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Georgia and Black Sea Security



Tbilisi 2018

Abstract

In geopolitical terms, the broader black Sea region serves as a link between the Caspian, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean basins and constitutes a lucrative corridor to the Middle East.¹ Therefore, historically, establishing control over principal trade routes crossing the Black Sea has always been the interest of global powers.² Following the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea region found itself encompassed within the United States' interests due to three key factors : the extension of democracy, security cooperation, and diversification of energy resources.³

The region is vital for the United States as a possible future stronghold from which to engage the greater Middle East and substantial portions of surrounding regions and Georgia constitutes a significant stronghold for the United States in the region.⁴

The democratic development of the countries in the region, as well as their close military cooperation with NATO member states where Georgia takes huge role is fundamentally contradictory to Russia's interests.⁵

Diplomatically, NATO as an alliance must keep the door open for enlargement. Even if membership is not immediately imminent for a Black Sea region partner nation, the aspirant states' actions will promote stability and security throughout the region.⁶ The open door need not be in the region itself—the membership plan for Montenegro, by encouraging other aspirants to continue reforms and capability developments, contributes indirectly to security in the Black Sea region.⁷

The partner state of Georgia, in response to the extreme and imminent threat of Russia, has conveyed its strategic importance in the region. At the 72nd Assembly of the UN on September 22nd, 2017, the Prime Minister of Georgia outlined the nation's standing in global markets, with particular regard for trade. Georgia's location places it at the crux of Eurasian trading. It's new port at Anaklia will be able to handle the largest of container ships and its partnership in a Eurasian railway system places Georgia "less than 20 days from East Asia and within five days of any point in Europe."⁸

Georgia's emphasis on its role in the economy has provided it with ensured support. The Summit in 2016 called for Georgia, as a valuable partner, to join the dialogue for Black Sea security and take part in the multinational joint training exercises.⁹

When we are talking about Black Sea security we must take into account that there are three factors to consider when it comes to the future of the region's security. The first is the evident democratic recession across the globe. This trend is occurring in what democracy

expert Larry Diamond calls “strategic swing states.” Examples of these are Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia, the three largest in the region, as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia. All these countries have tenuous rule of law and democracy situations¹⁰. It should be considered that Georgia occupies the first place in terms of human rights and democratic development in the region.

In 2014 NATO Wales Summit, Allies endorsed a substantial package for Georgia, including defence capacity-building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison, and opportunities to develop interoperability with Allied forces. These measures aim to strengthen Georgia’s ability to defend itself as well as to advance its preparations toward NATO membership and then Georgia will be at the height of the call to contribute a huge role to secure the Black Sea region.

Prospects of Black Sea Security

The Black Sea region is a crossroads, an intersection between Europe and the Middle East, from the eastern Balkans to the South Caucasus. Like many such points of intersection, it is often a friction point. This is very much the case in the current geopolitical environment of growing confrontation between Russia and the West. Any friction there will almost certainly involve NATO nations and the Alliance’s interests, with three NATO states on the Black Sea and several NATO partners on the Black Sea and throughout the region.¹¹

The notion of Europe being “whole, free and at peace” has already been challenged twice by Russia, through its military aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, both of which occurred in the Black Sea region. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its hybrid warfare against Ukraine have further emphasized Russia’s hostile motives in invading Georgia in 2008 and preventing NATO’s enlargement in the Black Sea region. Crimea gives the leverage to Russia to control a significant part of the Black Sea and project power within and beyond the region, such as the Eastern Mediterranean. Besides the annexation of Crimea and waging hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine, Russia currently illegally occupies Georgia’s Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) regions and has recognized them as independent states.¹²

In a broader context, Moscow’s endeavors to have control over the Black Sea not only undermine the independence and territorial integrity of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova; they also directly challenge the security of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. All of Russia’s activities directed against NATO’s partners and allies in the Black Sea are Moscow’s unequivocal

strategy to offset the Western democratic agenda and turn the Black Sea region into a “Russian lake” as it used to be in the Soviet period.¹³

As a result of the ongoing events in the world it is clear that several European countries are still depended on Russia's energy resources which poses a threat to the realization of the European and NATO's Black Sea security strategy. NATO and the EU are well aware of the need for a safe environment to open the door for alternative resources and trade routes, for that the Alliance must increase NATO air missions in the region. Increased NATO air operations in the Black Sea region would deliver presence, including persistent presence in the airspace over the waters of the Black Sea, without encountering any of the restrictions the Montreux Convention places on naval forces.¹⁴ according to the Convention, vessels of war are allowed to stay in the Black Sea no more than 21 days.¹⁵ Given the number of restrictions in the document, the Convention would inhibit vessels larger than cruisers or destroyers from entering the Black Sea basin. The limitations placed by the document would also negatively impact NATO's ability to establish a permanent naval presence in the Black Sea. Also NATO must Increase exercises and combined training events in the Black Sea region. Bilateral/multilateral exercises should be rebranded as NATO exercises, with NATO gaining training objectives of interoperability, command and control, and NATO standardization.¹⁶

Let's get back to the energy resources issue again. Energy is a central factor to appreciating the security ecosystem of the Black Sea region. The area is a significant transit route for energy resources, particularly natural gas.¹⁷ The network of producers and transit countries involves Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, who form a key chain for transporting Central Asian gas to Europe and for alleviating the dependency of European markets on Russian gas. Since energy has become a critical economic issue in Europe and beyond, it is of utmost importance for the Black Sea region and its potential to be rightly exploited by NATO.¹⁸ For that NATO must Focus on Building Defense Capacity (BDC) for regional partners. Continuing to build the defense capabilities of the partners in the Black Sea region—Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova will go a long way to increasing security and stability in the region. These cooperative efforts strengthen non-Alliance partners against potential aggression, contribute to their structural reforms, and amplify the diplomatic efforts of NATO and the member nations.¹⁹

In addition One of the goals of the European Union in terms of the strategy of the diversification of energy resource imports is to ensure the production and transportation of Caspian basin resources.²⁰ One of the priorities for the European Union is the development of the Southern Gas Corridor which will connect the EU market with the Caspian Sea region as well. In terms of the project, Europe will receive the first Caspian gas from Azerbaijan in

2020. However, at this stage then European Union will only be receiving ten billion cubic meters of gas from the Corridor.²¹

USA also will support this project. The United States does not need the energy resources of Central Asia for its own consumption. Political rather than economic interests are much more important for Washington in this case. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it has been the unwavering position of Washington that Russia must not have the monopoly on the transportation of Caspian basin resources and none of the pipelines should pass through Iran.²²

An important challenge for the transportation of Central Asian energy resources towards the West are the security problems in the South Caucasus and Turkey. The Turkish part is the most vulnerable in terms of terrorism where explosions took place on the pipelines coming from Azerbaijan in 2008 and 2015. The vulnerability of the pipelines was also revealed during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war when a bomb which was shot down by Russia fell near a pipeline in Georgia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is also a challenge for the region's transit potential.²³

Challenges and Opportunities of Georgia and The Black Sea Region

Given Georgia's geostrategic location on the Black Sea and the Caucasus, the country has taken its own niche in the East-West corridor development. Currently, Georgia is building a deep-water port on its Black Sea coast at Anaklia that will be able to berth the largest freighters and be a significant asset to trade between Europe and Asia.²⁴ The Anaklia port, which represents a \$2.5 billion investment, is being constructed by the Anaklia Development Consortium and will be operational by 2020. It was recently announced that a Seattle-based leading American company SSA Marine will operate the port.²⁵ But "Investments without security will not be implemented. Prior to 2008, discussions were ongoing in the region. NATO's major allies such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, must form the United Air Force and Marine Command, which will unite the military forces of every state in the region to coordinate, become compulsive and allow the naval forces to rotate. Russia's aggressive actions that threaten the security of Ukraine and Georgia on the Mediterranean Sea, Crimea and the Black Sea. This circumstance creates a necessity to create a NATO's united Command in the region."²⁶

At this stage it is very important for Georgia to develop specific action plans to actively engage with NATO in all possible ways of strengthening the Black Sea security, based on close consultations with the Alliance. Which encompasses the full spectrum of actions in the development of defensive means against land, sea and air and hybrid threats. On the basis of preliminary consultations, NATO is interested to cooperate with Georgia in the sphere of intelligence and analytical information related to Black Sea security. It is also possible to deepen relations in the direction of joint exercises, exercises and operations. It is possible to develop cooperation in the field of strategic communications, in terms of hybrid and asymmetrical threats.²⁷

The Black Sea is a very sensitive area for Russia. NATO feels that he needs to increase his representation in the Black Sea, including in the containment context. There is a very fragile margin between retention and escalation and NATO should not take any step that can be seen as a form of escalation in Moscow.²⁸

At the NATO Ministerial in February 2016, Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO is very closely cooperating with Georgia as their close partner. This cooperation, especially in the implementation of the essential package, is part of NATO and Georgia's close relations and, of course, complying with the challenges NATO has seen on the Black Sea.²⁹

Very important is the strategic infrastructure we have on the Black Sea, which connects the Black Sea to other vital regions such as Central Asia, the Caspian Sea Pool - it's already in the direction of economic and cargo transportation. This is the shortest and most strategic exit in the Middle East. Our strategic ports and infrastructure, based on location, is very important for NATO.³⁰

Despite the utmost significance of the development of defense capabilities and resilience, NATO's further expansion in the Black Sea region presents the only adequate response to completely deter existing threats and challenges. It is evident that the only alternative to NATO's open-door policy is the direct or indirect recognition of the spheres of influence which will have a devastating effect on Euro-Atlantic security. Consequently, it is essential to maintain the positive dynamics of Georgia's integration process and take concrete steps towards the decision rendered at the Bucharest Summit, according to which Georgia will effectively become a NATO member-state.³¹

Conclusion

Depending on the above, it can be said that security is directly proportionate to economic cooperation and development. Cooperation in the field of energy is the most important because energy resources have a vital importance. Historical experience shows that dependence on the Russia's energy resources is a threat, That's why Europe is trying to look for alternative ways, and the Black Sea region is just the way it is. Therefore, the Strong States take responsibility to cooperate in order to create a safe environment in Black Sea Region that will facilitate economic cooperation and development And Georgia will be one of the strongest partners in the achievement and implementation of this goal.

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