Post-Crimea Black Sea: Changing Geo-Politics and Strategies

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Abstract

Occupation but actually annexation of Crimea by Russian Federation is an important point that significantly changed Black Sea region's framework and internal status-quo. As Russian Federation in fact widened its sphere of influence in the region security issues became even more urgent as it had been before. It's the time when the one of the leading actors of the region became one of the security threats of the region. Violation of the international law and region's status-quo shifted the region to the several changes primarily in security sphere. Among them increasing of the NATO presence in the region and quest for development of the stronger and more effective defence policy as a reaction to the region's internal threat for Black Sea region countries. Influence on the region of the EU's sanction policy towards Russian Federation especially in energetic sphere is also significant. Appearance of the new hot points such as Crimea issue, war in the South-East of Ukraine, numerous terrorist acts in Turkey brings new challenges to the Black Sea region making it more vulnerable and destabilized. In the light of challenges mentioned changing geo-politics and strategies creates a new framework of the region highlighting mutual interdependency, new contradictions in views and interests.

Keywords: Annexation of Crimea, Caucasian statusquo, Black Sea regional security,

Özet

Rusya Federasyonu'nun Kırım'ı işgali ve aslında ilhakı, Karadeniz bölgesinin yapısını ve iç statükosunu önemli ölçüde değiştiren mühim bir meseledir. Rusya Federasyonu bölgesel güvenlik meselelerindeki etki alanını genişlettikçe bu durum eskisinden olduğundan daha da önemli hale gelmiştir. Şuandaki durum bölgenin önemli lider aktörlerinden birinin aynı zamanda bölge için güvenlik tehditlerinden biri haline geldiği bir şekle dönüşmüştür. Uluslararası hukukun ve bölgesel statükonun ihlali özellikle bölgesel güvenlik yapısında bir takım değişikliklere sebebiyet vermiştir. Bunlar arasında bölgede artan NATO varlığı ve Karadeniz ülkelerine yöneltilen, bölgeden gelen iç tehdide karşı daha güçlü ve etkili bir savunma siyaseti isteği gösterilebilir. AB'nin Rusya Federasyonu'na karşı özellikle enerji alanında yaptığı yaptırımların bölgeye etkisi de önem arz etmektedir. Kırım meselesi, Güney doğu Ukrayna'daki savaş, Türkiye'deki terör saldırıları gibi birçok sıcak meselenin varlığı da Karadeniz bölgesine yeni meydan okumalar sunmakta ve böylece bölgeyi daha zayıf ve istikrarsız hale getirmektedir. Değişen jeopolitik ve stratejiler ışığında gelişen yeni bölgesel yapı karşılıklı bağımlığı ortaya çıkarmakta ve bu da görüşler ve çıkarlar noktasında yeni çelişkiler de doğurmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kırım'ın ilhakı, Kafkasya statükosu, Karadeniz bölgesel güvenliği

MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

Introduction

Black Sea Region is a region of big opportunities and also a region of big challenges. The annexation of Crimea in March of 2014, and the outbreak of armed conflict in the east of Ukraine led to dramatic shifts in the Black Sea region's security framework and internal status-quo, among which the most significant ones are: break of military balance, stagnation of economic development, security instability, tendencies to the militarization of the Black Sea region or so-called "Cold War resistance 2" [10, P.35].

Talking about break of military balance the following points should be mentioned:

- Ukraine de facto lost the longest coastline among Black Sea countries. Also there are Ukraine's direct material losses: the loss of key ports, the energy-rich Black Sea continental shelf, as well as military bases in Crimea. The naval units, coastal defenses, and aviation of the Ukrainian Navy were deployed in Crimea. After the annexation, Ukraine lost its main naval bases, infrastructure, and equipment, which greatly limited the operational capabilities of the Ukrainian fleet as Ukraine lost much of its fleet and property (11 naval units, 6 service vessels, 2,363 automobiles, armored vehicles and special machinery, and 24 aircraft). Under Russia's occupation of Crimea, Ukraine is unable to effectively exploit its transport and tourism potential, which represent the most promising areas for Black Sea regionalism [12, P.17].

- Russia's military presence in the Black Sea enhanced. Now, with Crimea under its control, and the distance for the air force shortened by half, Russia has gained an ideal location for power projection in the Black Sea region and Central Europe, which are now in its strategic reach. Control of Crimea allows Russia to turn the Kerch Strait between Ukraine and Russia into its own territorial waters and places the Sea of Azov under its de facto control. It also expands Russia's maritime borders and its maritime gas and oil fields. By recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and signing the agreements on alliance and strategic partnership with them at the end of 2014, as well as by annexing Crimea in March 2014, Russia anchored its position in the Black Sea, minimizing one of the greatest dangers for itself — "the potential deployment of the NATO troops in Ukraine, particularly in Crimea, which would further reduce Russian strategic depth" that lead to possible escalation in military confrontation between Russia and NATO [2; 10, P.36; 11; 12, P.17].

- It's already visible that one of results of the Ukrainian crisis is an increased NATO and US presence in the region. From the Baltic region to the Black Sea, NATO is struggling to grapple with Russia's military revanchism and to shore up a strong military and deterrence posture that protects its exposed allies on the Eastern flank. The confrontation between Russia and NATO has escalated: their interaction has been frozen. In April of 2014, NATO decided to suspend all cooperation projects with Russia. Naval units of NATO member states regularly hold joint military exercises "to assure NATO Allies of the Alliance's commitment to collective defense". Russia has loaded the Crimean peninsula with anti-air defense infrastructure, begun upgrading its aging Black Sea fleet, and even talked of stationing nuclear weapons on the peninsula, endangering NATO's southeastern flank. The Black Sea region has become strategically important to the alliance. At the same time, though NATO Defense Ministers have already decided earlier this year in favour of "continuous rotational" presence in the Black Sea basin instead of establishing new bases in the Eastern Europe, the Alliance's enhanced role in the region is regarded as a key to effective Russia's deterrence and long-term regional stability [4, P.30; 5; 7; 12, P.17].

- Mentioned security crisis push the other countries of the region to develop/improve their defense systems/policies and strengthen military cooperation with neighbor countries. Turkey has to face now a larger and more assertive Russian presence, which will likely force it to deploy more resources to its northern flank and maintain a defensive posture in the Black Sea. Turkey is the dominant actor in the region. It exercises full control over access to the Black Sea through

the Bosporus and has the strongest navy on the Black Sea that is why the new balance of power also underlines Turkey's role as the sole local actor capable of potentially challenging Russian expansion in the region. The newly expanded Russian military presence will likely put Turkey in a more defensive position in the Black Sea. It could be realized through a military cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine. Over the years both countries have been jointly participating in international peacekeeping operations bilateral and multilateral military and naval exercises, like the Black Sea Harmony, Sea Breeze, Sea Shield, BLACKSEAFOR and PASSEX. Particularly, since last year Ukraine and Turkey have remarkably intensified their naval partnership. In March 2016, during the Ukrainian President P.Poroshenko's official visit to Turkey, Ukrainian "Hetman Sagaidachniy" frigate and "Balta" vessel launched joint naval exercise with a couple of Turkish ships in the Sea of Marmara after they had visited naval base in Gölcük to accept onboard Turkish humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian army. On a larger scale, the General Staffs of the Ukrainian and Turkish Armed Forces have recently signed a "road map" for military cooperation that envisages direction and scope of military cooperation between two countries until 2020 [4, P.29; 5; 7].

Also despite the nowadays warming in bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey after the incident with a downing of a Russian jet on the Turkish-Syrian border in November of 2015 together with previous sanctions against Turkey and confrontation of interests on Syria issue there is a high possibility of Turkey's support for NATO's policy towards the Black Sea region [1, P.19; 6].

Another significant change is influence on the region of the EU's sanction policy towards Russian Federation especially in energetic sphere and general economic development stagnation.

As for economic development stagnation after the annexation of Crimea, the activities of the region's cornerstone integration project - the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) - was virtually frozen. The exclusive economic zone of Ukraine has de facto drastically decreased, and Ukraine has lost access to oil and gas fields on the continental shelf [12, P.15].

Talking about interdependence in energetic sphere the lack of diversification in energy resources and energy suppliers had for a long time been Russia's most valuable leverage in dealing with the EU, Turkey and Ukraine. In case of Ukraine, Ukraine has solved this problem by steep decrease of gas consumption and gradual substitution of Russian gas by the European supplies. Since January 1, 2016, Ukraine has not received a single cubic meter of gas from Russia. Despite the influence on the region of the EU's sanction policy towards Russian Federation, Turkey and the EU are still vulnerable in this issue seeking for the way to diversify energy resources and become less dependent to the gas supplies from Russia. Construction of the several new LNG terminals in France, Poland and Lithuania to accommodate the Unites States shale gas export opportunities, which are going to be operational very soon, the exploitation of the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and possible supplies of the gas from Israel through Turkey to the EU could solve the mentioned dilemma and break Russia's monopoly [1, P.20; 3; 4, P. 27; 8, P.59].

The other influential challenge is a significant shift to the security instability of the Black Sea region. Together with the existing protracted conflicts (Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria) new hot points of the instability occurred: mentioned Crimea issue, war in the South-East of Ukraine, numerous terrorist acts in Turkey, urgent migration crisis also influenced the region and made it even more instable as I was before [9; 12, P.15].

To sum up it should be said that nowadays the Black Sea region suffers from instability, international law violation, possible military confrontation and economic development stagnation. The chain of events which unfolded due to the Ukrainian crisis has led to a significant change in the strategic situation in the Black Sea region. The expansion of a Russian military base in Crimea entangles escalation in military confrontation between Russia and

NATO, and the Black Sea is becoming one of the central bridgeheads. Although Russian Federation in fact widened its sphere of influence in the region and so became one of the security threats of the region, particularly it reached the opposite result and made a significant step to the isolation due to the fact that Crimea issue and case of the war in the South-East of Ukraine increased NATO presence in the region, stimulated military cooperation among neighbor countries against aggressor's threat, caused implementation of the sanction policy towards Russian Federation by EU, froze economic cooperation in the region and pushed the EU and Turkey to seek for solution for energy supplies diversification even more urgently. With actual militarization of the Black Sea region and possible break of Russia's gas monopoly as the main pressure policy instrument Russian Federation has a high possibility to be isolated and be in the situation of so-called "Cold War resistance 2".

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