

THE BLACK SEA REGION AS A SECURITY CHALLENGE FOR UKRAINE

The author analyzes security challenges and threats for Ukraine in the Black Sea region. Additionally, such spheres as frozen conflict resolution, naval security, missile defense system deployment, and competition with the neighboring states are discussed. The main challenges for Ukraine in the Black Sea region, she argues, come from the unrealized potential the country has in the region, as well as from its lack of strategic vision.

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The Black Sea region has always played a specific role in the foreign policy of Ukraine. Despite the fact that cooperation in the Black Sea region was already included in the Doctrine of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine in 1993, Ukraine has never really used those opportunities, never felt itself as a really littoral state. Ukrainian Black Sea policy has been short of both strategic vision and consistent activity. It has been more sporadic, spontaneous, and very often reactionary, rather than proactive.

Security in the Wider Black Sea region is one of the core elements of European security, and Ukraine, as one of the major actors in this region, had a potential to unite efforts of different states and international organizations to enhance cooperation in this region.

In 2005, just after the Orange Revolution, one could talk about the regional ambitions of Ukraine with reference to its potential to become a regional leader and to, in collaboration with others, shape regional security in the Black Sea region. However, and despite the short revitalization of the activity of GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), as well as the attempt to create Commonwealth of the Democratic Choice, Ukraine did not use the opportunity effectively. As a result of unrealized possibilities, the Black Sea region became a new challenge for Ukraine.

There are some threats and challenges for Ukrainian national interests and security in the Black Sea region, such as:

1. Unsolved conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia) and separatist movements;
2. Increase of the terrorism threat level;
3. Illegal migration, both from the conflicting regions and Asia, as Ukraine becomes a sanitarium zone before the EU border;
4. Smuggling and trans-border organized crime;
5. Threat to the territorial integrity;
6. Ethnic tensions in the border regions with high concentration of ethnic minorities;
7. Environmental threats such as pollution, technogenic catastrophe, oil spill, etc.;
8. Threats to the safety and security of navigation.

Among the challenges, the following can be cited:

Inability to implement a Black Sea Ring Highway project: this BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) project, for many years, could not be implemented

because some parts of the road is planned to pass through areas of the self-proclaimed territories where security can not be guaranteed. However, it is not only conflicts that have prevented the realization of this project. Bad infrastructure, low coordination in the work of the custom services of the littoral states, as well as, visa regimes affect the situation.

Failure to secure the transportation of energy resources from the Caspian region and Russia: under the conditions of the present energy policy of the Russian Federation, it is crucial for both Ukraine and the EU to diversify energy sources – both for economic and security purposes.

Broken off transport connections, the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, drugs and human trafficking, and competition with states such as Romania and Turkey also stand out as challenges.

Frozen Conflicts

Nowadays, the national securities of states are not characterized only by military security issues. For a long time, conflicts in GUAM states – the closest partners of Ukraine – were “frozen,” so, they did not have a direct military threat to Ukraine. But their pendency resulted in a range of problems and threats to national and regional security.

After the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, there was fear among the Ukrainian society that this scenario could be repeated either in Transnistria or in the Crimea. Though the conflict in Georgia shook the stable (though problematic) relations in the post-Soviet space, it was still not a direct threat to the national security of Ukraine.

However, if the situation in Transnistria were to be provoked, it would directly effect Ukraine, considering the long common border. In addition, analysis of the Russian-Georgian crisis reveals potential problems and threats that Ukraine had not paid attention to before, such as double-citizenship in Crimea (prohibited by Ukrainian legislation), the possibility that Russia could use its Black Sea Fleet from the territory of Ukraine for war – making Ukraine automatically a party to the conflict, and the weakness of Ukrainian media that was demonstrated by the propensity of those in Eastern and Southern Ukraine to consume Russian information.

Ukraine has never had any conflicts on its territory, and, at the same time, is perceived by conflicting parties in Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia positively because it has always been interested in the resolution of the conflicts of these countries, especially in the case of Transnistria which affects Ukraine's

national security. Ukraine is also recognized as a positive counterpart because conflicting parties see it as a partner who can understand problems of the post-communist states and the roots of the conflicts, and, at the same time, one that does not have the desire to exert control over other states' conflicts.

One of the past successes of Ukraine in this sphere is a Peace Plan for Transnistria established in 2005. Being a long-term official mediator and guarantor of peace in Transnistria, Ukraine used the confidence vested in it and both united the positions of the four GUAM states and managed to involve the European Union in the peace process. The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova became a first step of EU involvement in the conflict resolution process of the region, resulting in a higher level of attention towards Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts later.

Before 2008, the Georgian government invited Ukraine to send its peacekeepers to Georgia several times. Despite the active peacekeeping activities of Ukraine around the world, such propositions have never been accepted due to the fact that Ukraine could send its peacekeepers only in the framework of a respected UN mission. Peacekeepers in Georgia were under the CIS command, where Ukraine could not participate. Thus, Ukrainian observers served in the OSCE mission. The withdrawal of the UN and OSCE missions, as well as the Russian peacekeepers after the war of 2008 and the deployment of the EU mission presented Ukraine with a unique chance. It is still possible for Ukraine to join the EU mission on the basis of the special agreement, plus to share experience on the Transnistrian observing mission, as the EU has not had any real experience in the Black Sea conflicts, so far.

The proclamation of Kosovar independence had a certain influence on the negotiations on settlement of the Black Sea conflicts. Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia brought even more confusion to the minds of some Ukrainian politicians. However, the understanding has come that after recognizing Kosovo, it would be impossible to explain why Ukrainian government would not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. So, during the press conference on his 100 days in office, Viktor Yanukovich underlined that Ukraine would never recognize independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia or Kosovo, as it was in contradiction with international norms, according to which violation of territorial integrity of states was prohibited.¹

For Ukraine, there are still four possible scenarios: to recognize only Kosovo; to recognize only South Ossetia and Abkhazia; to recognize all three territories

¹ "Yanukovich has changed his mind: He will never recognize independence of Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Kosovo" (in Russian), *NEWSRU*, 4 June 4 2010, <http://www.newsru.com/world/04jun2010/janukovitch.html>.

at once; or not to recognize any. The last variant is the most pragmatic for the national security interests of Ukraine, as it will not provoke aspiration of some radical movements in Crimea, or its closest neighbor Transnistria, for a new independence proclamation. Such a choice would also be better for Ukraine's relations with Georgia, the U.S., and the European Union.

Despite the difficulties in Ukraine-EU relations due to the former Prime Minister Tymoshenko case,² there is still a possibility for active cooperation towards resolution of the conflicts in the Black Sea region. In some ways, Ukraine could have repeated a case similar to the one experienced in 2003 when it had extremely negative reputation in the world, due to issues such as the ones posed by the Kolchuga case, Gongadze assassination, freedom of speech and media problems, etc.

However, by means of sending its peacekeepers to Iraq, Ukraine has enhanced cooperation with the U.S. and has managed to improve its image since. With the prospect to chair OSCE in 2013, Ukraine should accelerate its involvement in the peace process especially in Transnistria, which will bring both direct and indirect benefits to Ukraine's international position.

Naval Security

Prolongation of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationing in the Crimea in 2010 has created confusion. On the one hand, it has not changed the security balance in the region as the Fleet had been there for years and was expected to stay until 2017. Also, the technical condition of the ships was so poor that they were more of a psychological than military threat to other countries. On the other hand, the prolongation has demonstrated two problems for Ukraine: the heightened Russian influence on the new Ukrainian president and inability to follow even

internal legal procedures, as there are still a lot of claims on impropriety of the process of signing and ratification of the Agreement. Even more importantly, neither Ukraine received any real benefits from this Agreement nor was there a necessity in such a prolongation. Ukraine could prolong the Russian Black Sea

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² Yulia Tymoshenko has got 7 years term in prison because she was accused of abuse of authority while signing Russian-Ukrainian gas agreement in 2009. The trial was perceived by the EU representatives as politically motivated, without guaranteed right of defense, and as a signal of democracy rollback in Ukraine.

Fleet stationing in Sevastopol to only five years – up to 2022, as it is stated in the Constitution of Ukraine, in exchange for the gas prices discounts. This would not raise the displeasure level in Ukrainian society and incomprehension from the Ukrainian partners' side but would please the Russian government. It would allow Ukrainian President to buy some time in the relations with Russian Federation, but also to delegate responsibility for the final decision for the next President.³

Back in 1993, Ukraine proposed to elaborate confidence building and security measures in the naval sphere on the Black Sea and took on the role of the negotiations coordinator, which started only in 1998. It took four years to prepare the text of the conclusion document, in which the three following confidence measures were included: annual exchange of naval information; naval activity plans; and preliminary notifications about the two biggest annual exercises. In addition, the document included different forms of voluntary cooperation.

To guarantee naval security in the Black Sea region, two initiatives exist, and Ukraine participates in both of them: BLACKSEAFOR (established in 2001 by six littoral states) and “Black Sea Harmony” initiated by Turkey. Existence of two naval initiatives in the Black Sea basin does not encourage effective resolution of the current problems and challenges. Ukraine, which is a member of both, should direct its work to the integration of the BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony efforts to advance the quality of operations and to narrow functions doubling. Ukraine can also initiate the creation of a contact center for the joint management of the naval ships of the BLACKSEAFOR member-states which operate multinationally for critical response, strategic analysis and planning. The Russian Federation has also proposed creation of such a control station in Novorosiysk. However, having it stationed in Sevastopol will be more effective because of its geographical location and technical basis, as well as because of Ukraine's good relations of with all states of the region.

Military Security

Proclaiming its status as a non-aligned state in 2010, Ukraine de-facto has not changed anything. Russian authorities received the announcement of Ukraine's non-aligned status with certain pleasure, as proof of Moscow's successful policy of not allowing post-soviet states to join NATO. However, Russia was not able to attract Ukraine to the Tashkent Pact of collective security within the CIS. Ukraine has continued active cooperation with NATO, including the Partnership for Peace Program, joint military training, etc., and even signed a new Annual Plan, which, by its content, is close to a real Membership Action Plan.

³ According to Ukrainian Constitution, only two terms are allowed for the President in Office. So, the maximum Victor Yanukovich can serve as the President of Ukraine is until 2020.

Statements of the top military officers were rather interesting just after the non-aligned status proclamation, as they wholly disagreed with such a decision, seeing it more political than pragmatic.

In addition to NATO Enlargement, one issue is still topical for the Black Sea military security: new configuration of the missile-defense system. Ukraine does not see any threat, unlike Russia, in the deployment of anti-missile systems in the Eastern Europe, especially in Romania. Several times, the discussion took place between Ukrainian and U.S. experts and politicians on the possibility for Ukraine to join AMD system, but without any concrete propositions. At the same time, there is a clear understanding in Ukraine that such deployment in Romania is not directed against any neighbors but rather a desire of Romanian authorities to substantiate its bilateral relations with the U.S. and to draw attention in the Eastern Europe, particularly from Poland, to Romania. On the other hand, due to the increase of the Romanian-Ukrainian border confrontations, the Ukrainian government raises the question of military strengthening of Romania at the negotiations with the U.S., pointing out that further militarization should be discussed with Ukraine.⁴

For the last several years, there have also been talks on the possibility of creating a joint U.S.-NATO-Russia missile-defense system. Some experts presumed that Ukraine and Georgia could be potential losers in this situation as “cooperation on issues of high strategic significance may result in the indefinite postponement, or even complete abandonment, of plans to bring Ukraine and Georgia into the North Atlantic Alliance.”⁵ This statement is rather controversial, as for now Ukrainian and Georgian perspectives of Euroatlantic integration are not considered in tandem as they had been before 2008. Also, Ukraine can benefit from a joint AMD system in Eastern Europe, as having technical and scientific potential for such a configuration of missile defense system, possessing radio-locative systems and rocket-construction plants can be easily incorporated in it as a partner without necessity to balance between U.S. and Russia's positions.

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⁴ Polina Sinovets, “Current ABM Problem: Black Sea Vector and Possible Consequences for Ukraine” (in Ukrainian), *Black Sea Security*, Vol.2 No.16, (2010), <http://nomos.com.ua/content/view/315/69/>.

⁵ Thomas Young, “The Reconfiguration of European Missile Defense, Russia's Response and the Likely Implications,” *Nuclear Treat Initiative*, 9 October 2010, http://www.nti.org/e_research/e3_missile_defense.html.

Regional Competition

It is understandable now that Ukraine is not able to be a real regional leader in the Black Sea region. At the same time, there are three other countries in the region which pretend to be regional leaders as well - Russian Federation, Romania and Turkey - and all of them can be at once competitors of Ukraine and, at the same time, its close partners, in creating so-called "strategic alliances," or, actors which unite to reach a concrete goal or for the resolution of a concrete strategic task without the creation of a formal alliance. In our case, this refers to the concrete problem in the security sphere.

The main competitors of Ukraine in the wider security sphere are Turkey and Romania. Turkey has mostly been a counterpart for the best trade and energy routes from Asia to Europe. At the same time, Ukraine and Turkey have both close bilateral relations and good contacts within international organizations.

Romania has appeared as a competitor only recently. Political initiatives such as the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue (2006), which went without continuation; the island Zmeyinyy dispute (Snake island case at the ICJ); missile-defense system deployment; and the recent AGRI project (Azerbaijan - Georgia - Romania Interconnector) are evidences of this tendency. If the AGRI project for gas transportation from Azerbaijan, via Georgia, to Romania were realized, Ukraine would lose its position as a transit state. The project of GUEU pipeline (Georgia-Ukraine-EU) will likely not be realized, but Ukraine can further lose ground in the Caucasus as Romania increases its presence there.

Ukraine still has the potential to initiate a number of projects to create a full-fledged security system in the Black Sea basin. However, for the most effective use of this potential, it should cooperate with other regional states and international organizations: with the European Union to concentrate on the questions of economics, energy security and conflict resolution; with NATO on anti-terrorist activity; with the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Romania on navigation safety, environmental security, and security of energy transportation; and with Georgia on reforms and GUAM activation.

The Black Sea region today stands with a set of challenges for Ukraine and its foreign policy – challenges of lost opportunities and increased competition. Ukrainian foreign policy in the Black Sea region will not be successful until the Black Sea region is seen as a complex and interconnected system rather than a set of bilateral relations. It is time for Ukraine to elaborate an independent security policy in the Black Sea region, taking into account new tendencies and its own national interests.