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## GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA REGION IN GLOBAL POLITICS

*The issue of the Black Sea region security is becoming more and more relevant. It has always had an important geopolitical and strategic meaning. Exactly this region is a point where the interest of Russia's and the West is intersected. It can be said that the Black Sea region is the place of competition between Russia and the West, as the two main players, for the future of Europe.*

*Researchers call this region "critical" which needs strengthening collective security and stability. While speaking about the Black Sea region, we mean eight different countries. They have different political tastes, interests and perspectives. Three countries are NATO members, and some are NATO partner countries. The two countries have a continuous conflict with Russia. Considering the latter, it turns out that NATO has not only interests in the Black Sea region, but also an obligation to ensure security. Therefore, NATO cannot remain as a simple observer considering the actions carried out by Russia in the region.*

*Considering the events developed in the last decade, the issue has become more relevant, as Russia has used military force several times against the countries of the Black Sea region since 2008 and is still carrying out military actions. There are new challenges present that the modern world has faced.*

*The frequently unsuccessful policy of both security and crisis management in the geographic division of East and West is not new. The existing security policy mostly refers to the prevention of threats and minimizing them, which is a particularly big challenge for Georgia, as our country has to implement the Western choice while dealing with the threats coming from the neighborhood.*

*In the process of studying the security issues of the Black Sea, we deemed it necessary to observe the evolution process of security as a concept, as well as a number of modern approaches in the field of security. A number of structural changes that have taken place in the architecture of world governance during recent decades, have gained our attention.*

**Keywords:** *global politics, Black sea region, NATO, EU, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey.*

When discussing various issues in the field of security, we take into account that individual states are not players with no alternative in the international field, since the main actors in this regard are military blocs, regional and international organizations. For example, we will refer to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which serves to ensure the security of member states, which in turn implies that stable national security and order is a prerequisite for international security.

In the light of the mentioned, we believe that the states should become more interdependent. The regional unity implies exactly the circulation of ideas and values, which naturally goes beyond the old system based on national barriers, the main goal of which was to maintain state power. With such an approach of interdependence between countries, we get a picture where the issues related to security are transferred from the national to the global level.

During the Cold War, the Black Sea region was "divided" between, on the one hand, Turkey as a member of the military alliance, and on the other hand, the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact\* member states: the Socialist Republic of Romania and the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Taking into account the above, the security of the Black Sea in the mentioned period was based on the balance of interests and forces between NATO and the Soviet Warsaw Pact.

After the end of the Cold War, the strategic balance in the Black Sea region has changed significantly. That is, the mentioned change is connected to several stages of NATO and EU expansion. One of the important steps was that two new member countries of the alliance appeared in the Black Sea region, along with Turkey. We refer to the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania, which were also EU member

states. After Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO, their security is guaranteed by NATO capabilities and the Washington Treaty.

As a result of the above-mentioned historical events, the geopolitical economic importance and role of the Black Sea has increased significantly. Considering this, new challenges appeared before the coastal states of the Black Sea region. Among them, Georgia and Ukraine were given new opportunities and new geopolitical role.

Nowadays, the Black Sea is an intersection of major geopolitical interests in terms of intersection of national interests of different countries. In global politics, the Black Sea region is not in the first place in this regard, as the Middle East, which is overloaded with hot conflict areas, should be taken into account. It must be said that we have many other interesting circumstances in the Black Sea: 1. Problems raised after the collapse of the Soviet Union and unanswered questions. 2. Taking into account the geopolitical situation of the country, the Black Sea is a potential for economic, political, cultural and military development for us, as well as it is a source of foreign threats; 3. The Black Sea is considered as the southern part of the eastern direction of NATO, the situation of which is quite delicate nowadays, due to the recently expressed position of Turkey in the alliance and the strained relations with the USA and Britain [1, p.33-34].

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, taking into account the growing trend of militarization in the Black Sea basin and the strengthening of Russia's positions in the region, the Black Sea basin has been given an even greater strategic importance for NATO and the European Union, both politically and militarily. Special attention was paid to the importance of the Black Sea for NATO and the European Union at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit. Moreover, at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Bucharest in 2017 and in the "Black Sea Strategy" of 2011, which was adopted by the European Parliament.

Considering the above-mentioned circumstances, the current situation in the region should be discussed in the light of the interests of its main political players and their positions. In this regard, one of the most important factors for us is Russia, which has always shown great interest in the Black Sea region (and not only). After the events developed in recent decades, especially after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, its representation in the Black Sea region has increased significantly, and the interest remains unchanged. It should be noted here that the USA shows more interest and at the same time, activity in the Black Sea region than the European countries, which can be said to have even replaced them.

We believe that the **USA's interest in the Black Sea region** is caused by the two main factors. The first is its well-known policy and attitude towards Iran, and the second main issue is the neutralization of the aggressive aspirations of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea region. The latter became especially noticeable after Russia expanded the Black Sea coastline at the expense of the Crimean Peninsula.

When discussing the geopolitical importance of the region in global politics, the issue of China's interest in the Black Sea region should be taken into account. As it is known, Beijing has launched several new global projects – the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", which together form the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. It should be noted here that this initiative includes Europe and Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Africa[14, p.4]. It should be said that the possibility of increasing China's role and influence in Eurasia made the issue of understanding and discussing the theoretical construction of Chinese "Eurasianism" relevant, which, in our opinion, requires a separate, special study.

It should be noted that the geographical location of Georgia is favorable for the above-mentioned initiative of Beijing, both in terms of the risks caused by foreign threats and in terms of the country's development opportunities. The reason for such conclusion is that, from a geopolitical point of view, our country is in the so-called buffer zone, and actually is between two strongest, but legally, politically and economically different states – Russia and Turkey. The interesting issue here is how the interests of these two states crosses Georgia. When discussing the latter, the following issue is important: the political and economic interests of Russia and Turkey coincide in some cases (Turkey's apparent confrontation with the USA in 2016) and sometimes they differ radically, these two countries have often faced political confrontations, a clear example of this is the case of Syria (Turkey attacked the Kurdish forces in the north of Syria in 2019, and in response, the Syrian and Russian armies began to protect the Kurds). In such case, a kind of deterrence line between them crosses the Black Sea and then crosses the territory of Georgia[1, p.33-34].

As for regional actors, we will start speech with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "NATO" became an actor in the Black Sea region in 2004, after Bulgaria and Romania joined the alliance. After which, the security of the region became a priority of the NATO agenda. However, after Romania and Bulgaria joined it, it took ten years for the alliance to begin to focus on the Black Sea regional policy and security strategy.

During the last decade, NATO has had many military initiatives in the Black Sea Basin. Among them, it should be noted, NATO's desire to act in the Black Sea basin within the framework of Operation Active Endeavor (OAE). This initiative is a direct response to the terrorist act of 2001. However, due to the opposition of Russia and Turkey, the mentioned initiative could not be implemented in the Black Sea. In addition, NATO's activity in the region can be considered within the framework of the Partnership Action Plan (PAP) and the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)[2, p.4-5].

The Black Sea is of strategic importance for NATO, as it occupies a special place in the European collective defense system from a military point of view. At the same time, it represents one of the fronts for dealing with Russia and represents an important challenge for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area considering the various conflicts. The threat of terrorism and the escalation created in the Middle East (in particular, in Syria) have added an even greater strategic meaning to this region. In this regard, it should be said that for the ongoing military actions in Syria, the Black Sea basin was a strategic area for the deployment of NATO's, Turkish and Russian military ships and other weapons[2, p.3].

In light of the challenges in the Black Sea region after the events in Crimea, the security issue of the region took a priority place in NATO's political agenda. Considering the militaristic and aggressive policy carried out by Russia, opposing the West is interesting. In this regard, we will highlight several issues: the deployment of NATO on the eastern flank is asymmetric, the latter is clearly visible on the example of the Baltic and Black seas. This situation has received appropriate names from the military point of view: in case of the Black Sea, it is called "tailored forward presence", and in case of the Baltic Sea, it is called "enhanced forward presence". This means that NATO's security system in the North-Eastern part is more organized and at the same time, more infrastructurally equipped, while its collective security system in the Black Sea area lags behind in almost all parameters. The reason for this is the relationship between the USA and Russia, as well as the legal factor of the Black Sea. This refers to the Montreux Convention, according to which the issue of unrestricted passage of military ships of the Black Sea countries through the straits is determined. This treaty is international, but its implementation largely depends on Turkey and its goodwill[1, p.33]. That is, Turkey will decide the issue according to how favorable it is for it in a specific political situation.

Considering the development of events in Crimea, NATO was forced to take countermeasures to maintain the alliance's positions and representation in the region, which was reflected in the document adopted at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit – "Readiness Action Plan". The military representation of NATO in the Black Sea increased instantly in the indicated period. The alliance conducted more than twice the planned military exercises in the Black Sea basin. Their number increased in 2015[5]. In addition, NATO's representation in the Black Sea has increased significantly with the arrival of USA ships in the region. Two American destroyers were added to the NATO sea fleet, which were transferred from Spanish waters to the Black Sea. The purpose of these ships is to provide ballistic defence (BMD) in the Black Sea region[9], as well as to support alliance trainings and missions.

A NATO summit was held in Warsaw in July, 2016, where a communique was adopted[11]. The Black Sea security issues takes an important part in the document. The communiqué noted that the Black Sea is of strategic importance, and Russia's destabilizing actions and policies include provocative actions at NATO's borders, including in the Black Sea region. The military pressure carried out by Russia on the region many times is considered a significant challenge for security. The document also emphasizes that due to the deterioration of the security situation, the Black Sea region is included in the approaches and policies of the Alliance[2, p.5].

It should be noted that Turkey's policy towards the Black Sea region is greatly influenced by Russian-Turkish relations. When the relations between the two countries are settled, it is completely unacceptable for Turkey to involve non-regional actors in the dealing with the internal regional issues. The observation showed that when mutual cooperation between Turkey and Russia deepens and their positions are reconciled, at such a time the discussion of regional security of the Black Sea in broad international formats loses relevance for Turkey.

Considering the mentioned analysis, it can be said that Turkey does not have a coherent, established vision towards the Black Sea region. This does not necessarily mean that the security issue of the Black Sea region is less important for it. But due to the vital importance of the issue for Turkey, this naturally causes Turkey's inconsistent reactions in some cases. Similar approaches in the Black Sea basin reflect the interrelationship of various regional interests in Turkey's foreign vision, as well as its interests and desire to establish the status of a regional leader.

Taking into account a number of factors, it should be said that Turkey is quite an important and accountable player in the regional security policy of the Black Sea. It is a member state of the North Atlantic

Treaty Organization, however, its position in the region is expressed by several specific elements, namely: Turkey tries to use the different interests of NATO and Russia to implement its own national interests. At the same time, it does not hide that the strengthened representation of NATO in the Black Sea region is not in its interests. Pursuing such a policy in the region does not allow Turkey to pursue a linear policy, and in many cases it is forced to oppose Russia. It must be said that Turkey is one of the influential states of the region at present, and its status is clearly manifested in various politically active regions: the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the South Caucasus. Turkey's dominant position in the mentioned regions emphasizes its influence in politically key and hot conflict regions.

The growing interest of various countries and international actors in the Black Sea is an important challenge for Turkey. The Montreux Convention, signed in 1936, allows Turkey to restrict the movement of warships in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits during wartime. Shortly after the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, official Ankara announced that it would implement the part of the Montreux Convention that restricted the entry of Russian ships from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea. In general, it should be said that this convention gives Turkey a special role, through which the country tries, on the one hand, to maintain this power. On the other hand, it is impossible not to be worried about the aggressive and conquering policy conducted by Russia in the region.

It should be said that the Montreux Convention contains certain restrictions regarding the use of the Black Sea Straits during wartime (Articles 19-21). We will also draw attention to one issue, recently there has been a discussion about removing the restriction by amending Articles 19 and 20 of the Montreux Convention. From the procedural point of view, changes may be made. However, we must take into account that any changes to the Montreux Convention directly or indirectly affect the security of Georgia. Accordingly, the change will affect the occupied Abkhazia and the Russian military bases located there. Taking this into account, the Georgian side should seriously consider [6]. It is even necessary to make changes to the Montreux Convention, unsuccessful attempts of which have been made many times in recent decades. However, we believe that the changes should ensure a reduction of militarization and confrontation level in the region.

Reducing the level of militarization of the Black Sea is more beneficial for the security of both the region and Georgia. Possible changes in the Montreux Convention should also serve to avoid conflict in the Black Sea. Any Black Sea state, which carries out armed aggression against another Black Sea state, occupies and annexes its territory, should be deprived of the right to free passage of both military and merchant ships in the Black Sea Straits within the framework of the above-mentioned changes [6]. Naturally, the same norm should be established for the non-Black Sea state, which will be in a state of war with any of the Black Sea basin countries. Making changes to the convention in the appropriate manner will help to relieve tension in the Black Sea region, demilitarize it, and establish a stable and just peace.

As for the approach of the Russian side, they believe that the Black Sea is the shortest and easiest way for the opponents of the country's interests to enter the Russian area. Due to this, the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits are a sensitive topic for Russia. That is, it is an opportunity to enter the area of Russian influence and to export Russian interests to the Mediterranean countries, especially to geographical regions rich in energy carriers, from which the most essential and strategically important is the Middle East with its transport corridors and ore deposits [6, p.33-34]. That is, for Russia it is not only the Black Sea waters and a simple space, but it is an exit both from the outside into the space of Russian influence and vice versa.

The democratic development of the countries of the region is fundamentally incompatible with the interests of the Russian side, at the same time their close military cooperation with the member states of the alliance is unacceptable. It is also unacceptable for the Russian side to implement alternative gas and oil projects in the direction of Europe through the region. Accordingly, in order to stop the countries of the region from getting closer to the Western unions, Russia maintains control over the conflict centers of the region. It is Russia's interests and control that unites the conflict regions of Abkhazia, Tskhinvali, Karabakh and Ukraine, despite the fact that the conflicts in these regions have a different nature.

Strategically, Russian forces in the region, including non-military security organizations (such as the Federal Security Service), have several objectives, the first being to protect Russia's southwestern flank from threats and to intimidate its neighbors, in order to avoid implementation of policies against Moscow's interests. In addition to security interests, Russia has political interests in all the countries that belong to the Black Sea basin [4, p.48].

In addition to European countries, in the early years of Putin's Russia, it sought to establish cooperative relations with the United States and its allies. For example, not long ago, there were some negotiations between Russia and the West in the field of security of the Black Sea region. The need for negotiations

between the parties became more apparent after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO and the European Union.

After the Russian aggression in Ukraine, it became clear that Russia is trying to strengthen its influence in the Black Sea region. With the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the military aggression it has shown in Ukraine, Russia, as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, has violated about twelve bilateral and international agreements. Including, the UN Charter, the Charter of Paris and the Helsinki Final Act, which guarantee the territorial integrity and sovereign equality of states, the abstinence from the use of force or the threat of force, the inviolability of borders, and also one of the important rights to determine or change their own security measures at national, as well as at the regional level.

Thus, the illegal actions carried out by the Russian side undermine and threaten not only the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, but also the security of the entire region. The Black Sea is also an important issue for it and of course, it fits into the concept of maintaining Russia's strategic depth. Considering the above, this kind of interest in the Black Sea carries more challenges for us, as we are also an integral part of this region, and the fight between two different camps (Russian Federation – military alliance) is always dangerous and disadvantageous for a small country like ours.

Russia's activation in the Black Sea increased NATO's interest in the region. NATO experts have been actively observing and discussing the so-called "The dimension of the Black Sea" in recent years. We refer to the necessity of forming a new strategy for the region. This is manifested in establishing closer ties with local partners, increasing the capabilities of NATO and its member states at sea, increasing the number of visits by military ships to the Black Sea and, in general, resisting Russia's military supremacy.

The western maritime connection with the Black Sea countries is one of the bases of tension between the United States of America and Russia. The fact is that the status of the Black Sea depends on political perception. The USA considers that it is a sea and therefore can have maritime traffic with allied countries, including ships and warships. On the other hand, Russia views the Black Sea as a lake, where landlocked countries should not have the opportunity to enter the sea with military ships[17, p.1]. In this context, naval power can be defined as a state's ability to achieve political goal and influence in the region. The latter, in turn, is a mean of protecting national interests[15].

In this context, it is important to talk about the interest of the European Union in the Black Sea region. For Europe, the Black Sea is a natural bridge that connects it with the Caspian region and at the same time, with Central and South-East Asia. The Black Sea is of strategic importance for the security of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries as the central core of the European Union. The energy security of the European Union is becoming more and more dependent on the successful pipeline projects that cross the Caucasus, Turkey, Ukraine and the littoral states of the European Union.

The accession of the two coastal countries of the Black Sea – Bulgaria and Romania\*\* – to the European Union gave the organization the ambition to play a more consolidated role in the region. In the process of development and strengthening of the Black Sea region, the European Union tried to use various instruments of enlargement, pre-accession assistance to Turkey, which was expressed in granting the status of a "candidate" country; Strategic partnership with Russia and the creation of the "Eastern Partnership", as the eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy. As we are aware, the region faced many challenges, there were security challenges, conflicts. During the indicated period, the intervention of the European Union as a security actor significantly increased its influence in the Black Sea region. The European Union's Neighborhood Policy (2003), Black Sea Synergy (2007) and Eastern Partnership (2009) facilitated approachment of regional players closer to the EU and had a significant impact on the region's democratic transformation and internal consolidation.

### **Conclusion**

At present, it is deemed impossible to define the field of security within strict methodological or disciplinary frameworks. The list of threats that modern players (Securitizer) consider important is rapidly changing. The current picture of security in the Black Sea region can be presented in the first place, as conflicting discourses grouped around specific cases, the main goal of which is to avoid (prevent) threats.

In the light of the discussed issue, we can say that the political interest in creating zones of influence and dividing lines in the region has a negative impact not only on important security aspects of the region, but also on its political and economic situation. Russia's military aggression against both Georgia and Ukraine dramatically changed the security balance in the Black Sea region. On the other hand, these actions created a significant threat to the security and stability of Europe.

Georgia, as a country interested in peace and stable development, should continue active cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. Properly formulated and effectively implemented neighborhood policy is of particular importance for regional security, as well as internal security and stability.

In the light of the discussed issue, we have formulated our vision regarding the strengthening of the security of the Black Sea region, as well as the role of Georgia in this regard.

First of all, we will say that taking into account the organic interrelationship between security issues and the economy, it is necessary to pay more attention to the modernization of transport and energy routes crosses the Black Sea region, including the digital infrastructure necessary for it. Otherwise, talk about the military alliances and other connections necessary for security will not be sufficient for valid global competitiveness and regional stability.

As for the involvement of the Georgian side, we believe that it should be more proactive. Although our vision for the security of the Black Sea is reflected in various strategic documents, it is necessary to develop a more detailed and specified policy, within the framework of which state agencies (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc.) will act in a coordinated manner. Considering the relevance of the issue, a special agency (perhaps in the form of a department) should be formed at the Ministry of Defense, which will coordinate the implementation of relevant policies and the development of a coordinated approach related to the security of the Black Sea region.

Special importance for the security of the Black Sea region is given to the development of a consistent and thought out policy by NATO, which will involve the regional member states of the alliance. At the same time, it is important that NATO conducts an active dialogue with both Georgia and Ukraine in the process of developing initiatives.

It is important to determine the degree of involvement of the European Union in the way of strengthening the security of the region. Georgia should pay attention to the ongoing reform processes and democratization within the Black Sea region in the context of the European Union. It is desirable that the European Union develops a macro-regional strategy for strengthening stability and prosperity in the region. It should be emphasized that this idea is actively supported by Bulgaria, such an approach is already valid in relation to the Baltic Sea, the Alps, the Danube and other regions.

It is necessary to take into account the fact that Georgia is connected to the European Union through the Black Sea. Attribution to the Black Sea region should be perceived as part of the European identity. At the same time, within the framework of this region, the two leading countries of the Eastern Partnership – Georgia and Ukraine – are given opportunities to conduct relations with the European Union in a new format.

In order to strengthen regional security, it is important to hold regular high-level summits, preferably at the level of leaders of the leading states, representatives of the EU, USA, Great Britain and other strategic partners, in order to ensure the necessary coordination. The main purpose of regular summits should be supporting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries of the Black Sea region. Within the framework of the summit, it is desirable to discuss regional security, actually geopolitical (not "ethnic") conflicts, cyber security, illegal migration, international terrorism and other current issues and challenges.

#### *Notes:*

\* Warsaw Pact – Eastern and Central European communist countries organization, established in 1955

\*\* Became member states of European Union in 2007

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***Хевциуріані А., Парджані А. Геополітичне значення чорноморського регіону в глобальній політиці***

*Питання безпеки чорноморського регіону стає все більш актуальним. Він завжди мав важливе геополітичне та стратегічне значення. Саме цей регіон є точкою перетину інтересів Росії та Заходу. Можна сказати, що чорноморський регіон є місцем суперництва між Росією та Заходом, як двома основними гравцями, за майбутнє Європи. Дослідники називають цей регіон «критичним», таким, що потребує зміцнення колективної безпеки та стабільності. Говорячи про чорноморський регіон, ми маємо справу зі вісьмома різними країнами, які мають різні політичні смаки, інтереси та традиції. Три країни є членами НАТО, деякі є країнами-партнерами НАТО. Дві країни мають постійний конфлікт з Росією. Зважаючи на останнє, виходить, що НАТО має не лише інтереси в чорноморському регіоні, а й зобов'язання забезпечувати безпеку. Тому НАТО не може залишатися простим спостерігачем за діями, які здійснює Росія в регіоні. З огляду на події останнього десятиліття, питання безпеки чорноморського регіону набуло більшої актуальності, оскільки з 2008 року Росія неодноразово застосовувала військову силу проти країн регіону та продовжує вести військові дії. З'явилися нові виклики, з якими зіткнувся сучасний світ. Існуюча політика безпеки чорноморського регіону здебільшого стосується запобігання загрозам та їх мінімізації, що є особливо великим викликом для Грузії, оскільки наша країна має реалізувати вибір Заходу, справляючись із загрозами, що надходять від північного сусіда. У процесі дослідження проблем безпеки регіону Чорного моря автори обґрунтували необхідність влаштування постійного моніторингу процесу еволюції безпеки як концепції, а також оцінили можливості застосування ряду сучасних підходів у сфері безпеки до аналізу безпекової ситуації в регіоні. Було розглянуто також низку структурних змін, які відбулися в архітектурі міжнародних відносин протягом останніх десятиліть та вплинули на безпеку регіону.*

**Ключові слова:** *глобальна політика, чорноморський регіон, НАТО, ЄС, Росія, Грузія, Україна, Туреччина*