Reconsidering Threats and Opportunities in a Changing Black Sea Security Environment: A View from Ukraine

Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, Odessa National Mechnikov University

Introduction

The Russo-Georgian war of 2008, the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine and, most recently, Moscow's intervention in Syria have unveiled the fragility of the existing European security architecture and the volatility of the Black Sea security environment. International community turned out to be ill-prepared to counter the nonconventional methods of the so-called "hybrid" wars of the 21st century and to suggest efficient responses to the new acts of aggression happening in the center of Europe and often directly threatening the member-countries of NATO and EU.

Kremlin's assertive policy and intervention in Ukraine and Syria not only reinvigorated concerns about possible Russian military expansion, but also transformed traditional debates about the stability of the post-Cold War Europe. What is more important, by brutal violations of all fundamental norms and principles of international law and blatant disregard of such basic multilateral treaties, as the Budapest Memorandum, it actually questioned the viability of the existing European security system and current international order that has clearly left Russia in a place far below its expectations.

Many experts tend to regard Moscow's aggressive moves in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria and, most recently, Russian provocations towards the Baltic states not only as an evidence of Kremlin's growing aggressiveness in the region but, first and foremost, as a desire to challenge the West. Russian intervention and bombing of civil areas in Syria, which have led to new waves of migrants to Europe, has become a major test for the EU solidarity while Russian fighter jets' incursions into Turkish airspace actually questioned NATO's resolve to defend its borders and U.S.-led coalition's unity in Syria.

Back in 2008, Madeleine Albright wrote in her article "Vladimir Putin" for the "Time" magazine that during the next years he would "remain an irritant to NATO, a source of division within Europe and yet another reason for the West to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels." In April 2014 she followed up saying, "I was wrong. It's worse. Through his illegal actions in Ukraine, Putin has reminded us that leaders of great countries are most dangerous when they make up their own facts…" Prophetically, these words have not only described the Russian tactics of acting in Ukraine but also predicted the main trend of the international politics for the next years. Obviously, in the "hybrid" wars of the 21st century the major battlefield has shifted from the trenches on the frontline to fighting for people's minds, making propaganda one of the main instruments of modern foreign-policy making and raising new concerns about the vulnerability of the informational and cyber dimensions of the national security.

As Marcel Lettre, U.S. Defense Undersecretary for Intelligence, has admitted during the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on the role of intel services, "in the last few years … we have seen adversaries with true intent to use propaganda and the ability to reach out, as terrorists are doing, and try to incite and match that up with the tremendous power that social media tools allow to make that easy and simple and effective and broadly applicable". Thus, he agrees, that given this is a strategy aimed not just at the United States, particularly with respect to interference in elections, but also at the Western Europe and Eastern Europe as a whole, there should be a joint effort underway to work on together to respond to it[1].

[1] "Clapper Calls for Information Agency on Steroids", Jan. 5, 2017 // https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/clapper-calls-for-information-agency-on-steroids/2017/01/05/182c125a-d370-11e6-9651-54a0154cf5b3_video.html

In fact, even the Global Engagement Center that was originally established as a mechanism to counter the Islamic State militant group, in 2016 was authorized by the U.S. Congress to act as a part of a pushback against the Kremlin's propaganda. Most recently, James R. Clapper Jr., the Director of National Intelligence, called for creation of a new U.S. Information Agency that would be more effective in countering Russia's deployment of disinformation[2].

That is why, without going into details of what has happened in each particular case or country, it's more important to provide a realistic consideration and broader framework for understanding the general pattern and implications of the recent developments in the Black Sea region.

Managing New Regional Security Threats

Starting with the first explicit example of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Russian regional strategy has been mainly focused on creating a series of small-scaled military campaigns, limited in space and time, however bringing long-term repercussions both regionally and globally. Such "special operations" that usually demand quick deployment of heavy weapons, special forces and, eventually, regular troops on the borders, have a potential of being converted into protracted low-intensity conflicts with continuous financing of local proxies.

The strategy of waging short, "victorious" military campaigns serve multiple tasks.

Internally, this adventurous policy provides a non-stop work of the huge propaganda machine, quick mobilization of the population, consolidation of the regime's power with President Putin's ratings hitting record highs, and creates necessary impetus for further developing and testing of modern weapons produced by the national defence industry – in fact, one of the few sectors of the Russian economy that has shown sustainable growth over the years.

Regionally, these "grey" zones artificially created on the territories of sovereign states, with inefficient or no official authorities create a constant factor of instability in the country and the whole region. At the same time, the presence of Russian troops (often labeled as "observers" or "peace-keepers") or Moscow-backed rebels deployed there, gives Kremlin a perfect leverage of influence on the internal processes, not to say about burgeoning criminal activities, such as illegal weapon, drug, human trafficking etc.

Globally, Russia's growing military presence and political influence in the different parts of the world gives it both a chance to challenge the West in multiple ways and an additional argument to negotiate with global leaders.

Besides, with a number of ongoing conflicts throughout the region Moscow has got a possibility of changing the dynamics in each of them according to the current international conjuncture and political rationality. In line with this strategy, Kremlin tries to minimize international pressure and demonstrate a progress necessary for lifting sanctions by playing all its cards at once, bargaining the perspectives of resolution in one conflict at the expense of the others.

Providing military and technical support for radical groups and separatist movements in other countries (like in cases of Ukraine, Syria or Turkey), providing financial support for extreme leftwing and rightwing movements across Europe, spending considerable budget to finance propaganda campaigns in the world media and fake news on the notorious RT and

[2] Nicholas J. Cull. What the U.S. Can Learn from Its Cold War Fight Against Russian Propaganda? // The Washington Post, Jan. 13, 2017 // https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/13/will-steroids-help-u-s-counter-propaganda-bigger-isnt-always-better/?utm_term=.e7b375ad0e2c

Sputnik channels, intimidating Baltic states via cyber warfare, kidnappings, unannounced military drills, waging the so-called drones war in the air and initiating provocative moves on the borderlines – all these examples prove the opposite. These recent aggressive moves show the sustainability and continuity of growing assertiveness in Russian foreign policy, which is far not limited to its "near abroad". As one Turkish political scientist put it, "Russia today is not, as some would like to believe, a revisionist state with limited, well-specified grievances. It is a revolutionary state that seeks to dismantle the foundations of a post-Cold war liberal order"[3].

The consequences of the recent shifts in the regional and global security systems will need much longer to be fully displayed, however it is possible to outline some of the general trends that are likely to shape the regional environment in the mid-term future.

Firstly, the Russian occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea have completely *changed existing balance of power in the Black Sea basin*. Moscow's quest for the warm-water seas and its desire to maintain control over the Straits has been determining its regional agenda since the times of the Russo-Ottoman wars. At the moment, the dream seems closer than ever. Russian military capacities and personnel are based in Crimea, something about 350 km flight distance from Turkey's Black Sea port of Sinop, and on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. The distance between Syria's Latakia and Turkey's southeast Hatay province equals 80 km at most. Just to remind, Russian missiles have a range of over 1500 km. Given the plans of the Turkish government to build a nuclear power plant in Sinop and the ongoing project of the Akkuyu NPP in the southern province of Mersin, which is being financed by the 100% Russian-owned company under a build-own-operate model, there is obviously a new strategic environment that makes Turkey more vulnerable than ever.

Secondly, the illegal occupation of Crimea has paved the way to *the increasing militarization* of the peninsula and the Black Sea basin as a whole. According to various sources, Russia has deployed in Crimea from 30 to 45 thousand soldiers, hundreds of battle tanks, armored vehicles, combat aircrafts and helicopters, dozens of coastal missile systems. A particular danger is presented by deployment of potential carriers of nuclear warheads, such as warships and combat aircraft in Crimea as well as Russia's intentions to convert the infrastructure of some Soviet-era storage facilities on the peninsula to nuclear weapons storages[4].

Against the background of intense activities of the Russian occupation authorities to transform Crimea into a huge military base Moscow is now building a new heavy intercontinental ballistic missile ICBM called "Sarmat" to be equipped with between 10 and 15 warheads per missile, SS-N-32 Bulava ballistic missiles to be launched on the new Borei-class submarines, a new rail-based ICBM capable of carrying multiple warheads, and is developing another long-range missile called the SS-X-31 that can carry up to 12 warheads.[5]

Though the probability of a nuclear attack is still very low, the *nuclear militarization* of Crimea under the occupational regime whose national media outlets discuss the possibility of "turning U.S. into radioactive ash", obviously, poses a threat to the global security, not only to the regional stability.

---

[3] Balkan Devlen. Russia's Challenge to International Order // "Towards Reassurance and Solidarity in the Euro-Atlantic Community". Riga Conference Papers 2015. – Latvian Institute of International Affairs, p.105.

[4] Ukraine Mission to UN: Russia Deploys 23,000 Troops in Crimea, Refurbishes Storages of Nuclear Weapons, February 16, 2016 // http://www.unian.info/politics/1266094-ukraine-mission-to-un-23000-russian-troops-deployed-in-crimea-refurbishes-storages-of-nuclear-weapons.html

[5] Larry Bell. Putin Shuts Down Nuclear Reduction, April 18, 2016 // http://www.newsmax.com/LarryBell/Putin/2016/04/18/id/724439/

Meanwhile, according to the statements of the Russian Ministry of Defense, Russia is making moves to revive and increase the size and scope of its *Black Sea submarine fleet*. Russian Navy Admiral Viktor Chirkov noted during one of the meetings at the Main Naval Command back in summer 2015 that the Russian submarine fleet will be "revived" and ready for action by 2016. The submarines are to be based at the Novorossiysk port on the Russian mainland across from the Crimean peninsula. According to Chirkov, the submarine fleet was to be strengthened by the inclusion of six new diesel-electric submarines. Three of them have already been put into service in 2014 and 2015, three others will additionally be added by the end of 2016.[6]

According to naval experts, the peculiarity of this type of submarines (so-called "Type 636") is that they are arguably the quietest diesel submarines in the world and are nearly impossible to detect acoustically. They are said to be capable of detecting an enemy submarine at a range three to four times greater than it can be detected itself[7]. Type 636 is designed for anti-submarine and anti-surface-ship warfare as well as for general reconnaissance and patrol missions. At the same time, the mixture of hi-tech equipment, capability to carry surface-to-surface missiles and torpedoes, modern weapon systems, effective radio and navigational systems onboard allow the submarines to hypothetically strike both land, sea and underwater targets[8].

With this being said, it is at least naïve to expect any changes in Russian foreign policy under the current regime. As the recent *Russian involvement in Syria* has shown, Kremlin is not going to stop in its dangerous military adventurism. Hence, it would be no surprise to predict that after Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey and Syria the others will follow to make this list even longer.

So far, it's too early to talk even about complete withdrawal of Russian troops and aircraft from Syria. What is more important, Russia's advanced military build-up and well-developed infrastructure is still there. While in 2015 it took Moscow hardly a week to deploy its forces in Syria with no transport and logistic support on the ground, now with the military bases and infrastructure ready to accept new groups of military and ammunition, a new operation of force deployment would last for hours, not days.

Despite the official announcement of the drawdown from Syria, Kremlin officials have acknowledged that Russia is going to maintain "a certain level of military presence" in both air and naval bases in Latakia and Tartus.[9]

While the developments in Syria contribute to the general destabilization of the Black Sea region only indirectly, for Turkey it is a matter of national security. Let alone the humanitarian crisis, foreign fighters trafficking and terrorism threat existing on its southern-eastern borders, Russia has also succeeded in using various *Kurdish groups* in Syria to strengthen its stance towards Ankara.

Experts note that after the downing of the Russian jet by the Turkish air forces in November 2015, Moscow deployed its cutting-edge S-400 air defense system to the Syrian base

[6] Jeremy Bender. Russia's Black Sea Submarine Fleet Is Getting a Serious Upgrade. July 14, 2015 // http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-is-reviving-its-black-sea-submarine-fleet-2015-7

[7] SSK Kilo Class (Type 636), Russia // http://www.naval-technology.com/projects/kilo/

[8] Jeremy Bender. The Kremlin Just Launched What It Claims Is the "Quietest Submarine in the World", April 30, 2015 // http://www.businessinsider.com/kremlin-launched-quietest-submarine-in-the-world-2015-4

[9] Michael Birnbaum. Weeks After "Pullout" from Syria, Russian Military Is as Busy as Ever // The Washington Post, April 12, 2016 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/weeks-after-pullout-from-syria-russian-military-is-as-busy-as-ever/2016/04/11/d150a004-fd77-11e5-a569-2c9e819c14e4_story.html

in Khmeimim, which actually created a de-facto no-fly zone for the Kurdish groups against Turkish air operations[10]. With the engagement in Syria Moscow has become an important player in Kurdish politics in the region. In his interview for Al-Monitor dated October 2015, the head of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and basically one of the top names among the Syrian Kurds Salih Muslim admitted that they had developed working relations with Russia for the past three years "going back and forth to Moscow" and coordinating their actions in Syria.[11]

After the deterioration of relations with Ankara Moscow has dramatically increased its support for the PYD, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Turkey, and has become their strongest advocate within the framework of the Geneva peace process labeling them "a major tool to render sustainability to the intra-Syrian negotiating process"[12]. Even more dramatically, Selahattin Demirtaş, the leader of the Turkey's Kurdish HDP, visited Moscow shortly after the downing of the jet and declared his intentions to open a party office in the Russian capital.[13]

For Turkey, Russia's growing support to various Kurdish groups in consolidating their power and creating an autonomous zone in Syria alongside the Turkish border comes at a time when Turkish security forces are carrying out the biggest in more than a decade antiterrorist operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish south-eastern provinces. Retired Turkish Ambassador Murat Bilhan, who has also served in Moscow, reminds that Russia enjoys traditionally good working relations not only with PYD and YPG, but also with the PKK: "The PKK had an office in Russia and from time to time received its assistance and support in the 1990s. Besides, Moscow has never considered PKK as a terrorist organization"[14]. Political experts also point at a possibility of such cooperation. According to some Turkish military analysts, the PKK has requested heavy weaponry from Russia to broaden the insurgency in Turkey[15].

Whatever the Russian response might be to these requests of direct assistance for PKK, Kremlin is already engaged in close military cooperation with PYD, which is broadly characterized by Turkish officials as a "Syrian affiliate" of the PKK. In fact, the worst-case scenario for Ankara might come into play once the tactical alliance between Moscow and the Kurds (or other oppositional groups in Turkey) develops into a strategic cooperation aimed at further destabilization of the situation inside the country. Russian expert circles were quick in using this pretext to bring the Kurdish and Armenian cards back on the table in the aftermath of the jet-crisis, suggesting these arguments should become "effective tools in Putin's countering the provocative policies of Erdoğan"[16]. Even after the normalization of bilateral

[10] Gökhan Bacık. Turkey and Russia's Proxy War and the Kurds. – GMF, January 16, 2016 // http://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkey-and-russias-proxy-war-and-kurds

[11] Amberin Zaman. PYD Leader: Russia Will Stop Turkey from Intervening in Syria. Al-Monitor, October 1, 2015 // http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/turkey-syria-russia-pyd-leader-muslim-moscow-prevent-ankara.html#

[12] Moscow Says Kurds' Participation in Syria Talks to Help Avoid Disruption of Peace Process. TASS, February 8, 2016 // http://tass.ru/en/politics/855345

[13] Lavrov Says Russia Is Ready to Cooperate with Kurds Against ISIL. Hürriyet Daily News, December 23, 2016 // http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/lavrov-says-russia-is-ready-to-cooperate-with-kurds-against-isil-.aspx?PageID=238&NID=92916&NewsCatID=352

[14] Dorian Jones. Turkey: Is Russia Ready to Play the Kurdish Card? Eurasianet, December 21, 2015 // http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76621

[15] Şenol Kantürk. Demirtaş'ın ihanet görüşmesi. Bugün, January 3, 2016 // http://www.bugun.com.tr/ozel-haber/demirtasin-ihanet-gorusmesi-1992940.html

[16] Artem Erkanyan. Moskva Zakluchila s Turetskimi Kurdami Takticheskiy Soyuz. Novoye Vremya, December 24, 2015 // http://www.nv.am/politika/47827-2015-12-24-07-28-50

relations, Kurdish and Armenian factors remain important leverages in Russian policies towards Turkey.

Taking into account Moscow's active role in a number of *"frozen" conflicts throughout the Black Sea region* since the early 1990's, it might be also interesting to see how the dynamics in these "sensitive zones" will develop in today's changing strategic environment. After the renewed hostilities in Nagorno Karabakh, the situation in Transnistria, Abkhazia or Southern Ossetia can be easily heated up as well.

Looking at the broader strategic landscape of the region, *Poland and the Baltic states* have voiced on numerous occasions their concerns about Russian provocations on the NATO's Eastern borders. Remembering well the Soviet Union legacy and still being to some extent an object of Russia's "near abroad" policy, with a considerable percentage of Russian-speaking population and active leftish oppositional forces getting their support directly from Moscow, these countries are well aware of the potential threats stemming from the Russian increased military presence in the region.[17]

With the Kaliningrad oblast of Russian Federation converted into "Putin's European arms depot" and Kremlin's plans to deploy permanently the Iskander-M missile systems in close vicinity to Lithuanian borders[18], "the transit [of heavy weapons] to Kaliningrad would be a useful excuse in case Moscow decides to launch a new invasion", Lithuania's former Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė suggests[19].

Russian sporadic military drills in the Baltic Sea, airspace violations and provocative moves on the borders have become an integral part of Moscow's risky and dangerous strategy in the region. According to NATO statistics published in November 2015 after the incident on the Turkish-Syrian border, only during 2014 there had been ten incidents with Sweden, six with Estonia, three with Finland, and one each with Denmark and Poland when the sovereign airspace had been violated by Russian aircraft. NATO fighters policing Baltic airspace were scrambled 68 times along Lithuania's borders whereas there were over 180 incidents of close fly-bys across the borders of Latvia.[20]

Low-level and close-range passes of Russian jets over the U.S. and NATO ships in the Baltic Sea tracked in 2014-2016 should be regarded as a part of this dangerous trend of escalation by Russia.[21] The incident with the U.S. destroyer Donald Cook in April 2016 was, besides all, a very symbolic move since the same vessel had been deployed in the Black Sea in April 2014, shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea. The official statement then claimed the vessel's mission was "to reassure NATO allies and Black Sea partners of America's commitment to strengthen and improve interoperability while working towards mutual goals

[17] Rusya'nın Baltık ülkeleri üzerindeki baskısı. Anadolu Ajansı, January 29, 2016 // http://aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/rusya-nin-baltik-ulkeleri-uzerindeki-baskisi/512172

[18] Jakub Palowski. Iskander Missiles to Be Stationed Permanently in the Kaliningrad Area by 2018. May 18, 2015 // http://www.defence24.com/226796,iskander-missiles-to-be-stationed-permanently-in-the-kaliningrad-area-by-2018

[19] Weapons Flood Into Putin's European Arms Depot. Newsweek, April 3, 2015 // http://europe.newsweek.com/kaliningrad-putin-builds-arms-depot-inside-europe-317651?rm=eu

[20] Andrew Jay Rosenbaum. Russia Makes Regular Tactic of Airspace Violations. Anadolu Ajansı, November 25, 2015 // http://aa.com.tr/en/politics/russia-makes-regular-tactic-of-airspace-violations/481090

[21] Keir Giles. Russian High Seas Brinkmanship Echoes Cold War. Chatham House, April 15, 2016 // https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russian-high-seas-brinkmanship-echoes-cold-war#

in the region".[22] Two days after it had entered the area, an unarmed Russian Su-24 fighter jet made twelve close-range passes during USS Donald Cook's patrol of the western Black Sea[23].

Other domains too have seen provocative actions of Russia. Recent reports claim that American soldiers visiting NATO's eastern members, in particular the Baltic states, have been subjected to intimidatory approaches by Russian intelligence officers as well as to cross-border electronic attacks, including jamming from Russian territory[24].

High insecurity sentiments, which are now dominant in the new "frontline" countries, become evident in the rhetoric of the state leaders that goes far beyond EU's traditional "security concerns". *Poland*'s Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, said at the Globsec conference in Bratislava on April 15, 2016, that he wanted "presence, presence, presence and once again presence" of NATO troops to act as a "symbol of readiness to defend the eastern flank".[25]

In *Sweden*, the previously NATO-skeptic Social Democratic Party stated it may be reversing its stance on Swedish membership in the alliance if it can do so together with neighboring *Finland*. Though the two Nordic countries will not necessarily be joining the alliance right away, simply discussing the possible NATO membership is already a clear message to Russia that there is solidarity between the European countries when it comes to military resilience against potential Russian aggression.[26]

The reaction of Russian authorities was in line with its traditional anti-Western rhetoric: Russian Foreign Ministry declared that it would view a Swedish attempt to join NATO as a direct threat and such a decision would force Moscow "to take the relevant technical and military measures"[27] whatever that means. The same was Russian reaction to Montenegro's membership bid – Moscow characterized it as an "openly confrontational step, fraught with further destabilizing consequences for the Euro-Atlantic security system". In the same statement, the Russian FM also blamed the Alliance for "its commitment to reckless expansion of its geopolitical space" and "promoting ideas about its own security at the expense of the security of others"[28].

However, as the reality has shown, it is Russia's ceaseless desire to expand its geopolitical space at the expense of a sovereign right of every nation to choose its own path, including in the security sphere, that has created a necessary pretext first for its war against Georgia in 2008, and then illegal annexation of Crimea and military aggression in Ukraine in the aftermath of the 'Euromaidan' in late 2013, intervention in Syria to support the illegitimate regime of Bashar Al-Assad and provocative moves against NATO-member Turkey in 2015.

Exploring Newly Emerging Opportunities

[22] USS Donald Cook Heads for Reassurance Mission in Black Sea. U.S. Ministry of Defence Press Service, April 9, 2014 // http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122023

[23] Russian Aircraft Flies Near U.S. Navy Ship in Black Sea. U.S. Ministry of Defence Press Service, April 14, 2014 // http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122052

[24] Keir Giles. Russian High Seas Brinkmanship Echoes Cold War. Chatham House, April 15, 2016 // https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russian-high-seas-brinkmanship-echoes-cold-war#

[25] Andrew Rettman. U.S. and Germany Say Poland 'No' on NATO Base. April 16, 2016 // https://euobserver.com/foreign/133084

[26] Sweden and Finland Consider NATO Membership. Stratfor, September 16, 2015 // https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/sweden-and-finland-consider-nato-membership

[27] Damien Sharkov. Russia's Lavrov Warns Sweden Against NATO Membership. Newsweek, April 29, 2016 // http://europe.newsweek.com/russias-lavrov-warns-sweden-nato-membership-453890?rm=eu

[28] Neil Buckley, Alex Barker. Russia Fumes over NATO Invitation to Montenegro. Financial Times, December 2, 2015 // http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/91f99dbc-990d-11e5-95c7-d47aa298f769.html#axzz46OxpXUWQ

The difficulties of making the way through the regional turmoil and facing new challenges have brought about a completely new background with the embedded unique opportunities for both Ukraine and Turkey.

The 2015 crisis in bilateral relations between Moscow and Ankara has unfolded existing imbalance in these relations and the high level of dependency on Russia in almost all strategic spheres. The lack of diversification in energy resources and energy suppliers had for long time been Russia's most valuable leverage in dealing with both official Kyiv and Ankara. The heavy energy dependency on Russian gas had enabled Moscow to apply politically motivated approach to forming its price policies and significantly limited countries' abilities to benefit from the positive trends on global oil and gas markets. Energy blackmailing has traditionally remained one of the Kremlin's major tools in shaping its foreign policy towards Ukraine since the first "gas war" Russia waged against Ukraine in harsh winter of 2005/2006. The same pattern was later used in relation to Turkey when Russian monopolist Gazprom rejected a request from the Turkish state-owned company Botaş to supply additional volumes of gas in 2008/2009 and 2011/2012 winter seasons. Paying high price for these lessons, both countries realized too well that diversification of energy sources and transportation routes is a key factor to their energy and, on a broader scale, national security.

Ukraine has solved this problem by *steep decrease of gas consumption and gradual substitution of Russian gas by the European supplies*. In 2014, shortly after the Russian aggression against Ukraine had started, official Kyiv sought reverse supplies of gas from Slovakia to deprive Moscow of one of its main instruments of political pressure and intimidation. Gazprom had tried to ban resale, but its demands were in violation of European rules. In April 2015, the European Commission cited such stipulations as an example of Gazprom's abuse of its dominance in Eastern and Central European gas markets. Trying to avoid serious fines and arrive at a settlement with the Commission, Gazprom was not able to prevent its European customers from supplying gas to Ukraine.[29]

On the other hand, in order to help Turkey decrease its dependency on the uninterrupted gas flow from a single supplier, Ukraine has recently come up with an offer to provide its gas storage facilities for Turkey's use. At the moment, the capacities of the gas storages in the Western parts of Ukraine are estimated as approximately 33-34 bcm. At least half of them can be provided for Turkey's needs[30]. Though the use of the Ukrainian facilities for storing Russian gas seems problematic from the legal point of view and would definitely arouse Moscow's protests, once the TANAP pipeline is put into exploitation Ankara could easily arrange storing Azerbaijani (and, potentially, Turkmenistan) gas in the western Ukraine. With the newly unfolded energy potential of the Caspian basin and the diversified pipeline infrastructure, Turkey will get another chance to reinvent its role as a regional energy hub, not being reduced to a linking chain between the Russian market and European consumers.

With the realization of the *nuclear power plants projects* and Turkey's joining a global community of "nuclear states", the national energy strategy will get yet another reading. However, it is crucially important not to reiterate the old mistakes in the new context. Given the build-own-operate model envisioned for the Russian state-owned company Rosatom at the Akkuyu NPP, it might be beneficial for Turkey to take care about creating sufficient educational opportunities to prepare its own high-qualified specialists in the field. Sending Turkish students abroad can be a good solution at the first stage, but it's important to be sure

[29] Leonid Bershidsky. How Ukraine Weaned Itself of Russian Gas. Bloomberg View, January 12, 2016 // http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2016-01-12/how-ukraine-weaned-itself-off-russian-gas

[30] Murat Temizer. Ukraine Offers Gas Storage Facilities for Turkey's Use // Anadolu Ajansı, May, 16, 2016. http://aaenergyterminal.com/news.php?newsid=8349240

that they have got equal access to different national schools of nuclear science now and that the respective nuclear research institutions will be formed on the basis of Turkish universities in the nearest future. So far, the only University that has been defined for these purposes under the provisions of the Akkuyu contract is the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (MEPhI) with 300 undergraduate Turkish students enrolled.

Ukraine has already come up with a suggestion to accept Turkish students for education in Ukrainian universities and to share its experience in such spheres, as creating regulatory environment, elaborating safety and security measures, introducing early warning and crisis management mechanisms, etc.[31] After a long interval in bilateral contacts the Head of the Turkish Council for Higher Education has recently visited Kyiv to explore opportunities for collaboration in such strategically important areas, as nuclear energy, aviation and space technologies. So far, the sides have agreed to sign a Memorandum of understanding that would create a framework for further cooperation in education and scientific research, including students' exchange programs, issuing double diplomas by partner Ukrainian and Turkish universities, providing grants and scholarships for students on bilateral basis, etc.[32]

This agreement comes at a time when the two countries have officially announced their decision to engage in joint cooperation on aviation and space technologies. According to the provisions of the agreement signed during the recent visit of the Turkish then-Minister of National Defense Ismet Yilmaz to Ukraine in May earlier this year, Turkey will work to produce a TAN-158 model passenger plane and a cargo plane based on respective models of Ukrainian aircraft manufacturing company Antonov[33], best known for its world's biggest cargo plane "Mriya".

The negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and Turkey have been reinvigorated after Ukraine's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Zone with the EU entered into full force on January 1, 2016. The 10th meeting of the Turkey-Ukraine Intergovernmental Trade and Economic Cooperation that took place in Kyiv in May 2016 has given a new impetus to this process. During a press-conference following a ceremony of signing of the joint protocol, both sides have stressed their firm intentions to complete the negotiation process on the Free Trade Agreement within the next year[34].

On the other hand, Ukraine and Turkey continue to cooperate effectively within the framework of *multilateral mechanisms called to strengthen security measures and contribute to stability in the Black Sea region*.

Unfortunately, the already existing regional organizations with high level of representation of all or most of the regional countries turned out to be inefficient in countering security challenges of the 21st century that require quick reaction, operational mobility, considerable flexibility in decision-making process. Over-institutionalized, with clumsy bureaucratic mechanisms that do not meet the demands of the day, often paralyzed by the internal structural problems and unresolved conflicts between the member-states, they have proved hollow in dealing with the terrorism threats and military aggression.

---

[31] Sultan Çoğalan. Ukrayna'dan Türkiye'ye nükleer enerji için işbirliği teklifi. Anadolu Ajansı, February 9, 2016 // http://aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ukraynadan-turkiyeye-nukleer-enerji-icin-isbirligi-teklifi/518399

[32] YÖK'ten Ukrayna ile Nükleer ve Uçak / Uzay Teknolojileri Alanlarında İşbirliği. – May, 24 2016 http://www.yok.gov.tr/web/guest/yok-baskani-sarac-in-ukrayna-temaslari

[33] Turkey and Ukraine Sign Joint Plane Manufacturing Project // Daily Sabah, May 15, 2016. http://www.dailysabah.com/money/2016/05/16/turkey-and-ukraine-sign-joint-plane-manufacturing-project#

[34] Ali Cura. Milli Savunma Bakanı Yılmaz: Anlaşma İki Ülke Arasındaki İlişkilere Yeni Boyut Kazandıracak // Anadolu Ajansı, May 13, 2016. http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/milli-savunma-bakani-yilmaz-anlasma-iki-ulke-arasindaki-iliskilere-yeni-boyut-kazandiracak/571952

Instead, Russian assertive policy in the Black Sea basin has triggered new forms of cooperation between the regional countries, aimed at enhancing their military presence and deterrence capabilities against Russia's probable new aggressive moves. Initiated mainly by the countries that have already become victims of, or are aware of their vulnerability to, Kremlin's reckless military adventurism, such cooperation can vary from occasional naval drills and joint military exercises to calls for permanent deployment of rapid reaction forces.

Ukraine and Turkey have remarkably intensified their naval partnership over the last years. 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 Ukrainian army.[35]

Less than a month later, Turkey's "Salih Reis" frigate and "Bartin" corvette vessels were reported to practice with Ukrainian Navy tactical maneuvering, cargo transfer and signal communication at an exercise course in the Black Sea, following a visit by Turkish naval officials to Ukraine's port city of Odessa. Ukraine's Ministry of Defence commented the drill as "another step in the deepening of cooperation of the fleets of the two countries, which aims to strengthen stability and security in the region". [36]

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, Breeze, BLACKSEAFOR and PASSEX to name just a few. However, in the aftermath of the Russian aggression these endeavours were complemented by the efforts to build a strategic industrial alliance that would include cooperation across a variety of military and defence programs.[37]

In a visit to Turkey in January 2016, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin stressed in his interview for the Turkish newspaper "Daily Sabah" that Ukraine is open to military cooperation with Turkey in the Black Sea and "any kind of security and defense cooperation between Kyiv and Ankara is possible".[38]

Turkish side seems more than happy to welcome such rapprochement. Experts pay attention that Moscow's repeated violations of Turkish airspace, countries' divergent positions in Syria campaign, Turkish shoot-down of Russian jet, and the Kremlin's economic sanctions and threats of retaliation have not only spoiled its relations with Ankara, but also, ironically, contributed to deepening security cooperation of Turkey with Georgia and, especially, Ukraine.[39]

In this sense, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's recent statements on Georgia's future in NATO get a more profound reading. He has recently reiterated *Turkey's support for Tbilisi's NATO membership* aspirations and suggested that Georgia could join

---

[35] V Odessu posle uspeshnogo vipolneniya zadach u beregov Turtsii vernulsya otryad korabley VMS Ukraini. UNIAN, March 13, 2016 // http://www.unian.net/society/1288560-v-odessu-posle-uspeshnogo-vyipolneniya-zadach-u-beregov-turtsii-vernulsya-otryad-korabley-vms-ukrainyi-fotoreportaj.html

[36] Damien Sharkov. Ukraine and Turkey Launch Black Sea Naval Drill Amid Russia Tensions. Newsweek, April 7, 2016 // http://europe.newsweek.com/ukraine-and-turkey-launch-black-sea-naval-drill-amidst-russia-tensions-444882

[37] Birol Tekince. Ukraine and Turkey: Strategic Relations, Plenty of Cooperation Opportunities // MSI Turkey Defence Review, January 2016. – p. 82.

[38] Yusuf Selman İnanç. Ukraine Open to Military Cooperation with Turkey in Black Sea. Daily Sabah, January 31, 2016 // http://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/02/01/ukraine-open-to-military-cooperation-with-turkey-in-black-sea-ukrainian-fm-says

[39] John Herbst. Estranged From Russia, Turkey and Ukraine Join Forces. Newsweek, April 15, 2016 // http://europe.newsweek.com/estranged-russia-turkey-and-ukraine-join-forces-447473

NATO without going through the Membership Action Plan since technically it has already met all requirements.[40]

Turkey has been actively working to establish close military and defence ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan in a trilateral format since 2013. However, it took the countries two years and another act of aggression in the Black Sea basin to institutionalize this cooperation and create a Trilateral Coordination Group responsible for bringing the sporadic contacts between the General Staffs of the three countries on a regular basis. According to the Protocol signed in May 2015, the Group's key objectives are defined as developing military cooperation between the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey; holding joint exercises, courses and trainings; expanding cooperation in the fields of military education and medicine; exchange of experience and coordination of other issues of mutual interest; realization of joint infrastructural projects and strengthening of practical arrangements to provide stability and security in the region.[41]

A year later, in May 2016, the Defense Ministers of the three countries met again to negotiate the provisions of the future Memorandum of understanding that is planned to be signed soon. Citing the Defense Minister of Azerbaijan Zakir Hasanov, this will enable the trilateral activities "to pass to a new level" and create legal basis for the new projects, ranging from "trilateral joint exercises to improve combat readiness and mutual vigilance of the three countries" to military training in a trilateral format and exercises for the protection of oil and gas pipelines.[42]

On the other hand, *Romania has recently come up with a new initiative to increase NATO's presence in the Black Sea basin by creating a permanent alliance fleet* in order to counter Russia's increasing military involvement in the region[43]. The general problem with this initiative would be the restrictions of the 1936 Montreux Convention, prohibiting warships of countries not bordering the Black Sea from spending more than 21 days at a time there. To solve the issue, the regular flotilla might include ships from the Black Sea littoral countries, namely Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey whereas other NATO members' vessels might stay in the Black Sea basin on a rotating basis. "Bucharest has to convince its allies that such a development is not too expensive, then that the fleet could be useful in the context of other security threats, such as terrorism or cyber terrorism. And, finally, the move should not cause international turmoil, especially in Russia," experts say.[44] Another issue, though, will be to reassure Turkey that such developments will not require any concessions on the part of the Montreux Convention and will not threaten its generally "untouchable" status.

Ukraine, though not a NATO member, has also declared its desire to join the flotilla in case such a decision will be approved by the Alliance. During his recent visit to Romania President P.Poroshenko noted that under conditions of lasting aggression of Russia, Ukraine and Romania paid special attention to the security situation in the Black Sea region and suggested ensuring the security situation with new approaches that will "either replace or

[40] Turtsiya predlojila prinyat Gruziyu v NATO bez Plana Deystviy po Chlenstvu. Zerkalo Nedeli, April 20, 2016 // http://zn.ua/WORLD/turciya-predlozhila-prinyat-gruziyu-v-nato-bez-pdch-211120_.html

[41] Mushvig Mehdiyev. Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan Broaden Military Cooperation Spectrum. Azernews, May 5, 2015 // http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/81540.html

[42] Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia to Hold Joint Military Exercises // Trend News Agency, May 15, 2016 http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2533680.html

[43] Joshua Kucera. Romania Pushing for Permanent NATO Presence in Black Sea. Eurasia.net, January 17, 2016 // http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76866

[44] Marian Chiriac. Romania Calls for Permanent NATO Black Sea Force. Balkan Insight, February 2, 2016 // http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/romania-calls-for-permanent-nato-black-sea-force-02-01-2016-1#sthash.VAVFcrdw.dpuf

supplement the existing ones – BLACKSEAFOR and Document on Confidence and Security Building have become ineffective as a result of Russian aggression".[45]

Most recently, the General Staffs of the Ukrainian and Turkish Armed Forces have signed a military cooperation "road map" that envisages direction and scope of military cooperation between the two countries until 2020, a year which has been set as a deadline for the wide-scale reform process in Ukrainian Army. Among other things, it focuses on strategic planning, military education and training of troops, consultative and advisory assistance, cooperation between the respective branches of the Armed Forces, information sharing, etc.[46] In fact, the document is a detailed implementation plan of practical measures on military cooperation, aimed both at strengthening bilateral ties and getting Turkish support in preparing Ukrainian Army in accordance with NATO standards. Interestingly, the experience of military and technical collaboration between Ukraine and Turkey has become one of the most vivid examples of how the countries can turn security threats existing in their regional environment into major opportunities for speeding up the pace of bilateral cooperation as well as contributing to the restoration of stability in the whole region.

Concluding remarks

The new realities of the changing security environment in the broader Black Sea region have questioned major trends of the post-Cold war liberal international order bringing back "hard" security issues to centre stage after a decade of "commercial engagement" and "soft" power discussions. The return of security considerations to the top of the regional agenda required quick adaptation of the states' foreign policy instruments in accordance with the non-conventional threats of the modern "hybrid" warfare, thus, paving the way for the emergence of the new formats of regional cooperation.

Firstly, in a conflict-ridden and crisis-prone strategic environment of the Black Sea region low-profile, flexible and result-oriented 'minor' partnerships initiated by regional states in various spheres from counterterrorism to information sharing and intelligence exchange proved much more efficient than traditional multilateral regional organizations slow in their reacting. Active naval, military and defence cooperation between Ukraine, Turkey and the Central/Eastern European states can be regarded as the most recent examples of this tendency.

Secondly, though there is an agreed decision in favor of "continuous rotational" NATO presence in the Black Sea basin instead of establishing new bases in the Eastern Europe, the Alliance's enhanced role in the region remains a key to effective Russia's deterrence and long-term regional stability. With NATO's new rapid reaction forces claimed to be enough to ensure that Russia "should not even think about trying to destabilize Poland or one of the Baltic states"[47], its presence in the region could also be made notable through regular naval exercises, joint trainings, maritime patrol, humanitarian operations etc. Such activities could be carried out by NATO members like Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey together with the non-member littoral states that have a big experience of cooperation with NATO within the framework of the PfP programme and are most vulnerable to Russian aggression, i.e. Ukraine and Georgia.

Thirdly, excess caution can at some point prove more dangerous than excess security measures. While every possible effort should be done to avoid escalation of tensions or

[45] Ukraine and Romania Stand for Establishment of Flotilla under NATO Auspices to Enhance Security in Black Sea Region. April 21, 2016 // http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-ta-rumuniya-vistupayut-za-stvorennya-flotiliyi-pid-37013

[46] Ukraine and Turkey Ink Military Cooperation Road Map // May 17, 2016. http://24today.net/open/663932

[47] Andrew Rettman. U.S. and Germany Say Poland 'No' on NATO Base. April 16, 2016 // https://euobserver.com/foreign/133084

aggravation of conflict with Russia, it is crucial for the international community to demonstrate solidarity and firm resolve on all matters, from eventual air incursions to major issues of regional security. As one top U.S. official has put it, 'the only thing worse than bilateral escalation is unilateral escalation"[48]. For this reason, even though further alienation of Moscow and deepening confrontation with the West would be the worst-case scenario for both Ukraine and Turkey, maintaining international pressure and extending sanctions on Russia until it shows full compliance with the international law is of critical importance.

Forthly, reaching sustainable peace and stability in the Black Sea region is impossible without securing comprehensive cease-fire regime in eastern Ukraine and in Syria, respect to human rights and full implementation of provisions of the fundamental international agreements. Further efforts are needed by UN, OSCE, and other international organizations for de-occupation of Crimea and final settlement of the "frozen" conflicts in the region.

Last but not least, deepening strategic partnership between Ukraine and Turkey possesses necessary political, military and diplomatic potential to become a cornerstone of the new regional security structure. "Strategic partnership" between official Ankara and Kyiv was established back in 2011 with a mechanism of High-Level Strategic Council. Today, the range of projects on the bilateral agenda varies widely from creating joint enterprises in defence and space industries to common use of gas pipeline infrastructure, cooperation in nuclear energy sphere, conducting joint naval exercises, exchanging information in countering terrorism etc.

With much attention paid to the current strategic environment and immediate steps taken to mitigate the direct impacts of Russian aggressive moves, cooperation between Ukraine and Turkey has been traditionally focused on long-term projects in the domains where countries' policies and economies are mutually complementary and, thus, can hardly be called a "situational" or "tactical" alliance.

At the same time, while Ukraine and Turkey have been waging their own struggle against the existential threats emerging both inside the countries and on their borders, deepening strategic cooperation between Kyiv and Ankara as well as their joint participation in multilateral regional frameworks have been playing a major role in restoring security and stability in the broader Black Sea region.

MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

[48] Evelyn Farkas. Putin Is Testing Western Resolve // Politico, September 25, 2015 http://www.politico.eu/article/putin-news-russia-turkey-nato/