total number of deaths. It is worth noting that children born before and after the occupation of the Peninsula are largely brought up as Russians and citizens of the Russian Federation.

Thus, the trend of natural population decline due to increased mortality and reduced fertility will continue in the future. The restoration of the demographic balance on the peninsula under such conditions is possible only through external migration, which the Kremlin actively uses as a means of replacing the local not loyal population.

Migration as a means of population replacement

The practice of population replacement is not new for Russia; it was already applied to Crimea after the mass deportation of the Crimean peoples in the 1940s. Back then that measure was forced – the Russians were resettled in Crimea by the entire collective farms. The current Russian government does not organize forced relocation but provides certain preferential conditions for those who want to move to Crimea. First of all, this applies to military pensioners, for whom Russia has a resettlement program in the southern regions. Attempts to encourage movement of Russians are also made

with the use of mortgage lending –mortgages on Crimean new buildings are actively offered in different regions of Russia. The corresponding mortgage program is also valid for the Russian military and other security forces.

Crimean statistics show that during the years of occupation **252.5 thousand** people moved to Crimea: 154.5 thousand to the ARC and 98 thousand to Sevastopol [3; 5; 7; 8]. The vast majority of immigrants are Russians – **160.7 thousand** (64%). Herewith, more than 89 thousand Russians arrived to the ARC during this period, and 71.4 thousand arrived at Sevastopol (16% of the urban population). But this does not include the militaries, security forces, and other officials who have been sent to Crimea.

However, even migration does not help to overcome the consequences of natural population decline, which is accompanied by a mass departure of Crimeans from the Peninsula. Thus, in 2015-2018, 78,453.00 people left the occupied ARC, and in the eight months of 2019, another 13,217.00 people left [8]. In total, during the years of occupation, 91.7 thousand people left the ARC. In addition, the flow of Crimeans who leave is growing rapidly: if in 2015 15,914 people left the ARC, in 2018 this figure already reached 23,876 (30% more) [3].

More than **33 thousand** residents left Sevastopol during the occupation period (10% of the pre-occupation population of the city) [5; 7]. Thus, according to the official statistics, during the occupation of Crimea **124.7 thousand** people left.

And this is not taking into account those Crimeans who moved to mainland Ukraine but did not withdraw from the registration in Crimea. According to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, **40.7 thousand** migrants from the occupied ARC and Sevastopol were officially registered on the mainland [9]. To them, we can add another 10-15 thousand Crimeans who changed the registration from Crimea to the mainland, without receiving the status of internally displaced persons. Thus, at least **180 thousand** people left the Peninsula during the occupation.

It should be noted that the departure from Crimea for the vast majority of Crimeans is a very serious step, as after the occupation the regional identity of the Crimeans has significantly increased. According to a German study in 2017, the number of

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Crimean residents, who began to feel more Crimean than before, was almost 40%, and almost 80% of respondents did not even think about leaving the Peninsula. But among those, who are ready to leave, 55% are young people (from 18 to 42 years), that is, persons of childbearing age [10].

Therefore, during the annexation, the number of the population of the Peninsula decreased by at least 370 thousand people, which is almost 16% of the population of the Peninsula. If this trend continues, in another period from five to ten years, less than half of the population that lived there before the annexation will remain in Crimea.

The national component of the "demographic weapon"

During its domination over the Peninsula, Russia has constantly changed the national composition of Crimea. After the first annexation of the Crimea (1783), the share of Crimean Tatars, which accounted for more than 92% of the population of the Peninsula, by the end of the XIX century decreased by almost three times – to 34% (186.2 thousand of 547 thousand people). But the number of Russians, who together with other peoples were resettled to the Peninsula, increased to 33% of the population of Crimea [11, p. 14].

According to the researcher V. Grigoryants, the emigration of Crimean Tatars to the Ottoman Empire and the migration of other peoples to the Peninsula allowed Russia to carry out a significant socio-cultural reconstruction, which resulted in the displacement of the Turkic-Muslim type of civilization and its replacement by the Russian-Orthodox type [12, p. 30].

The Soviet authorities in Crimea tried to attract the Crimean Tatars to their side through the policy of "rooting"(in the Crimean format – "tatarization"). But this did not change the national content of the Peninsula: the number of Crimean Tatars in 1926 - 1939 increased by 18% – from 179.8 to 218.9 thousand, but their share in the population of Crimea decreased from 24 to 19.4%. At the same time, the number of Russians on the eve of World War II already exceeded half of the Crimean population and reached 558.5 thousand people. The share of Ukrainians on the Peninsula also doubled: from 77.4 to 154.1 thousand people (13.7% of the population of Crimea) [13, P. 18].

However, the Soviet policy of deportation during

the World War II radically changed the ethnic composition of Crimea: during 1941-1944, almost 300 thousand Crimean Tatars, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Romanians, and Italians were deported from the Peninsula [14, p.88-89]. Instead of deported peoples, Russians and later Ukrainians began to resettle on the Peninsula.

As a result of this policy in 1959, out of 1.2 million people, who lived in the Crimea, the share of Russians was 71.4% (858.3 thousand), and Ukrainians-22.3% (267.7 thousand) [13, p. 18].

The return of the Crimean Tatars home changed the ethnic map of Crimea, but the Russians remained a large people of the Peninsula (Fig. 3). According to the 2001 census, of the 2.4 million people, who lived in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, almost 1.5 million were Russians (60.1%), 576.6 thousand were Ukrainians (24%) and 245.3 thousand were Crimean Tatars (10.2%) [15].

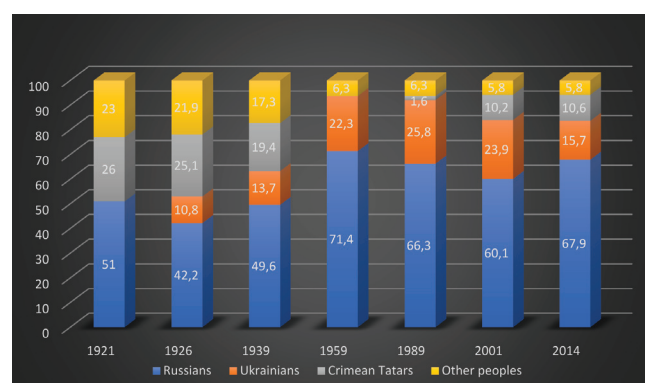


Figure 3. The national composition of Crimea in 1921-2014, percent

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian government did not conduct new censuses, but the data of the Razumkov Center's study in 2008 largely coincide with the results of the census – 60.1% of respondents considered themselves Russians, 24.9% - Ukrainians, and 9.1% - Crimean Tatars [16, p.3]. Data from the Russian census of 2014 show a very different picture: the number of Ukrainians is reduced from more than half a million to 344 thousand people, that is, from 24 to 15.7% of the population [17].

Russian political scientist O. Baranov explains ethnic changes in Crimea as a "voluntary choice" of Crimean Ukrainians, who "recognized themselves as Russians" due to "relatively low cohesion and poor command of their own language" [18, p. 35]. This "scientific logic" justifies the policy of the Russian government to level the Ukrainian iden-

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tity on the Peninsula and helps to consolidate the myth of the "Russian Crimea" in the minds.

On the other hand, Russian researchers warned in 2014 about the possible process of consolidation of Ukrainian identity in Crimea due to the threat to its existence. *"The share of the Ukrainian population of the Peninsula, which previously did not feel threatened by their ethnic community, being in the position of a minority, can actualize their own ethnic identity,"* writes Russian historian R. Starchenko [19, p.22].

Because of the fear of this "actualization", the occupying power of the Peninsula implements a strict policy of leveling Ukrainian identity using a variety of measures: from open repressions against Ukrainians ("cases" of Volodymyr Balukh, Ihor Movenko, Oleh Prikhodko, etc.) to the restriction of education in the native language and the closure of Ukrainian churches.

Thus, in five years, the number of children studying in the Ukrainian language has decreased in Crimea by 51 times – from 12,694 to 249 people (0.2% of all students) [20]. Only one of the seven schools, where children were taught in Ukrainian before the annexation, according to official data, remained (school number 20 in Feodosia), but there are no de facto Ukrainian classes [21].

At the beginning of 2018, because of the refusal of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) to register under Russian law, only nine parishes remained from fifty-two existent before [22, p.26]. However, Russia continues to fight against the Ukrainian Church: the occupation administration of Simferopol, on the basis of the decision of the occupation court, took the premises of the Cathedral of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Princes Olga and Vladimir away from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The occupation administration of Yevpatoria appealed to the "court" to demolish the Church of the UOC in this city.

Through this policy, the next Russian census may record an even greater decrease in the number of Ukrainians in Crimea, which will be used by Russia in the international arena to confirm the "Russian status" of the Peninsula.

On the other hand, the Russian researcher A. Baranov notes the following: in 12 of the 25 "municipalities" of Crimea, the Slavic population is

replaced by the Crimean Tatar population, which requires the Russians to implement a special policy towards the Crimean Tatars [23, p. 6]. That is why Russia is trying to achieve the loyalty of the Crimean Tatars through educational and religious policy. For example, more than 6 thousand children (3% of all students) are now studying in the Crimean Tatar language, which is even more than before the annexation (in 2013-2014, there were 5.5 thousand such students). All 15 Crimean Tatar schools, which worked before the Russian occupation, continue to work – more than 4.2 thousand children study there [20]. During 2015-2016, 66 titles of educational materials (textbooks, manuals) were printed in the Crimean Tatar language with a total of 61 thousand copies [24]. The Russian government supports the construction of mosques in Crimea and helps Crimean Muslims to perform the Hajj every year.

All these actions of the Russian occupation authorities are aimed at creating a picture of Russia's "concern" about the rights of the Crimean Tatars, to achieve not only their loyalty but also a support from Turkey, which acts as a defender of the rights of the Crimean Tatar community in Crimea and is becoming an increasingly important partner for Moscow in the region.

On the other hand, Russia bans the Mejlis (the representative body of the Crimean Tatar people) and closes the Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR, which moved to Kyiv. In addition, the Russian government conducts a repressive policy against a certain part of the Crimean Tatars on religious and political grounds. One of the reasons for the persecution of Crimean Muslims is that among the Crimean Tatars, who are supporters of Ukraine, 66% consider religious identity to be important (a 2015 survey in Simferopol) [18, p. 36].

Thus, the modern Russian national-demographic policy in occupied Crimea is aimed at forming a completely loyal to the Kremlin community on the peninsula. This is facilitated by the large-scale resettlement of Russians, and the gradual displacement of dissenters from the Peninsula, and educational policy, and methods of carrot and stick against the Crimean Tatars, whose loyalty Moscow needs. Of course, all these actions will significantly complicate the process of de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine in the future.

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Telecommunications Infrastructure in Crimea: Not Learned Lessons of 2014⁸

The national security of any country is based on basic ideas of the political class about it. The quality and efficiency of national security is proportional to the level of elite circles. The components of the security of the state are distinguished by specialists into categories and assigned to specialized military and civilian institutions. The development of a methodology for the study of threats and the implementation of countermeasures for the security of the nation is an indicator of the maturity of a society, a permanent feature of a democratic country. One of the most important aspects of the society security in the digital world is protecting critical communications infrastructures. This applies both to the media and to the content of the messages. The catastrophic consequences of the inability to assess and implement solutions to the threats in the information field were clearly demonstrated by History itself in March 2014 in Crimea.

Critical infrastructure (CI) is a set of facilities that are strategically important for the economy and security of the state, society and the population and the violation of the functioning of which can harm the vital national interests of Ukraine [1]. Such objects include, in particular, bridges, ports, airports, buildings, structures, and maintenance of factories and enterprises of the chemical, space, nuclear, information, transport, financial industries, and so on.

The United States attach extreme importance to critical infrastructure. The security of energy, telecommunications, transport, and water infrastructure is a priority (Fig. 1).

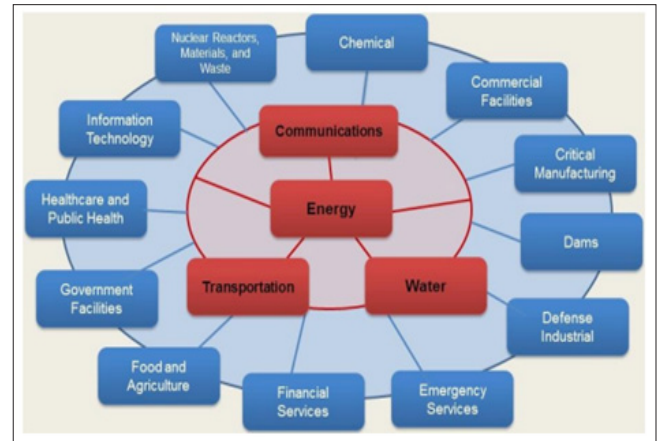


Figure 1. Significance of the critical infrastructure in the USA

Telecommunications and facilities that are part of the national information space systems are critical infrastructure objects in the field of information transmission. Ukraine did not pay proper attention to the threats and security of CI facilities. Accordingly, financial resources in this area were dispersed, extremely low and inefficiently used. Meanwhile, during the armed occupation of Ukrainian Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, first of all, the ports, airports, and television centers were seized. Armed groups without insignias intercepted broadcasting frequencies, which were national property and distributed among countries under international rules. As you know, foreign influence on national information spaces is a consequence of information globalization.

Before the Russian occupation, 79 radio and television stations, including 13 television broadcasting, 14 FM radio stations, 5 utility wire broadcasting radio companies, 4 private redirects wire broadcasting stations, 39 cable TV-radio stations, 7 radio and cable television and radio companies operated in Crimea [2]. Among other things, the Peninsula has a complex terrain, and radiofrequency coverage requires more power capacities than on a flat terrain. Therefore, Crimea was and remains the most difficult field of information ac-

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tivity in Ukraine. Now there is no Ukrainian media on the Peninsula.

It is worth noting that powerful broadcasting is an important resource for military tasks, as the broadcasting infrastructure is a dual-use system. In particular, the capabilities of radio transmission centers are widely used for electronic warfare (EW), they are part of the public warning system and law enforcement agencies.

The seizure of the information space in Crimea was organized and implemented by the groups of highly qualified specialists. But the rapid armed operation of the Russian security forces was preceded by many years of preparation of the population of the Peninsula to a loyal perception of propaganda narratives. Over the years, the FSB and GRU have created networks of political and social associations in Crimea under the guise of parties, cultural foundations, "independent" media, and so on.

The Russian presence in the media space of the ARC was manifested by the retransmission of "NTV", "MUZ-TV", "Voice of Russia". In Crimea, Russian TV stations including "Channel One", "NTV", "TV-Center", and ITAR-TASS News Agency worked. Moreover, in many cities of Crimea, various pro-Russian organizations installed satellite receivers tuned to satellites with Russian TV channels free of charge [3].

In 2013, 508 periodicals were published in Russian in Ukraine – 17% of the total volume of periodicals, and 845 Russian-language Newspapers were issued - 36% of the total number. In Crimea, printed pro-Russian content was provided by "Komsomolskaya Pravda in Ukraine", "Arguments and Facts in Ukraine", "Moskovsky Komsomolets in Ukraine", "Izvestia in Ukraine", "Flag of the Motherland" and others, and publications of local anti-Ukrainian media: "Crimean truth", "Crimean time", "Rusichi". "New region", "NTV-Crimea" and "Regnum" functioned as the Internet resources [3].

These information resources worked closely with socio-political organizations, which declared the pro-Russian orientation: Crimean regional branch of the "Russian block", PSPU, KPU, "Left Forces Union", "Russian community of Crimea", the Peoples Front "Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia", the Russian community of Kerch "Fatherland", the Russian community of Yevpatoria, "Union of Soviet

Officers of the Crimea", Cossack organizations, members of the "Crimean Cossack Union" and "Union of Cossack Troops of Russia and Foreign Countries" [3].

The active stage of propaganda in Crimea began with Russia's re-conservation of mid-hill transmitters with a capacity of 500 to 1200 kW in the Kaliningrad region, Krasnodar and the city of Grigoriopol in unrecognized Transnistria. The signal from these points covered almost the entire territory of Ukraine. Russian media "Voice of Russia" and Federal "Vesti FM" broadcasted. Russia deployed military mobile medium-wave broadcasting stations along the North-Eastern border with Ukraine [4].

The effectiveness of the methods of information influence chosen by the Russians on the public of Crimea can be assessed by sociological surveys. According to the results of the opinion poll "Image control" (October 2008), 90.4% of residents of the ARC supported the cooperation of Ukraine with Russia in the foreign policy sphere, 75.2% were in favor of further basing of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea (8% - for the withdrawal of the Black Sea Fleet from Sevastopol after 2017). According to the SOCIUM opinion poll (September 2008), 89% of Crimeans opposed Ukraine's accession to NATO, 81% of respondents supported the military operation of Russian troops in Georgia, 79% of respondents said they supported Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the book "Wars – XXI: Russia's Polyhybresion", the authors have identified three levels of development of hybrid aggression. At the last red level, the two most dangerous points indicate the appearance of unidentified militarized groups of the aggressor state and the disconnection of TV channels in the victim state [5]. At the end of February 2014, the main capacities of the Crimean information infrastructure – GTRK and RTPC of Crimea – were seized. That allowed the occupiers carrying out technical preparations to replace Ukrainian TV channels by Russian ones. In particular, the capacity of the private company "Zeonbud", which had more than seventy TV signal transmitters and worked in conjunction with the equipment of the state **Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern** (BRT Concern), was also captured. The Russians returned the satellite receivers to the satellite position of 75°

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east longitude and set up the reception of Russian TV channels, which were formed under the guise of Ukrainian ones.

Vice-President of the Swedish company SES Astra AB and satellite technology expert Onno Zonneveld explained that TV channels were replaced by a masking scheme: "From the technical side, it does not matter what content is inside the signal. To receive a satellite signal, you must create a package configured for ground equipment. The Russians formed packages of Russian channels under the identification of the Ukrainian company. In a technical sense, the equipment in Crimea received a signal that looked like Ukrainian multiplexes, but inside there were Russian TV channels."

The Russians raised disguised packages with Russian TV channels to the European satellite ABS-2 (75° CX. d.), owned by the global European private equity Fund Permira Holdings Ltd (UK) [7]. The act of simultaneous switching of TV channels in Crimea on March 10, 2014, was carried out under the leadership of a group of specialists of the Russian television and radio broadcasting network (RTRS) and the all-Russian state television and radio broadcasting company (VGTRK). At ten-minute intervals, a commercial package "STV_ABS2" and four copies of multiplexes disguised as Ukrainian "Zeonbud" appeared on ABS – 2.

This probably indicates that the semi-state Russian company Satellite Television JSC (STV) has a significant role in the occupation of the information space of Ukraine. The signal of masked multiplexes was output and received in a non-standard range for broadcasting – 10900-11700 MHz. The specified connected range was used by the mentioned company. It is also known that masked channel packets were formed in the transmission center of Dubny in the Moscow region, which is also used by STV.

Switching channels was a special operation that was completed in a few months. Until July 1, 2014, Ukrainian equipment was fully transferred to the capacity of the Russian RTRS [8]. At the same time, the special services controlled the "transition" of the media business under the "legislation" of the Russian Federation. The FSB, Roskomnadzor and the "Ministry of Information of the Republic of Crimea" constantly checked the providers for the presence or absence of Ukrainian TV channels in the cable networks. A number of

training events were organized by the occupation authorities, and media asset managers received warnings and threats for mandatory re-registration. According to the analytical report by the National Institute for Strategic Studies made in 2016, access to 54 sites, which allegedly contained calls for extremism and other illegal activities, was restricted. During 2014, thanks to the new "laws", it was possible to almost completely displace Ukrainian television, radio, and print media from the territory of the Peninsula [9].

After the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, since February 2014, the National Radio Company of Ukraine, at its own expense, started broadcasting for Crimea with the First Program of Ukrainian radio by using a MW transmitter of 500 kW at a frequency of 549 kHz, which is located in the village of Luch in the Mykolaiv region. Due to this broadcast, Crimeans were able to get a Ukrainian radio signal without aggressive Russian propaganda [10]. But in 2019, by the decision of the management of the NSTU, its work was stopped, and the NSTU received numerous complaints from both residents of Crimea and listeners in mainland Ukraine. According to the management of the NSTU, the shutdown was due to insufficient funding by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

In 2013, the Crimean TV and radio communications market were estimated at about \$ 400 million. The majority of this amount was the capacity of mobile operators [11]. The National Broadcasting Council of Ukraine estimated the total losses of private and public companies in the sphere of broadcasting on the Peninsula due to the annexation at almost \$ 25 million. In the government's complaints to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine formed a claim on the facts of seizure by the Russian Federation of the RTPC and other telecommunications facilities in Crimea. The complaint indicates more than four thousand objects. Most of them were created in the Soviet times to broadcast to the territory of Crimea and part of the Kherson region. The equipment of the BRT Concern, which also owned land, telecommunications networks, etc., is not a little effective security system as objects of critical infrastructure [12].

Now the definition of the "critical infrastructure" term exists only in the Law of Ukraine "On the Basic Principles of Cybersecurity of Ukraine" and is quite vague: "critical infrastructure objects are en-

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terprises, institutions and organizations irrespective of the form of their ownership, which activities are directly related to technological processes and/or provision of services, being of great importance for the economy and industry, functioning of society and safety of the population, disabling or disruption of which could have an adverse impact on the national security and defense of Ukraine, natural environment, cause property damage and/or pose a threat to life and health of people." Industry experts note that under this definition almost everything from a bakery to a night club can be classified. However, a specific list of CI objects in Ukraine has not been created, and the protection of really dangerous and important objects is carried out locally and non-systemically.

The former Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine (now in the process of reorganization into the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports of Ukraine and the National Council of Broadcasting of Ukraine, within the framework of a special Commission, together with the BRT Concern and the Ukrainian State Radio Frequency Center (US-RFC) have developed and coordinated actions for the development of Ukrainian broadcasting networks in Crimea and the Kherson region. However, in fact, the occupied Peninsula is almost not covered by the Ukrainian signal, because the power of the Crimean equipment, which was captured and through which the Russian content is transmitted, significantly exceeds the power of analog transmitters in the Kherson region. Also, no state program is being developed to ensure the analysis of threats to CI in the field of telecommunications, as well as methods of protection, in particular, regarding the most vulnerable to Russian aggression regions: Ukraine-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Dnepropetrovsk regions.

Former Chairman of the BRT Concern Valery Yurchenko believes that the only current technology for transmitting a radio signal, when a large area can be covered by a signal from a transmitter located at a considerable distance from this territory, is broadcasting on long, medium and short waves. At the same time, he notes: "The Ukrainian powerful radio transmission centers of the BRT Concern are half-destroyed, some have been liquidated (Brovary Radio Center), the current transmitting equipment of Russian production has exhausted its resource of 40 years of operation; there

is a threat of its work termination at any time" [13].

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in 2016 assigned the task of creating the concept of the state system of protection and development of critical infrastructure to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (Cabinet Order No. 1009 of December 6, 2017). Sixty-seven representatives from seventeen state bodies in the working group developed a draft law (register No. 10328 dated May 27, 2019) "On critical infrastructure". However, after the change of the government and the Verkhovna Rada, the bill was withdrawn.

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation has a state program "Information Society" (2011-2024) with a budget of 40.6 billion US dollars. [14]. The ultimate goal of the program is one hundred percent coverage of the Russian-speaking population of the world with free Russian media. Russia is investing this money in the formation of the agenda of foreign audiences, to influence people's opinions through television. Meanwhile, the thematic of Crimea is gradually losing its mobilization and propaganda potential for Russian audiences and is displaced from the Russian information space. At the same time, the expenses for information and propaganda activities in the "DPR/LPR" are constantly increasing.

Now the state of the information space of occupied Crimea is extremely unsatisfactory, given the results of the destructive activities of the occupation authorities in the media sphere. Ukraine's ability to carry out active counter-propaganda work on the Peninsula is limited, in particular, by the lack of stable legislation in the field of CI facilities protection, internal political program on information policy on the occupied territories and counteraction to information aggression.

According to the laws of Ukraine "On Mobilization" and "On National Security", now there is a special period in Ukraine. This means that state authorities, institutions, and citizens must be prepared "to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity." In addition, the Civil Protection Code, adopted in 2013, obliges local authorities not only to resist threats when they occur but also to predict them and implement preventive security measures and inform the population. However, the practice of the last six years shows that the lessons of the occupation have not been learned.

In the majority of regions of the country, there is no national alert system, and the only means of transmitting information from the state to the population in the case of emergency is the public broadcast. After January 01, 2020, radio receivers of the Soviet warning system, owned by the private company "Ukrtelecom", will officially no longer be maintained. TV public broadcaster does not have full coverage of the territory of Ukraine, and it almost does not have any coverage abroad. Not every household has a TV and autonomous power supply. In addition, the population is not well aware about the role of the public broadcaster and will prefer to trust and choose another information source. Given the almost complete paralysis of the national systematic information policy, the probability of expansion and distortion of the content of private (non-state) broadcasters by the aggressor in the case of emergency is extremely high. So, the biggest hostages of the lack of protection of information infrastructure objects are the consciousness of citizens, the degree of their understanding, the ability to navigate the situation [15].

After the occupation of the territories in 2014 and the aggressor's capture of the part of the information space of the unoccupied territories, the National Council made a significant contribution to the development of national broadcasting. However, the coverage of Ukrainian content is carried out mainly in the part of radio broadcasting. In particular, as of December 2019, the broadcast-

ing of several Ukrainian radio stations on medium frequencies covers a significant part of Crimea and the Kherson region. The question of choice remains open. In the South and East of Ukraine, the lost information decades have formed an audience, quite aggressive to all Ukrainians, even broadcasted in Russian. Meanwhile, the most popular means of obtaining information is traditional TV. Attempts to cover Crimea with Ukrainian TV channels are an extremely difficult task, which, despite attempts, still suffers a complete fiasco [16]. However, the equipment and technologies, which are used to restore national broadcasting in the troubled regions, remain unprotected or captured in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Regions with a high risk of danger are border areas in the South, South-West, North-East, and North of the country and are not considered by the state as requiring special attention in the field of protection of CI facilities. The state authorities do not demonstrate effective changes in the legislation and attitude to the critical infrastructure in the information sphere. At the same time, even single adopted legislative initiatives are not implemented.

As a result, it should be noted that the institute of state security is a sphere that, in addition to technical professionalism, requires high moral and ethical qualities of the elite. Statehood and focus on the common welfare are the main factors of Ukraine's sovereignty and security.

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LNG as a Factor of Energy Security of the Black Sea Region⁹

Natural gas remains a significant component of the energy transition process, and not only because it is the least polluting fossil fuel, but also in terms of supply security. However, after the Russian manipulations of 2006, 2009 and 2014, the reputation of gas imported by pipelines fell sharply. The question of an early exit from the situation of a monopoly supplier has gained additional weight in the European market.

The meaning of LNG¹⁰ has increased dramatically in the world in recent years. According to the International Energy Agency [1], LNG supplies will reach 500 billion cubic meters in 2023. The EU already receives liquefied gas from Australia and the United States. LNG trade volumes are expected to grow by 30% over the next five years that will reinforce the trend of individual markets becoming a global and more competitive gas market.

It is likely that in 2020, depending on the level of gas demand in Asia, LNG will be available for the European market in the amount of 113-169 billion cubic meters (after regasification) [2]. This trend can also help the Black Sea countries to diversify their gas contracts (and thus increase the security of supply), reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the future, in particular by replacing coal for power generation and oil in the transport sector, and increase competition in the gas market.

Enhancement of the security of gas supplies is a complex issue that requires actions by each country and joint efforts at the European level.

The opportunities associated with the growing role of LNG are recognized at the political level and are reflected in the EU documents. On 16 February 2016, the European Commission presented an energy security package that included the EU strategy for liquefied natural gas and gas storage [3]. The Strategy notes that LNG can play an important role as an alternative and environmentally friendly fuel for motor transport, heating and power generation. The environmental aspect is also important as the amount of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution indicators for LNG are much lower than for diesel fuel.

It is planned to develop LNG infrastructure for refueling trucks, buses, and river transport. Work will continue to standardize and improve the regulatory framework for LNG in shipping. But the main reason for such attention to the development of LNG and gas storage facilities is that they are seen as factors for improving the security of supply. Pipeline gas supplies from an external monopoly supplier and the situation in domestic markets today have shown insufficient reliability due to political influence.

Now there is a pan-European concept of security of supply, which involves close regional cooperation and an appropriate level of interconnection of gas networks of different countries. Eliminating bottlenecks in the gas infrastructure will increase the utilization of existing LNG and underground gas storage facilities (UGS). It is not for nothing that liquefied gas and underground gas storages are considered together. They allow reducing dependence on a monopolistic external supplier, which regularly creates problems in the gas market. However, some countries in the Black Sea region still receive the lion's share of gas under contracts with Russia's Gazprom, so they remain particularly vulnerable to interruptions in its supply [4].

⁹ The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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.

¹⁰ LNG is a widely used international abbreviation, which stands for liquefied natural gas.

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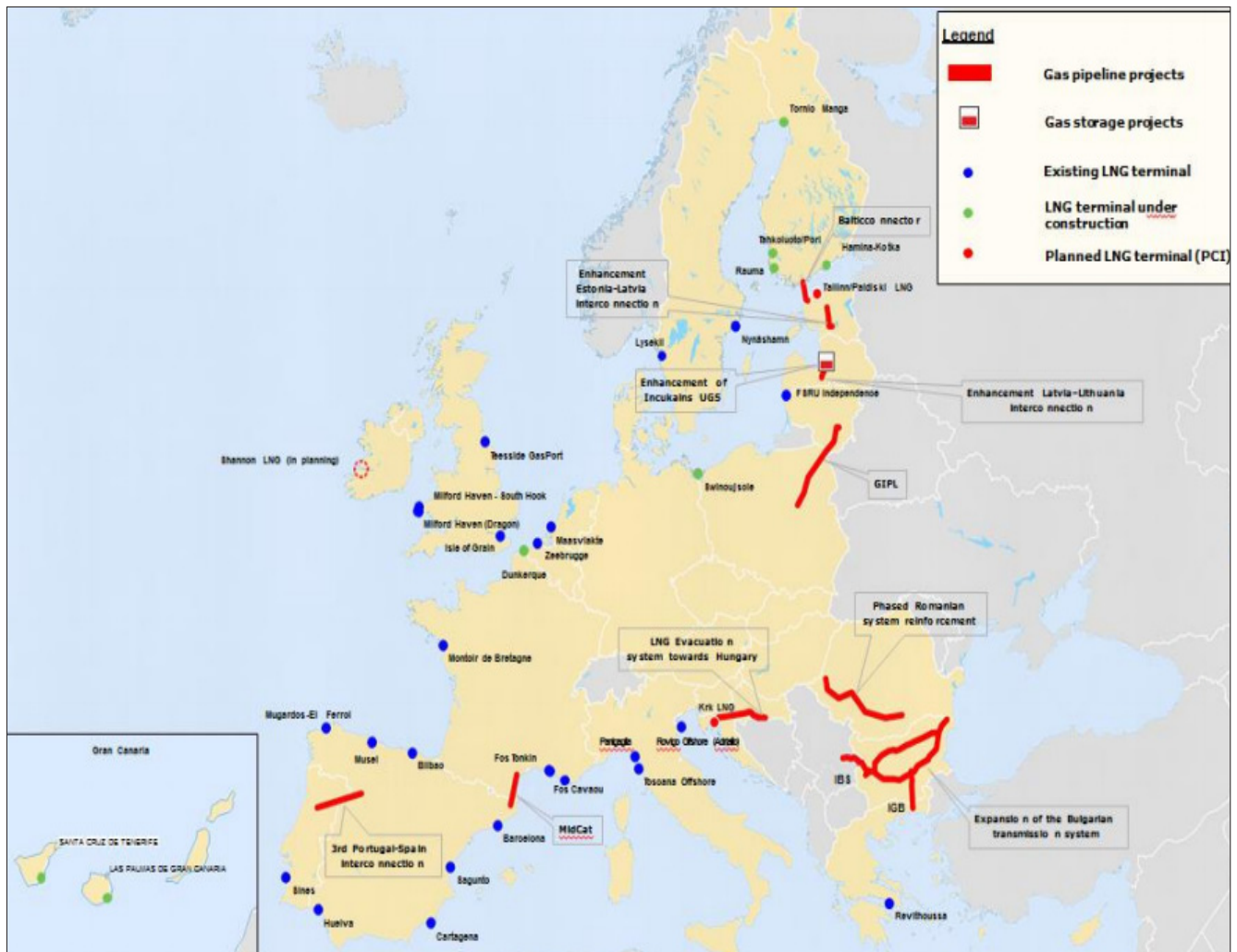


Figure 1. The EU infrastructure according to the LNG and gas storage strategy

Note.: Dots indicate LNG terminals: blue dots indicate existing terminals, red dots indicate planned terminals.

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/energy>

The European Commission also noted that the countries of South-Eastern Europe are very dependent on a single supplier, and therefore require an increase in gas security. Among the Black Sea countries, they are the EU members (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia) and the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Energy Community (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Serbia). These countries, as well as Ukraine, comply with the European gas legislation, so they should be considered as members of the EU gas market with equal rights and obligations. Strategies and plans for the development of LNG and gas storage facilities in the EU should take into account the interests and capabilities of the countries, which implement the EU gas legislation, in particular the efficient use of Ukrainian UGS, which is the largest in Europe. The interaction of LNG terminals and underground gas storages has a positive impact on market liquidity

and supply security. It is sufficient to recall the experience of Lithuania and Poland, which significantly improved their own energy security when they gained access to the global LNG market, which immediately strengthened their negotiating positions regarding the supply of pipeline gas.

The EU strategy also determines that the development of LNG hubs, the availability of underground storages along with pipeline supply routes could make a significant contribution to the diversification and security of supply. But it is quite correct to note that the potential of existing LNG terminals and gas storages is not used enough and that before starting the construction of new infrastructure, the opportunities for the use of the existing facilities shall be analyzed. The question of whether it is necessary to invest billions of Euros in new UGS in the EU if there are already available in Ukraine is rhetorical.

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A strategy is being implemented to provide all the EU members with access to LNG either by building LNG terminals or indirectly through a gas pipeline connection.

It is worth noting that the European Commission believes that the same opportunities should be available to the Eastern Partnership countries. The European Commission is implementing a special LNG Program [5] within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Initiative (Network on LNG markets) to assess the economic and political opportunities in the partner countries arising from the growing role of LNG in the global market, in particular, diversification of the natural gas sources, new import routes, competition with traditional suppliers, and a new potential sector of the economy. Preliminary results of the study show that there is a possibility of access and use of LNG in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The nearest planned terminal to the Black Sea coast is in the North of Greece. Back in 2016, it was included in the EU strategy and had the status of a Project of Common Interest (PCI). What has changed since then? In November 2019, the fourth edition of the List of Projects of Common Interest was published, which is being constantly updated in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) No. 347/2013 [6]. The List again includes LNG terminal projects on the island of Krk (Croatia) and in Gdansk (Fig. 1). The implementation of the LNG terminal project in Northern Greece, together with the infrastructure project known as the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) between Komotini (Greece) and Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), will allow liquefied gas reaching the Black Sea region (Fig. 2). The IGB project is a key part of the strategy for greater integration of gas markets,

which includes the Bulgaria-Greece, Bulgaria-Romania, and Romania-Hungary interconnection projects. Now the issues of financing the IGB project and obtaining licenses and permits are being resolved. In July 2019, a license was obtained that permitted the construction of a gas pipeline on the territory of Greece. On October 10, 2019, during an official ceremony in the presence of the Ministers of Energy of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Hellenic Republic, an EIB loan agreement for the amount of 110 million Euros was signed. Mandatory gas transportation agreements were also signed with shippers who booked capacity in the pipeline, as well as contracts with selected contractors for the production and supply of pipes and construction of the pipeline.

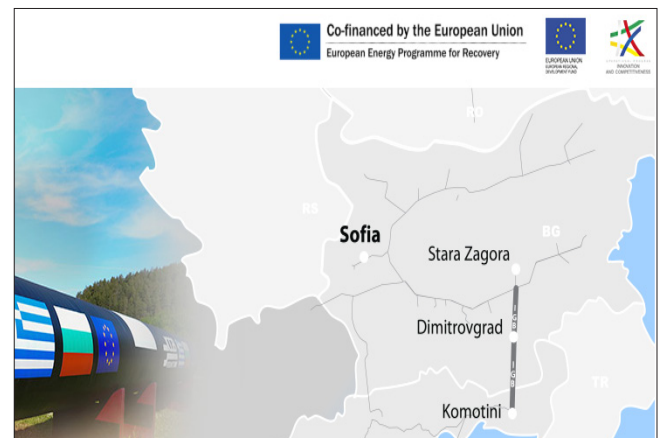


Figure 2. Diagram of the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB)

The project for LNG Terminal in Northern Greece in Alexandroupolis (Fig. 3), implemented by the Greek company GASTRADE S. A. today, has already received all necessary licenses required for construction start [7].

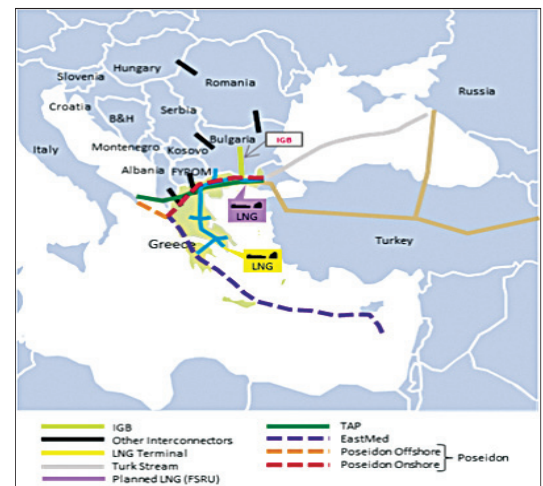


Figure 3. Location of the FSRU floating terminal and other LNG receiving facilities near Alexandroupolis

Source: www.gastrade.gr; www.depa.gr

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The Alexandroupolis terminal will consist of the following main components:

- offshore floating LNG storage and regasification unit (FSRU) with storage tanks up to 170,000 m³;
- system for FSRU mooring at the distance of 17.6 km from the city of Alexandroupolis and 10 km from the nearest opposite shore near the village of Makri, on the sea area with a depth of about 40 m;
- two flexible 14-inch risers, through which natural gas is supplied to the Pipeline End Manifold, PLEM;
- the underwater 24-km long section of the pipeline and the coast 4-km long section to the junction with the pipeline Kipi-Komotini NNGS, Greece.

In July 2019 regulatory procedures were announced for a market test for capacity booking at this facility.

Russia's presence in the LNG market

The development of production and transportation capabilities turned LNG into a global commodity, which forced the Russian Federation to change its attitude to it. After the years of skepticism and rejection, Russia allowed the export of LNG to several companies, except for the monopolist, "Gazprom". They argued that the development of LNG production, including low-tonnage production, requires market liberalization. State regulation of prices was abolished to stimulate, among others, investment projects.

If recently liquefied natural gas has reduced Russian dependence, now Gazprom is talking about the development of the LNG business as a priority area of activity. The goal is to increase the volume of exports of this gas to the new markets that are not available for pipeline supplies. At the same time, Gazprom sells LNG both from its own gas production and by buying it from the third parties [8]. In 2005-2018, 170 LNG deliveries were made from the Sakhalin-2 project and 230 – under term and spot deals. In total, about 27 million tons of LNG entered the markets of 15 countries during this period.

Small-scale production of liquefied natural gas develops. In 2017, Gazprom Export LLC increased

the volume of small-scale LNG supplies for export from 22 thousand tons to 35 thousand, including to Poland (from 19.3 thousand tons in 2016 to 22.5 thousand tons in 2017) and Estonia (from 2.2 thousand tons to 9.4 thousand tons). LNG produced by Gazpromtransgaz Yekaterinburg LLC in the amount of 2.6 thousand tons is delivered to Kazakhstan. Belarus has received a trial batch of LNG for Minsk Automobile Plant JSC to use it as a motor fuel for APCZ-16 truck intended for transportation, long-term storage, and distribution of liquefied natural gas. Therefore, the security strategies for gas supplies must be changed to take this factor into account.

The European market is becoming increasingly competitive and interdependent

Gas markets in all parts of Europe are increasingly integrated. This is facilitated by the common European legislation, which is applied both in the European Union and in the EU partner countries. In particular, the gas market in Ukraine is developing rapidly. European gas transparency rules are implemented there. Outside the EU, the Ukrainian operator of GTS is a single full-fledged participant of the European platform "AGSI+" – an initiative that displays data on the volume of gas storage in European gas storage facilities [9]. Such information is necessary for the effective functioning of the market and the security of gas supplies. Data on underground storages in Ukraine are available online (<https://www.gie.eu>) for more than five years – since July 2014.

The EU Regulation on Energy Market Integrity and Transparency (REMIT) contains requirements for a reporting regime and greater transparency of information regarding LNG and LNG facilities. This mode is mandatory for operators of LNG and UGS terminals and market participants. In particular, the ALSI platform deals with data on the activities of LNG terminals and LNG reserves in Europe (Fig. 4). Now, this platform reflects data from ten countries, including terminals in Poland (Świnoujście LNG Terminal), Lithuania (FSRU Independence), and Greece (Revithoussa LNG Terminal). Thus, liquefied gas, which in many countries is already a competitor to traditional gas coming via gas pipelines from fields, is becoming important in the Black Sea countries.

FOCUS ON: ENERGY CHALLENGES

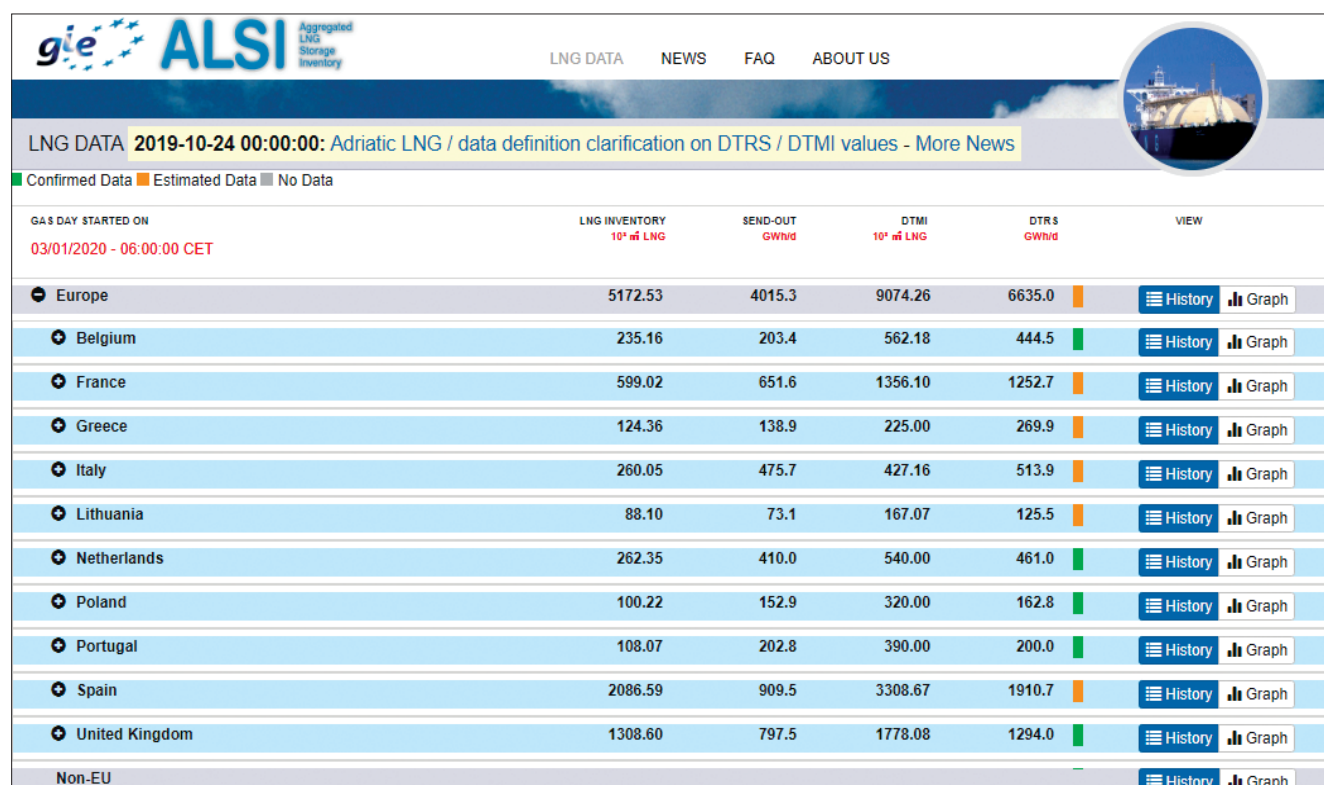


Figure 4. The ALSI platform provides data from LNG terminals

Source: <https://www.gie.eu/>

In November 2019, liquefied gas finally arrived in Ukraine. This was a small batch (90 million m³) of American LNG contracted on the Ukrainian "ERA" through the Polish PGNiG [10]. It is difficult to conclude long-term contracts for the supply of LNG to Ukraine now. To do this, we need to continue to address a range of issues, both technical and relative to the forecast pricing. But even now Ukraine has the technical capacity to receive gas from the Polish direction in volumes that exceed the capacity of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście. In October 2019, Ukrtransgaz completed the construction of an interconnector at the "Komarno" compressor station in the Lviv region. Available for import from Poland, the capacity increased from 6.5 million to 18 million cubic meters per day. In annual terms, this is almost 6.6 billion cubic meters or about half of the total annual demand of Ukraine for gas imports.

The gas infrastructure that connects Ukraine's GTS with its EU neighbours has large capacity, but today it is blocked by Gazprom for the use of other customers. However, the situation began to change. On November 29, 2019, the operators of the GTS of Poland and Ukraine agreed on the

terms of cooperation at the connecting points of the GTS of the two countries – Hermanovychi and Drozdovychi, which are completely based on European practices and the EU legislation. And from January 1, 2020, when the transit contract with Gazprom expires, the interaction between the "GTS Operator of Ukraine" and related operators is possible only in accordance with the EU gas legislation [11]. Therefore, the infrastructure capacity is enough to get the necessary amount of LNG in Ukraine.

LNG markets are developing very quickly, and soon the participation of Ukraine and other Black Sea countries in the ALSI platform may become a reality.

In Ukraine, more than 600 companies have licenses for gas supplies. Exchange trading works and develops. The powerful UGS of Ukraine contributes to the strengthening of competition. The introduction of a gas storage mechanism in the bonded warehouse regime allows companies taking advantage of these opportunities without unnecessary financial overload. All this contributed to the pumping of a record volume of gas into Ukrainian UGS before the 2019-2020 winter season, which is a particularly important fac-

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tor for security and countering the threats of gas flow disruption between Ukraine and the EU due to the actions of the Russian Federation and the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project.

The use of existing terminals, primarily in Poland and Lithuania (possibly Greece, Italy and Turkey), and the existing gas infrastructure already allows increasing the presence of LNG in the Black Sea region. For LNG supplies to Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, the pipeline infrastructure, which already supplies gas, can be

used. Therefore, the key driver of LNG development will be security and economic feasibility (price competitiveness).

One way or another, relying on the fact that liquefied gas is becoming a world commodity, with the development of infrastructure, the countries of the Black Sea region can in the coming years get access to the world LNG market, which will help to remove monopoly influence and significantly enhance the security of natural gas supplies in general.



Photo 1. The tanker with the first LNG for Ukraine

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Possible Military Actions against Iran, the Turkish Invasion of Syria and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict¹²

The purpose¹² of this article is not to analyze the situation that has developed in Syria and around Iran as of November 16, 2019, and possible development scenarios, but to present the views in the context of the dangerous events around the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria resulting of the Turkish invasion of this country, since in Washington's relations with Tehran the confrontation in relations with Turkey continues. The problems are not only unresolved but have also aggravated and expanded.

Despite some positive trends and steps to reduce the risk of possible military actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the situation around Iran remains explosive. The United States, with the help of a new coalition, are trying to resist new, including naval, initiatives of Iran.

The large, accumulation and movement of naval forces in the Persian Gulf have created a situation when it is more likely that military actions can start not only under the political will of one of the main players but also due to the so-called war by accident.

Given a large number of key players and stakeholders involved, both publicly and less openly, it is possible that some of them will try to commit such an action that will lead to a possible military action of chance.

In the case of the most undesirable scenario of military actions and the beginning of the war, of course, ground operations against Iran are practi-

cally excluded. But it is also obvious that the geography of the military arena of operations at the regional level will significantly expand. Military operations may involve the states in this war involuntarily, resulting in a significant increase in the number of parties in the military operations that will cover the entire Middle East - from Syria to the UAE, from Iran to Saudi Arabia, and so on.

In the case of the military actions, it is more than likely that in four to six months, Iran will have nuclear weapons. Some experts already consider the situation much more complicated than the Caribbean Crisis, in the sense that it involved two players who were much easier to agree, while in the Iranian issue, as already noted, there are many key players, which are not so obvious.

It is more than evident that in the case of military actions or war, it is impossible to foresee all the scenarios, but one thing is clear: if Iran suffers massive airstrikes, a large flow of refugees will leak out of it. Turkey is likely to close its borders, and these flows will be directed mainly to the North – towards the border with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Such events will become a serious threat not only to Armenia and Azerbaijan but also to Russia. As some Russian experts have already predicted, it is quite possible that Russia will have to increase and strengthen its border troops on the border of Armenia with Iran, take control over the border, as well as the actual border line between Nagorno-Karabakh and Iran.

If events develop in such a way, there might be a situation when it is very difficult for Azerbaijan to hold different geopolitical chairs at the same time. The official Baku will probably agree that Russia should also take control of its border with Iran (including Nakhichevan) since a large flow of refugees could become a dangerous source of serious internal political destabilization for Azerbaijan.

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As a result of military actions against Iran, there will be no winners among the participants, either militarily or politically. But there is no doubt that the greatest political dividends will be received by Russia and, perhaps, China. The role of Russia in such a situation will significantly increase, because no country can play the role of mediator, except Russia, and, therefore, it is possible that China will also show its support.

Russian-Iranian relations are already becoming a strategic alliance, as evidenced by the recent agreement on expanded military cooperation between Iran and Russia. Iran aims to establish closer ties with the EAEU, and at this stage, the issue of completing the procedures necessary for an interim agreement on the formation of a free trade zone between the EAEU and Iran entry into force is being discussed. According to the reached decision, the temporary free trade agreement is effective from October 27, 2019.

Given the growing multilateral cooperation with Russia of another player in the "Iranian tangle" – Turkey, we can confidently say that the Moscow-Ankara-Tehran triangle will be crucial and that a significant role in it will be assigned to Russia. This trilateral cooperation can have a different meaning and influence also in various processes that are much broader in the region.

The unpredictability of the future Turkish involvement in Syria

While it is difficult to predict exactly how further events will unfold in Syria, it is clear that we should not expect a political settlement of the Syrian crisis in the foreseeable future. Washington sees this process under the auspices of the UN, but Moscow insists on the Astana format of Russia-Iran-Turkey. Having agreed to both formats, Ankara has not finally decided yet. Now the main goal for the United States is to maintain the military presence and control over the hydrocarbon-rich Syrian territories.

Turkey's military operations in Syria under the guise of an anti-terrorist operation, initiated with the consent of the United States and Russia, pose a threat to the security of the South Caucasus region and will have an impact primarily on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

It is no accident that on October 15, 2019, at a meeting of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) in Baku, President of Azer-

baijan Ilham Aliyev said: "*Nakhichevan is separated from the mainland of Azerbaijan. Between them is Zangezur - an ancient Azerbaijani land. Its transfer to Armenia created a geographical split in the Turkic world*" [1]. And this is not the first time the President of Azerbaijan has declared Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Armenia.

It is worth noting that, despite the fact that the meeting of the Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States was held during the hottest days of the Turkish military operation in Syria, the Turkish delegation chaired by President Erdogan and Turkish representatives fully supported such plans of Azerbaijan, in particular, the statement of the assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Ali Hasanov: "There is no doubt that Azerbaijan will conduct an anti-terrorist operation in the territories controlled by the occupying military units..."[2], that is, a possible war against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Turkey's actions in Syria not only push Azerbaijan to a new war but can also serve as an additional factor for launching military operations against Iran. The arc of instability has already reached Iraq and Lebanon, where internal clashes could lead to a civil war that could blow up the entire region.

All these threats and above all, probably, the unpredictability of the actions of Turkey and Azerbaijan became the main reason for Moscow to double the military potential of the Russian military base in Armenia, as stated by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on October 29, 2019, during his visit to Armenia. Many experts also assess this as an initiative to balance Turkey's possible new activity in the South Caucasus, as well as against Ankara's possible plans for Turkey's military participation in Azerbaijan's new war against Nagorno-Karabakh.

Possible military actions against Iran and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

In the context of the Iranian hub, changes in influences and interests and potential scenarios in the Middle East are constantly discussed. At the same time, people tend to forget about the South Caucasus, where there is a great potential for conflict, and the serious threats to regional security and stability, in particular the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The negotiation process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by Russia, the United States, and France, is in a rather uncertain status.

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Given the belligerent rhetoric of the Azerbaijani President and other senior officials, which recovered after a pause, and conflicting statements of the Prime Minister of Armenia about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the statements of the Minister of Defense of Armenia, which contained some aggressive elements, it is possible that, in the case of large-scale military operations in Iran, Azerbaijan will attempt to resort to military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, feeding them as the answer to several conflicting statements of the current government of Armenia, incomprehensible even to the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, and the ill-considered policy of official Yerevan in the negotiation process.

It should be noted that significant changes have taken place in the negotiation process on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the format of the co-chairing countries of the OSCE Minsk Group. After the four-day war in April 2016, the proposals of the mediators were discussed, aimed solely at easing tensions and maintaining the ceasefire reached by the conflicting parties on May 12, 1994.

These include: increasing the OSCE Monitoring Group along the contact line, installing special electronic equipment along the entire contact line to register violations of the ceasefire regime and creating mechanisms for an international investigation of violations of the ceasefire regime with the participation of the parties to the Karabakh conflict.

These proposals of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries were not accepted by Azerbaijan. After the change of power in Armenia in April-May 2018, these issues were removed from the agenda of the negotiations and were no longer mentioned in the statements of the OSCE Minsk Group. By the way, they were provided to the parties as requirements even before 2016, starting from 2013. Instead, the negotiation process of the OSCE Minsk Group began discussing the problem of conflict resolution, which obviously has no prospects, and for this reason, as mentioned above, the negotiations were in uncertainty, in an almost dead-end.

This change of agenda fully satisfies Azerbaijan, and the current impasse in the negotiation process does not in any way contribute to the compliance of the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the ceasefire regime, which is an international ob-

ligation for them. It should be noted that although the mediators previously considered their task was to manage the conflict, observe the ceasefire and ensure security, now, after the verbal agreements are reached during the famous "meeting in the elevator" between Pashinyan and Aliyev in Dushanbe on September 28, 2018, the observance of the truce has been transferred to the Pashinyan-Aliyev format. This, by the way, has already been recorded in the statements of the OSCE Minsk Group, which contained references to the agreements in Dushanbe. These realities have significantly reduced the role of mediators in maintaining the ceasefire and deterring the growth of tension.

Now in this situation, it will be quite difficult, or almost impossible, to convince Azerbaijan or force it to return to its previous agenda, since the Azerbaijani authorities have been able to get rid of an unprofitable agenda. If military operations start in Nagorno-Karabakh, active involvement of new political players, primarily Russia, the United States, Turkey and Iran, will be obvious.

Can the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries establish stability along the line of contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without the consent of the parties?

Azerbaijan has consistently opposed the proposals for a ceasefire on the demarcation line and has not actually accepted them. These measures can only be implemented with the consent of the parties. However, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries have the opportunity to make the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone manageable and stable without the consent of the conflicting parties. Given the fact that the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Russia, the United States and France, which are permanent members of the UN Security Council and quite serious geopolitical centers, all three countries are technically able to establish satellite control over the demarcation line. And they now, obviously, if not constantly but periodically, use this opportunity and monitor all movements and changes along the line of demarcation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Accordingly, these three intermediary states can demonstrate political will and, without the consent of the conflicting parties, make a joint official statement that they will start the regular exchange of information on the results of satellite observation, and that the intermediary countries will periodically discuss and analyze changes in the military

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situation in the conflict zone in Nagorno-Karabakh and possible undesirable processes.

The exchange of information on satellite monitoring, discussion and analysis between the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries can become a serious deterrence to offensive plans. Such co-operation between the mediators will significantly reduce the risk of resumption of large-scale military operations, and will also be a great positive incentive to continue negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

It should be emphasized that if compliance with the ceasefire agreement, signed on May 12, 1994, is an international obligation for the conflicting parties, the implementation of this Agreement for the co-chairing countries of the OSCE Minsk Group is a matter of international responsibility. And it can also be implemented if one of the conflicting parties is opposed, preventing new large-scale fighting, which is preceded by new troop movements and military accumulation on the demarcation line.

Such an initiative of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries can have a serious and positive impact not only for Nagorno-Karabakh and the South Caucasus. Such cooperation between the

three states will also play a positive role in the Middle East region, starting another process where the importance of diplomacy rather than a show of force will again increase. Unfortunately, in all recent geopolitical processes, diplomacy occupies very little space, and the policy of using hybrid tools dominates more.

If the above-mentioned initiative is implemented, the co-chairing countries of the OSCE Minsk Group will have a new opportunity to confirm the role and importance of their mediation mission in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an effective and promising format for ensuring peace.

Today, there are threats to global security in the region, and military action against Iran could trigger a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Conversely, the beginning of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh may become an impetus to the aggravation of the situation around Iran.

In this context, the task of reducing the possibility of new large-scale military operations in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is becoming increasingly relevant for the wider region of the Middle East - South Caucasus.

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FOCUS ON: UKRAINE-NATO COOPERATION

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Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine: The Single-Alternative Course *The main events on the Ukraine-NATO cooperation in October-December 2019*



Photo 1. Delegation of the North Atlantic Council in Ukraine

On December 3, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has adopted a resolution on the lack of an alternative to Ukraine's accession to NATO, which is established in the Constitution of Ukraine and is widely supported by the citizens of Ukraine. "The prospective integration of Ukraine into the North Atlantic Alliance will guarantee the independence, security, and sovereignty of Ukraine, its development as a democratic state of law, well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Ukraine," the document says.

On October 30-31, 2019, the NATO North Atlantic Council, chaired by Alliance Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, paid a two-day visit to Ukraine. During the visit of the North Atlantic Council to Ukraine, a meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission was held with the participation of Presi-

dent Volodymyr Zelensky and the members of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the purpose of which was to discuss the situation in and around Ukraine, the reform process in the country, and progress in the Ukraine-NATO partnership.

In the official statement of the Ukraine-NATO Commission¹⁴, in addition to the usual phrases about condemning Russian aggression and non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea, NATO member countries encourage Ukraine to better use the tools available within the framework of the Ukraine-NATO Commission, including the **Annual National Program**, to achieve NATO standards as soon as possible. It is noted that the member States hope for further progress in reforming the security and defense sector of Ukraine, including the implementation of the National Security Law of 2018, in particular, the provisions of the Law "On Civilian Control and Democratic Supervision" of the security and defense sector was called a key Euro-Atlantic norm. In addition, the need to intro-

13 The material was prepared in the framework of the project "Raising awareness on NATO in the communities of the East and South of Ukraine", implemented by the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI from June 1, 2019 till March 15, 2020 with the support of the Britain Embassy to Ukraine.

14 https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natohq/official_texts_170408.htm

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duce secondary legislation was noted, which provides for the introduction of the Law "On National Security", "On Security Service of Ukraine", "On the New Committee on Parliamentary Supervision", "On Intelligence", "On State Secrets" and "On Defense Procurement."

During the visit of the representatives of the North Atlantic Council, Ukraine has officially appealed to NATO with a request to join the **Enhanced Opportunities Program (EOP)**. *"Ukraine has requested moving to a new level of cooperation and provision to Ukraine of the status of a participant in the partnership of expanded opportunities. This program primarily provides for the expansion of practical operational cooperation,"* Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Dmytro Kuleba said. The Enhanced Opportunities Program allows uniting around NATO in a club of the closest partners who, for various reasons, are not allies, but are willing to work closely together, often in technical matters, during joint operations and exercises.

At the end of October, Ukraine and NATO agreed on the transition to a new format of cooperation **"One country – one plan"**, which will include all previous developments and focus them under a single structure of control and coordination, as reported by Defense Minister Andriy Zahorodnyuk after a visit on October 24-25 to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. According to him, NATO intends to offer this "One country – one plan" format to optimize and improve cooperation with all partner countries, and Ukraine will be the first country to develop such experience. The main difference of the new format is its concretization with the tasks and deadlines for their achievement with a clear system of control over the implementation of both Ukraine and NATO. Set out priorities of the joint work will relate to the transformation of the Armed Forces and providing for: changes in the structure of the General Staff and the Armed Forces, revision of the functions of governing bodies adapted to the formats that mutually compatible with the approaches of NATO. In parallel with the optimization of the management system, new statutes and guidelines will be developed, based on NATO standards (STANAG – Standardization Agreement). As it was noted, the adaptation will cover all three classes of standards – administrative, logistical and organizational, and each of the mentioned areas of work will have its own very specific **road map**. In the expert environment,

the transition to a new format of interaction with NATO was assessed as certainly beneficial for Ukraine, which allows, fulfilling the tasks of the road maps, achieving operational interoperability with NATO countries without actually obtaining a membership action plan¹⁵.

On December 3-4, during a two-day meeting of NATO leaders dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Alliance foundation, the determination to accept Ukraine into this organization was confirmed, according to the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Alliance Jens Stoltenberg. In particular, he said that the decision made in 2008 on the potential membership of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO, is still valid. "NATO decided at the NATO summit at Bucharest in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia would be members of NATO. This decision still stands. At the same time, we have not put in place any specific timetable. What we focus now is how we can help both Georgia and Ukraine move towards Euro-Atlantic integration," said Stoltenberg.¹⁶

In parallel, on December 3, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a resolution¹⁷ on the lack of an alternative to Ukraine's accession to NATO, which is established in the Constitution of Ukraine and is widely supported by the citizens of Ukraine. "The prospective integration of Ukraine into the North Atlantic Alliance will guarantee the independence, security, and sovereignty of Ukraine, its development as a democratic state of law, well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Ukraine," the document says.

Thus, the main events behind the vector of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO for the period from October to December indicate the readiness to search for new mechanisms of cooperation by a new team. Based on the results of further meetings, in particular, on January 15, 2020, the next meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission will be held at the level of permanent representatives of the Alliance member states, it will be possible to talk about the efficiency of such steps.

In the context of Ukraine's cooperation with NATO member countries, cooperation with the United States is strategic. At the end of 2019, there was good news from Washington. Ukraine buys a batch of Javelin antiarmor weapon systems from

¹⁵<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2019/10/26/7102321/>

¹⁶ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/summit-nato/30307832.html>

¹⁷ <https://rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/185267.html>

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the United States. This is the first large-scale contract of direct intergovernmental defense procurement of weapons between Ukraine and the United States. Ukraine has signed a contract for the purchase of Javelins, made directly by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine under the Pentagon program Foreign Military Sales¹⁸.

For Ukraine, this is a huge step forward, which was preceded by a departure from the old system that forbade the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to directly buy weapons and equipment from foreign countries. Now, these changes will expand the opportunities for strengthening the military-technical and defense potential of Ukraine.

18 <https://www.facebook.com/ukr.embassy.usa/photos/a.437547496288488/2701856836524198/?type=3&theater>



Photo 2. Warships of the NATO Permanent Naval Group in the Black Sea

Source: <http://argumentua.com/novosti/v-akvator-yu-chornogo-morya-zakhodyat-chotiri-boiov-korabl-nato>

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MEETING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL IN LONDON 3-4 DECEMBER 2019, 3-4.12.2019, LONDON



Heads of State and Government of NATO member states, London, 4 December 2019

Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_171561.htm

London Declaration

Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019

Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm?selectedLocale=en

1. Today, we gather in London, NATO's first home, to celebrate seventy years of the strongest and most successful Alliance in history, and mark the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. NATO guarantees the security of our territory and our one billion citizens, our freedom, and the values we share, including democracy, individual liberty, human rights, and the rule of law. Solidarity, unity, and cohesion are cornerstone principles of our Alliance. As we work together to prevent conflict and preserve peace, NATO remains the foundation for our collective defence and the essential forum for security consultations and decisions among Allies. We reaffirm the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and North America, our adherence to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and our solemn commitment as enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty that an attack against one Ally shall be considered an attack against us all.
2. We are determined to share the costs and responsibilities of our indivisible security. Through our Defence Investment Pledge, we are increasing our defence investment in line with its 2% and 20% guidelines, investing in new capabilities, and contributing more forces to missions and operations. Non-US defence expenditure has grown for five consecutive years; over 130 billion US dollars more is being invested in defence. In line with our commitment as enshrined in Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, we continue to strengthen our individual and collective capacity to resist all forms of attack. We are making good progress. We must and will do more.
3. We, as an Alliance, are facing distinct threats and challenges emanating from all strategic directions. Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security; terrorism in all its forms and manifestations remains a persistent threat to us all. State and non-state actors challenge the rules-based international order. Instability beyond our borders is also contributing to irregular migration. We face cyber and hybrid threats.
4. NATO is a defensive Alliance and poses no threat to any country. We are adapting our military capabilities, strategy, and plans across the

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Alliance in line with our 360-degree approach to security. We have taken decisions to improve the readiness of our forces to respond to any threat, at any time, from any direction. We stand firm in our commitment to the fight against terrorism and are taking stronger action together to defeat it. We are addressing and will continue to address in a measured and responsible way Russia's deployment of new intermediate-range missiles, which brought about the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and which pose significant risks to Euro-Atlantic security. We are increasing action to protect our freedoms at sea and in the air. We are further strengthening our ability to deter and defend with an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defence capabilities, which we continue to adapt. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. We are fully committed to the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, taking into account the prevailing security environment. Allies are strongly committed to full implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in all its aspects, including nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We remain open for dialogue, and to a constructive relationship with Russia when Russia's actions make that possible.

5. We work to increase security for all. We have strengthened partnerships in our neighbourhood and beyond, deepening political dialogue, support, and engagement with partner countries and international organisations. We reaffirm our commitment to long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. We are increasing our cooperation with the United Nations; there is unprecedented progress in NATO-EU cooperation. We are committed to NATO's Open Door policy, which strengthens the Alliance and has brought security to millions of Europeans. North Macedonia is here with us today and will soon be our newest Ally. We are committed to the success of all our operations and missions. We pay trib-

ute to all the men and women who have served for NATO, and honour all those who have sacrificed their lives to keep us safe.

6. To stay secure, we must look to the future together. We are addressing the breadth and scale of new technologies to maintain our technological edge, while preserving our values and norms. We will continue to increase the resilience of our societies, as well as of our critical infrastructure and our energy security. NATO and Allies, within their respective authority, are committed to ensuring the security of our communications, including 5G, recognising the need to rely on secure and resilient systems. We have declared space an operational domain for NATO, recognising its importance in keeping us safe and tackling security challenges, while upholding international law. We are increasing our tools to respond to cyber attacks, and strengthening our ability to prepare for, deter, and defend against hybrid tactics that seek to undermine our security and societies. We are stepping up NATO's role in human security. We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.
7. Taking into account the evolving strategic environment, we invite the Secretary General to present to Foreign Ministers a Council-agreed proposal for a forward-looking reflection process under his auspices, drawing on relevant expertise, to further strengthen NATO's political dimension including consultation.
8. We express our appreciation for the generous hospitality extended to us by the United Kingdom. We will meet again in 2021.
9. In challenging times, we are stronger as an Alliance, and our people safer. Our bond and mutual commitment have guaranteed our freedoms, our values, and our security for seventy years. We act today to ensure that NATO guarantees those freedoms, values, and security for generations to come.

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Threats to the Flora and Fauna of the Azov and the Black Sea Basin from Ballast Water²⁰

Introduction. Invasive alien species – destroyers of global biodiversity

Cargo flows of the world's marine fleet now cover almost all countries. They provide 90% of the total volume of transported goods. The organization of transportation primarily includes the safety of navigation, which guarantees the safety of cargo, ships, life, and health of crews.

In this regard, a prerequisite is the stability of a ship, i.e. its ability to withstand any weather influences, remaining afloat. While sailing from port to port, the shiploads seawater into ballast tanks with regard to the alignment of the roll and trim, increasing its draft, that allows improving its storm stability. Upon arrival at a port for loading operations, seawater (ballast) is removed from the ballast tanks. The operation of ballast water removing in the waters of the ports of the ship's mooring is the main point of transferring many types of foreign organisms and harmful strains of bacteria to the waters of the countries, which ports ships visit. Such species are usually referred to as alien invasive organisms and may have other names in countries that adhere to the rules of the IMO (International Marine Organization) Ballast Water Management Convention (BWMC)

The Convention defines the main stages of ballast operations management:

- acceptance of ballast water;
- ship on sail;
- ballast water drainage;
- naturalizing of the alien invasive species in the new environment.

Of these four stages, the last one becomes the key one, for which the main factors are:

- the temperature regime of the environment;
- duration of favorable conditions for reproduction;
- the salinity level of seawater;
- presence of predators and large nutritive base.

"Harmful aquatic and pathogenic organisms" are those introduced into seawater from freshwater basins, including estuaries, or freshwater streams that may pose a serious risk to human health.

Invasive alien species, which have entered other water basins, are recognized as disruptors of global biodiversity. Almost all countries and continents irrevocably lose many species of fauna and flora, which previously were stably reproducing within their borders. Ballast waters pose a global threat to the economy and ecology of many world countries, exporting foreign bio-organisms and pathogenic strains of bacteria and viruses.

The IMO estimates that about 5 billion tons of ballast water are transported annually by the world's fleet,

²⁰ The publication was prepared in the framework of the project "Promoting Security in the Black Sea Region through Greater Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations" with the support of 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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where one cubic meter of ballast water can contain up to 50,000 zooplankton samples. In ballast tanks, thousands of marine alien species can be transported. They are resistant to various "steps-actions" of their habitat on a ship. In addition, in the ballast tanks, the solid suspended matters settle, constantly accumulating entire colonies of bio-organisms, which are no less hazardous in the case of their transfer to "foreign waters" [1].

Research of the problem. Colossal damage to the World Ocean is associated with contamination and transportation of invasive species in ballast water

The Azov-Black Sea basin is a rich natural heritage. Only in the Sea of Azov, the annual catch of fish in the middle of the XIX century reached 300 thousand tons, and by today the catch has decreased to 3 thousand tons. Sturgeon previously caught in the volume of up to 100 thousand tons per year, and today amount is decreased to 8 thousand [2, 3]. Things are bad enough with the catch of fish in the Black Sea; newcomers from the Black Sea move to the mouth of the rivers, where they disappear; in the mouth of the Dnieper - there are eight species of fish. In the Dnieper-Bug estuary, local fauna was destroyed by Chinese hairy and Dutch crabs; Kherson fishermen found piranha paku, reaching one meter in length and up to 40 kg weight.

There is a steady and rapid movement of the imported invasive species throughout the Azov-Black Sea basin, including Mnemiopsis, which has almost destroyed the anchovy in the Black and Azov Seas (Fig. 1). Its presence in one cubic meter of seawater reached 1.2 kg [4].



Figure 1. *Mnemiopsis leidyi* is the representative of the Ctenophore type up to 10 cm in size

Source: Belenko T. *Environmental problems of the Black and Azov Seas - Natural Scientific and Social Aspects. Issue: United Nations Development Program — Global Environmental Facility (UNDP — GEF), 2014.*

According to the latest data of the Russian Academy of Sciences, there is a destruction of *Mnemiopsis* by *Beroe cucumis* Ctenophore (Fig. 2). These Ctenophores feed on *Mnemiopsis*. The species was introduced with the ballast waters of ships coming from the Atlantic Ocean.



Figure 2. *Beroe cucumis* Ctenophore

Source: Belenko T. *Environmental problems of the Black and Azov Seas - Natural Scientific and Social Aspects. Issue: United Nations Development Program — Global Environmental Facility (UNDP — GEF), 2014.*

Scientists rightly consider venous *Rapana* an ecological disaster of the Black and Azov Seas. It was imported in the middle of the XX century from the Far East (Fig. 3). Rapid reproduction of *Rapana* is conditioned by favorable conditions that have provided it a non-competitive residence in our seas.

The mass death of mussels has led to an environmental disaster. *Rapana* mercilessly destroys bivalves and crustaceans. Medium-sized mussels filter up to 5 dm³ of seawater per one hour. No wonder it is called "seas lungs". Previously, the entire coast of the Azov-Black Sea basin was inhabited by solid colonies of mussels, which kept the purity of the two basins at a sufficient level - this allowed actively engaging in breeding fish of mullet and sturgeon breeds.

Ecologists believe that the situation around marine water resources is on the verge of disaster. Not by chance, a ban on catching mussels in the Black Sea was introduced in Ukraine from May 1 to June 31, 2019. That measure only increased attention to the problem but did not improve the purity of the basin. At the same time, a significant action will be needed, including the organization of mass *Rapana* fishing, requiring funds for the purchase of fishing gear and the creation of cooperatives.

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A serious approach to this issue was demonstrated by the scientists of Kherson, developing technologies for musselbreeding. They set themselves the task of creating nurseries that can massively replenish mussel stocks and thereby significantly improve the ecology of the Black Sea. A good indicator of water purity is its clarity, which varies along the coast line. Three decades ago, almost the entire water area of the Black Sea bottom was visible up to a depth of 20 m, now this figure is 4-5 m.

The reasons for different water purity are:

- dumping of wastewaters without proper cleaning;
- contamination of the seawater in the port zones with the cargo remnants;
- inhabitation of the seawater with invasive plankton and micro-organisms.



Figure 3. Venous *Rapana* is an inhabitant of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov

Source: Belenko T. Environmental problems of the Black and Azov Seas - Natural Scientific And Social Aspects. Issue: United Nations Development Program — Global Environmental Facility (UNDP — GEF), 2014.

The death of mussels and crustaceans has passed the no-return point through the murderous influence of *Rapana*. Today the Black Sea crab is almost extinct. To our surprise, having visited the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria last year, we were amazed by the abundance of fish, which we caught, mussels, crustaceans and even crabs. In Bulgaria, mussels are widely cultivated and settled from nurseries in the marine environment of coastal waters, where modern technologies for the reproduction of mussels are used. They differ from the applied technologies on

the cultivation of mussels of Sevastopol farm (in Crimea annexed by Russia). The fundamental difference is that mussel embryos are grown out of contact with the sea. This is due to the fact that most of the embryos die in seawater due to its contamination and pollution. After forming in a nursery to a certain size, mussels adapt much better to their habitat than those grown in existing seawater in contact with the sea [5].

The peculiarity of water filtration by mussels is that they purify the water from heavy metals, neutralize harmful bacteria and microorganisms, not accumulating them and not infecting themselves. The most efficient way to clean the seawater of the Azov-Black Sea basin, according to the authors of the article, is the mass settlement of the coast and shallow banks of these seas by the colonies of mussels.

Dolphins are on the verge of extinction. Currently, the number of dolphins does not exceed 150 thousand in the two seas. Only in the summer season of 2017, the death of 200 dolphins was fixed [6]. Biologists and ichthyologists consider several reasons for this hazardous phenomenon – an abrupt deterioration of sea ecology. Microorganisms and viruses introduced with the ballast waters from ships actively spread through the water and in airborne droplets, causing irreparable harm to dolphins. First of all, they affect the dolphins' orientation system that is confirmed by the animals' throwing on the shore because of the loss of orientation.

The contamination and transportation of invasive species by ballast water cause enormous damage to the entire World Ocean and estuaries of the seas – this is the impending catastrophe of the century. According to Western experts, the penetration of Ctenophore in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea caused damage to the Russian Federation amounting to more than \$2 billion. [7]. In Ukraine, this figure in the first approximation is about USD \$1.2 billion. And this is far from precise data.

Ballast water discharge monitoring: documents

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides for state obligations to prevent the spread of alien organisms, is the fundamental instrument for controlling the discharge of ballast water from ships. In the framework of the GloBallast Program, the Task Force in Ukraine has developed a Concept for implementing the Ballast Water Management Convention in Ukraine. D-2Rule, which became mandatory for all marine ships with a volume of ballast water of 5,000 tons or more,

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was finally adopted for mandatory implementation in 2020 [8]. This rule was constantly discussed by individual countries, the possibility of reducing the D-2 requirements was mentioned, but after the final decision of the IMO, more than 40 thousand ships are now preparing to install new equipment for cleaning and decontamination of ballast water. In 2019 in Ukraine, two units of Alfa Laval Company equipment were tested for the first time on Polish sea ships in the Black Sea, in the city of Chornomorske in the Odesa region, and the technology of such equipment is being developed at the Izmail Shipyard Dunaysudnoremont PJSC.

Model of equipment for decontamination and treatment of ballast water in accordance with the new requirements of D-2 Rule developed at DI NU “OMA”

Our Danube Institute of NU “OMA” finds itself in the wake of modern scientific developments today. One of the professors of the Department of Ship Power Plants and Systems, Anatolii Danylian, has established a creative group of scientists and engineers, specialists of the marine fleet. The result of their work was the preparation of working materials for equipment of decontamination and purification of ballast waters in accordance with the new D-2 requirements.

The equipment was patented and its production started in the form of a working laboratory sample. Partial financial and technical assistance was provided by the Izmail Shipyard Dunaysudnoremont-PJSC. The unit uses the most modern scientific and technical developments (Fig. 4). It is still quite a long way to get specific calculated results, and there are certain organizational, financial and technical difficulties.

The most important block of the equipment requires the use of modern nano-material of high value. The water treatment block with water hammer has not previously had its application in the purification and disinfection of ballast waters. All scientific materials on this topic require a lot of research work and scientific consultations. The main research materials for the equipment are samples of ballast water from sea ships, and water from various areas of the Black Sea.

The peculiarity of this equipment is its versatility. Wastewaters from coastal cities that are dumped into the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov from estuaries, in their purity are far from the international requirements of the World Health Organization, and environmental standards approved by the Ministry

of Environment of Ukraine. The performance of the equipment and its technical capabilities allow disinfecting and purifying wastewaters in accordance with modern environmental requirements.

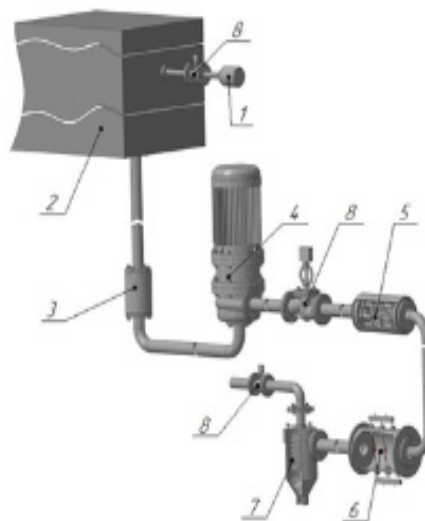


Figure 4. Unit for treatment and decontamination of ballast water, developed in DI NU “OMA”

1-chemical dispenser; 2-ballast tank; 3-coarse filter; 4-ballast pump; 5-UV unit; 6 –electric hydraulic shock unit; 7-self-discharge nanofine cleaning filter; 8-ballast system shut-off valves.

Summary

The authors of this article have resorted to an attempt to analyze the ecology of the Azov-Black Sea basins, to determine the main hazardous phenomena leading to man-made disasters in the two seas in the case of flora and fauna destruction in their waters. The main reasons for the destruction of fish stocks and pollution of seawaters were revealed.

The main directions in the localization of hazardous phenomena with the use of biological forms of seawater treatment and the introduction of modern legislative measures and technical support activities for the new generation of decontamination and treatment of sea waters of Ukraine were determined.

Unfortunately, the article cannot cover all efficient measures suitable for restoration of the ecological balance of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, but it would be appropriate to recall the use of the aeration of coastal sea waters, which may well be implemented in case of close cooperation of all countries of the Azov-Black Seas basin.

The article demonstrates the research work of one of the Marine educational institutions of Ukraine aimed at the improvement of equipment for decontamination/purification of ships' ballast water.

FOCUS ON: ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!



We start II season (2019-2020) of the contest of marine prose named after Lysianskyi "Matelot"!

This year contest is held under the auspices of the Kherson State Maritime Academy with the support of the Marlow Navigation company and is dedicated to the 185th anniversary of the establishment of the Merchant Shipping College in Kherson (1834).

CONDITIONS OF THE CONTEST 2019-2020

The language of works: Ukrainian;

Volume of works: from 10 to 50 thousand characters, including gaps.

Genre of works: short story, essay, novel, artistic realistic prose works of genres unknown to us, the main thing is not just raw records in the watch journal. Emphasis is on the word artistic! Although the reportage and travel notes may be the same.

Theme of the works: man at the sea, man of the sea in all variety of possible situations. However, every year of the contest has one specific

theme that is easy to mention in the text, but you can make it a leading one for your work. This year, it sounds like "BOYS WILL BECOME ADULT PEOPLE!"

This is a phrase from Taras Shevchenko's letter explaining the need to enter the Merchant Shipping College. The full quote from the letter to Brother Bartholomew is this: *"On the morning of September 19, I came to St. Petersburg and read your letter. You write that you were not at home, that you drove the boys to Kherson. Well done you are! But did you only get them into that merchant shipping college? If it is light, then pray to the God and go to bed: there will be adult people from the boys... but it is necessary to sleep with one eye..."*

So this year, we suggest talking about cadets and interns in the marine fleet: first trips, schooling, naval habits to meet newcomers on board and more. However, this is an optional requirement, rather a proposal to the authors, the jury will also consider works of other subjects to be interesting and convincing.

Place of action: the entire globe without restrictions - oceans, seas, bays, straits, coves, fjords, estuaries, greedy, erikes, skates, coasts, ports, estuaries, navigable rivers, lakes and so on. Please refrain from alternative realities and worlds where the laws of physics and hydrometeorology do not apply, use the same globe as Lysianskyi had.

Time of action: unlimited, past, present, future. The time is GMT.

Requirements for the drafting of the work: Word.doc document, signed by the author's first and last name, and his/her contact email, Nazva_Failu - the name of the work in Latin.

Work submission time: from 00:00 GMT 15 October 2019 to 23:59 GMT 20 April 2020

Address for submission: matelot@meta.ua

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

The work of the jury:

The evaluation is done on an anonymous basis from a long list of works on a ten-point evaluation system. Each jury member has one "extra" score that can be used for a favorite work. Each member of the jury has the right to veto one work, which is thus removed from the first three works for some significant reasons for that member of the jury. The veto can be overcome by majority votes of the jury.

The long list is formed by readers, the only criteria, for which is the formal compliance of the text with the conditions of the contest and its readability. After the evaluation, the jury creates a short list of 15 works that will be included in the collection and will be published in a book.

Announcement of the results of the contest:

May 20-24, 2020

Financial reward to the winners of the contest:

1st place: 5000 UAH

2nd place: 4000 UAH

3rd place: 3000 UAH

Members of the jury:

Valerii Petushchak, Kyiv, yacht captain, first world-class navigator of independent Ukraine;

Mykola Kostrov, Rear Admiral, Chairman of the Flagship Council of the NGO "Association of Navy Veterans of Ukraine";

Oleksandr Shumey, Kherson, Vice-Rector of the Kherson State Maritime Academy;

Leonid Kyrylash, Zaporizhzhia, senior radio operator;

Andriy Velychko, Kyiv, captain of long-distance trips;

Oleksandr Bereza, Odesa, captain of long-distance trips;

Anton Sanchenko, Kyiv, radio station chief;

Irina Pogorelovska, Kyiv, Chairman of the Organizing Committee.

A collection of the previous year's contest and a reprint of Y. Lysianskyi's travel notes are available for order at the web-site: http://www.chytomo.com/special_project/matelot/



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