



## Uncertainties and Weaknesses in International Security Around the Black Sea Region<sup>1</sup>

*By Eugene Kogan, Tbilisi-based defence and security expert*

***Abstract: Following the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and subsequent turn of Crimea into Fortress Russia, as well as the ensuing war in the East of Ukraine, the Black Sea Region was turned into a region full of uncertainties and weaknesses in international security. The countries surrounding the Black Sea lack a common agenda and that despite the fact that three out of six states namely, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are NATO member states, while Georgia and Ukraine aspire to become NATO members in the future. The view in these countries regarding Russia lacks cohesion, sharpness and understanding of what needs to be done to deter aggressive Russia. And they remind this author of the famous fable Swan, Pike and Crawfish written by Ivan Krylov: “When partners can’t agree their dealings come to a naught and trouble is their labour’s only fruit.”<sup>2</sup> It can also be assumed that the main impediment to regional co-operation is***

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<sup>2</sup> Sergey Armeyskov, Ivan Krylov’s Fable “Swan, Pike and Crawfish”. See online at: <https://russianuniverse.org/2014/04/06/ivan-krylovs-fable-swan-pike-and-crawfish/>.

*in the diverse histories, neighbourhood relations, individual interests, budgetary limitations, bilateral relations with Russia<sup>3</sup> and perceptions of Russia.*

*Even though the Black Sea region is called a critical intersection between Europe and the Middle East, from the Eastern Balkans to the South Caucasus, NATO has belatedly started to pay attention to the region. The below-mentioned analysis is to focus on facts that highlight uncertainties and weaknesses or rather vulnerabilities in the international security around the Black Sea Region. Finally, in conclusion, the author will provide a kind of policy recommendations to the littoral states and a forecast of what we can expect. Russia is excluded from policy recommendations since it knows exactly what it needs to do in the region namely to keep the other five littoral states in a state of suspense. Or to paraphrase Anton Chekhov's dramatic principle known as Chekhov's gun "Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there."<sup>4</sup> That is exactly how we need to see potential Russian action in the Black Sea namely, it must go off.*

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<sup>3</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, "Black Sea Defended. NATO Responses to Russia's Black Sea Offensive", Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), Strategic Report Number: 2, p. 4, see online at: [https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id\\_plik=2684](https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=2684) – online on 8 July 2016.

<sup>4</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chekhov%27s\\_gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chekhov%27s_gun).

## Introduction

It can be ascertained that until the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 the Black Sea Region was perceived as a region with certain problems but certainly not of a military nature. As a result, this region was neither high on the international community agenda nor on the radar screen of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member states, and that despite membership of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey in NATO. Furthermore, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government thought back in 2014 that they were capable to handle President Vladimir Putin's Russia single-handed, NATO assistance was not required and non-NATO members such as Georgia and Ukraine should not be involved since they are minor actors in the region and should not be consulted. This however proved to be the wrong policy line and the security situation around the region has sharply deteriorated. Furthermore, Turkey's policy of *status quo* proved to be untenable after Russian illegal annexation of Crimea and a turn of Crimea into Fortress Russia because the balance of power in the Black Sea region has shifted in favour of Russia, although Turkey is not yet ready to admit this point.

### **Turkey's Policy of Status Quo in the Black Sea Endangers the Littoral States Except Russia**

Turkey and Russia considered that maintaining the status quo in the region was and still is a preferable solution by stressing in particular the maritime security dimension by considering any revision of the Montreux Convention of 1936 as taboo and by

enhancing co-operation through the Black Sea Naval Force (BLACKSEAFOR) and Black Sea Harmony initiatives. The non-revision of the terms of the Montreux Treaty could put Turkey at odds with some of its NATO allies as was evident during the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008 and the terms of engagement of US warships in the Black Sea. Furthermore, the poor state of relations among the six littoral states complicates the emergence of a viable maritime security framework necessary to meet common challenges such as fighting organised crime and nuclear smuggling.<sup>5</sup> Regarding a viable maritime security framework, Russia has for instance reduced Ukraine's share of growth in Black Sea shipments and is poised to challenge other littoral states by strengthening its competitiveness by military means. Bulgaria [in particular] is concerned about disruption to maritime trade routes because 80 per cent of its imports and exports are shipped via the Black Sea. Region wide, Black Sea shipments are important for the flow of oil, grain, fertilizer, iron ore, metals and other

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<sup>5</sup> Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "The Uncertain Times of Black Sea Regional Security", *Euxeinos*, Number: 6, 2012, p. 8, see [online at: file:///E:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Admin/My%20Documents/Downloads/Triantaphyllou\\_Euxeinos%206.pdf](file:///E:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Admin/My%20Documents/Downloads/Triantaphyllou_Euxeinos%206.pdf). It should be emphasised that BLACKSEAFOR format focuses on humanitarian emergencies and, as a result, of Russia's participation can be simply neutralised by Russia. Therefore, military co-operation in the Black Sea requires reconfiguration, going beyond the BLACKSEAFOR format. J. Bugajski and P. Doran, *ibid*, p. 6 and p. 10. For more information on the Montreux Convention and Ankara's staunch opposition to amend the Montreux Convention, see *ibid*, p. 7. For a sharp minded analysis of Turkey's policy of status quo, see Vladimir Socor, "Turkey Stalls NATO, Clings to Defunct Status Quo in the Black Sea", Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 15, Issue 116, see [online at: https://jamestown.org/program/turkey-stalls-nato-clings-to-defunct-status-quo-in-the-black-sea/](https://jamestown.org/program/turkey-stalls-nato-clings-to-defunct-status-quo-in-the-black-sea/) - online on 2 August 2018.

commodities, and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles are among the world's most critical oil-flow chokepoints. The risk of disruption to maritime trade flows is growing, and the prospect that Russia will try to increase its influence over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles should not be underestimated. Moscow [has] also intimidated Sofia from joining any kind of regional security organisations and forging any effective regional naval agreements, thus undermining efforts for maritime coordination in the Black Sea.<sup>6</sup> The risk of disruption to maritime trade flows may sound as a far-fetched scenario but it should be no longer dismissed out of hand.

### **The Littoral States' Gas and Oil Dependency and Other Hazards**

In addition to [aforementioned] hard security threats and Turkey's refusal to change the *status quo* in the Black Sea region, the Kremlin continues to develop an assortment of softer hazards for the Black Sea littoral states. It manipulates energy supplies and contracts both as carrots and sticks. Bulgaria is particularly vulnerable because of its high dependence on Russian gas and oil. In the case of both Romania and Bulgaria, Kremlin-generated propaganda exploits the persistence of poor governance, the

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<sup>6</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Doran, *ibid*, p. 3. For Bulgaria's refusal to join a proposed Black Sea Fleet after warning from Moscow, see online at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/nato-bulgaria-blacksea-idUSL8N19835X> - online on 16 June 2016. See also Valentin Naumescu, "Stability, Ambiguity and Change in the Discourses of NATO Allies in the Black Sea Region: The Cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey", *Croatian International Relations Review (CIRR)*, Number: XXIII (80), 2017, p. 198, see online at: [file:///E:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Admin/My%20Documents/Downloads/CIRR\\_80\\_Valentin\\_Naumescu%20\(1\).pdf](file:///E:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Admin/My%20Documents/Downloads/CIRR_80_Valentin_Naumescu%20(1).pdf).

pervasiveness of official corruption, growing income disparities and the emergence of social strata that have not significantly benefitted from the market economy and European Union (EU) membership. Kremlin-sponsored outlets campaign against secularism, multiculturalism and liberalism in order to widen the alienation of disoriented citizens from the European project.

Russia also seeks to foster mistrust and division among Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey in order to preclude them from acting in concert or forging a strong NATO flank. Bulgaria and Turkey, in particular, remain dependent on Russian oil and gas supplies, making them susceptible to outside pressures<sup>7</sup> and both countries also wary of

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<sup>7</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Duran, *ibid*, p. 3. Domestic Bulgarian gas production covers less than 13 per cent of domestic consumption. The rest is covered by Russia, with all volumes today passing through Ukraine. See online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/bulgaria-tries-to-loosen-russian-grip-with-new-gas-pipeline-deals/a-42695513> - online on 23 February 2018. In the Bulgarian national gas market, Gazprom enjoys the power of monopoly pricing. In the past decade, Bulgaria has paid on average between 20 per cent and 30 per cent more than Germany for its Russian gas supply. For the complete article, see Martin Vladimirov, "[GGP] Can Russia Use Energy to Renew Its Grip on Bulgaria?", *Natural Gas News*, see online at: <https://www.naturalgasworld.com/ggp-can-russia-use-energy-to-renew-its-grip-on-bulgaria-61873> - see online on 9 June 2018. Russia supplied 53 per cent of gas to Turkey in 2016. "Gas Supply Changes in Turkey", *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, pp. 1-2, see online at: <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Gas-Supply-Changes-in-Turkey-Insight-24.pdf>. Turkey's major concern in relations with the current gas suppliers relates to its biggest gas supplier, Russia, from which it currently imports 53 per cent (24.54 billion cubic metres (bcm)) of its total natural gas consumption. This has led to both energy security concerns and potential geopolitical risks. Consequently, Turkey has been trying to decrease its energy dependence on Russia by reducing the share of gas in the energy mix and expanding downstream infrastructure to ensure alternative import sources and supply. There is no doubt that these measures will strengthen the position of Turkish companies in negotiations for new contracts with Gazprom as well as

each other. Russia sees it as vital to keep pressure on the coastlines and activities of her nearest NATO member states; states like Turkey, which have immensely important choke points like the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, as well as the oil-drilling activities of states like Bulgaria.<sup>8</sup> It appears that by the combination of fostering mistrust and maintaining pressure Russia has successfully sowed the seeds of discord.

In addition, after settling a dispute at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with Ukraine about Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) around Serpent's Island in 2009, Romania recently started oil explorations in the region. However, Bucharest's cumbersome win in 2009 is partially invalidated by Russia's non-recognition of the court's decision. Now that the two countries are maritime neighbours, bilateral disputes are far more likely: Russia has the capacity to obstruct explorations, force the withdrawal of Romanian companies, bloc

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other suppliers after the current contracts expire in the 2020s. Nevertheless, the figures show that Turkey is in fact increasing its energy dependence on Russia - by concurrently building new projects such as the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). "Gas Supply Changes in Turkey", p. 8. Having no available alternatives to achieve its goal, Turkey, contrary to its energy policy, will strengthen its import dependence on Russia with Turkish Stream. Ibid, p. 13. The share of Russian gas in Turkey's natural gas import decreased to 51.8 per cent in 2017 from 52.9 per cent in 2016. See online at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/turkey/turkey-hits-record-gas-consumption-and-imports-in-2017/18943> - see online on 21 February 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Angus Ross and Andrew Savchenko, "The Black Sea: How Russia is Looking to Cause Chaos for NATO", National Interest, see online at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-black-sea-how-russia-looking-cause-chaos-nato-25681> - online on 3 May 2018. For Bulgaria's recent oil-drilling activities, see online at: <https://sofiaglobe.com/2018/07/11/bulgaria-opens-black-sea-for-new-oil-exploration/>.

commercial flow from the Danube River to the Black Sea, or even attack Romanian capabilities in the EEZ. As the EU has not prioritized the Black Sea energy route, nor has NATO put energy security on the agenda, Bucharest must fend for itself to preserve its energy independence and free movement in the Black Sea.<sup>9</sup>

Romania is also vulnerable to hybrid warfare, particularly aimed at critical infrastructure — since corruption has stunted Romania's post-communist modernisation — and information warfare. Despite formulating national security policies independently of Russia, Romania remains susceptible to Moscow-launched strategic narratives aimed at sowing confusion and disunity within the Euro-Atlantic community. Though the national consensus that Russia constitutes a threat remains intact — unlike in many other European countries — Russian disinformation has managed to transform sources of security, such as ballistic missile defence (BMD), into perceived sources of insecurity. Russian disinformation has also tremendously hindered regional solidarity and Romania's relationship with its neighbours.<sup>10</sup>

It can be said that thus far Russian policy of intimidation has been successful, and leaders of Bulgaria and Turkey maintained and

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<sup>9</sup> Iulia-Sabina Joja, "Dealing with the Russian Lake Next Door: Romania and Black Sea Security", see online at: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/dealing-with-the-russian-lake-next-door-romania-and-black-sea-security/> - online on 15 August 2018. For potential Russian obstruction of exploration in the Romanian EEZ, see Stephen Blank, "NATO, Russia and the Black Sea", see online at: <https://sldinfo.com/2018/07/nato-russia-and-the-black-sea/> - see online on 11 July 2018.

<sup>10</sup> I-S. Joja, *ibid.*

continue to maintain a cautious position towards NATO since the latter cannot guarantee secure and alternative supply of gas and oil. And surprisingly enough Russia has also successfully turned BMD from a source of security into source of insecurity by portraying Deveselu BMD base as anti-Russian and threat to Russia thus causing a degree of anxiety in Romania.<sup>11</sup>

### **Lack of Regional Co-operation**

A key component to enhancing security is the intensification of regional co-operation. Currently, there is little regional integration and infrequent interaction among NATO's Black Sea states, and an absence of well-defined contingency plans in case of a Russian military assault. Romania and Bulgaria conduct no bilateral naval exercises, possess no common surveillance or early warning capabilities, and have no collective defence plan.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the governments of Romania and Bulgaria realised that they have neglected their territorial defence capabilities since the early 2000s. Both Bucharest and Sofia found themselves possessing armed forces that were underfinanced, underequipped and unprepared for the new type of threats.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For portraying Deveselu base as anti-Russian and threat to Russia, see David Blair and Matthew Day, "Russia Cries Foul as NATO Activates Missile Defences in Europe", The Telegraph, see online at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/12/russia-cries-foul-as-nato-activates-a-missile-defence-shield-in/>. See also a smartly prepared analysis on the same issue prepared by Nicholas Dima, "Russia's Opposition to US Missile Defense in Romania", Selous Foundation for Public Policy Research (SFPPR), see online at: <http://sfppr.org/2016/06/russias-opposition-to-u-s-missile-defense-in-romania/> - online on 2 June 2016.

<sup>12</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Doran, *ibid.*, p. 5. I would add that lack of regional co-operation also include Turkey due to the aforementioned factors mentioned in notes 2 and 14.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Doran *ibid.*, p. 4.

Romania began to address the aforementioned shortcomings, while Bulgaria is still lagging behind.

Among NATO members in the Black Sea region only Turkey has fully developed anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. However, Ankara's ASW capabilities are divided between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and their readiness put to the test by Russia's assertiveness.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the Black Sea eastern flank of NATO remains vulnerable to any potential attack from and by Russia and is not yet ready to defend itself.

Besides, Bulgarian officials believe that Ankara has a more obstructive stance, as it views Black Sea security to be a regional [and not international, author's words] matter to be decided solely by the littoral states. In addition, Turkey's strategic partnership with Russia has played a decisive role in Ankara's refusal to involve NATO more substantially in the Black Sea. According to Bulgarian officials, media reports about the potential formation of a joint fleet by Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey stirred public outrage. Given Bulgaria's history, it is difficult for many Bulgarians to accept that their navy could be under Turkish command within a potential rotational command structure. By rejecting the idea of a joint fleet, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov was catering to that part of the population. [However] He was also wary of the Russian lobby in Bulgaria, fearing

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<sup>14</sup> George Visan, "Growing Submarine Threat in the Black Sea", Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume: 15, Issue: 1, see online at: <https://jamestown.org/program/growing-submarine-threat-black-sea/> - see online on 19 January 2018.

retribution if Sofia openly pit itself against Moscow.<sup>15</sup> As long as memories of the past continue to dominate Bulgarian-Turkish agenda and as long as Bulgaria remains under the shadow of Russia, regional co-operation remains hindered. Although annexation of Crimea has changed the status quo in the Black Sea in favour of Russia and left Turkey struggling alone, Turkey is not yet willing to amend Montreux Convention and that makes regional co-operation very difficult if not impossible.

Besides the changed status quo over the past few years, Russia has steadily upgraded its military posture and matched it with an uncompromising and assertive information campaign. Russia's actions were in focus at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, when Allied leaders clearly stated that "Russia's recent activities and policies have reduced stability, increased unpredictability,

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<sup>15</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Duran, *ibid.*, p. 6. I dare say that there is no such thing as Turkey's strategic partnership with Russia since Russia perceives Turkey as a junior partner and behaves accordingly. For further information on the lack of strategic partnership, see Eugene Kogan, "Russian-Turkish Relations and the Realities in the Black Sea Region", Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS), Expert Opinion Paper, Number: 28, 2014, pp. 1-12, see online at: <http://gfsis.org/media/download/library/articles/kogan/28-kogan-ENG.pdf>; E. Kogan, "Russian-Turkish Relations and their Impact on NATO and the EU", European Security and Defence (ESD), Number: 2/3, 2018, pp. 28-30. Perhaps historic examples of German-French and German-Polish reconciliation can be considered in case of Bulgaria and Turkey. After all, German-French and German-Polish enmity is well-known fact and three countries are members of NATO. Furthermore, establishment of the Weimar Battlegroup (Polish: *Weimarska Grupa Bojowa*; abbreviation: EU BG I/2013) as a multinational Battlegroup under Polish leadership, in which Germany and France also participate as members of the Weimar Triangle may be a useful example of how historical troubles can be peacefully and to each other advantage solved. See online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar\\_Battlegroup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Battlegroup). For refusal of Bulgaria to join the proposed Black Sea Fleet, see note 5.

and changed the security environment."<sup>16</sup> And that reaction was presented two years and three months after Crimea. In other words, NATO reaction was not just belated but also inadequate. In light of the [aforementioned] regional realities and security challenges, NATO has strengthened its deterrence and defence posture with tailored forward presence measures. The multinational brigade in Craiova, for which Romania is a framework nation, forms the land component of the forward presence. Currently ten Allies – Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain – have committed to it, contributing to the brigade headquarters and coordinating enhanced training.<sup>17</sup> Turkey however supports a limited and scaled-up NATO reinforcement of the Black Sea region, as long as it does not impact its interpretation of the Montreux Convention.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Turkey's lukewarm position limits NATO involvement in the region and endangers other littoral states.

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<sup>16</sup> Pavel Anastasov, "The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection", NATO Review, Number: 5, 2018, p. 1, see online at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/Also-in-2018/the-black-sea-region-a-critical-intersection-nato-security/EN/index.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> P. Anastasov, *ibid.*, p. 5. Mihai Fifor, Romania's Minister of National Defence, wants to make the multinational brigade in Craiova operational by the end of 2018. For the complete article, see online at: <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/03/13/defmin-fifor-wants-to-make-multinational-brigade-in-craiova-operational-by-end-of-2018--71917>.

<sup>18</sup> Boris Toucas, "NATO and Russia in the Black Sea: A New Confrontation?", Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Commentary, see online at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-russia-black-sea-new-confrontation> - see online on 6 March 2017.

## Unresolved Conflicts

Finally, additional uncertainty and weakness that needs to be mentioned relates to the unresolved conflicts around the Black Sea region, in particular those between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway regions of Georgia of Abkhazia and South Ossetia recognised by Russia as independent states and the ensuing war in the east of Ukraine. As Anastasov correctly states, the conflicts create ‘gray zones’ that potentially could or are already fuelling organised crime, smuggling and radicalisation. It requires little effort to see how Russia exploits these conflicts for political intimidation of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the unresolved conflict between Georgia and Russia could be ignited at any moment and could put aforementioned issues of maritime security in jeopardy. As a new research paper by the Bucharest-based New Strategy Center asserts, whenever such conflicts occurred, Russia promptly stepped in to stop hostilities for a while without addressing their root causes and typically introducing a ‘temporary’ peacekeeping force which never intended to leave the scene, thus securing a permanent Russian military presence. The experience of the past two decades has confirmed that Russian strategic planners are able to turn those conflicts on and off at will depending on Moscow's political and military interests at the moment<sup>20</sup> and the

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<sup>19</sup> P. Anastasov, *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> “Vulnerabilities and Opportunities in the Black Sea Region. Romanian Perspective; Turkish Perspective”, New Strategy Center and Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, p. 7, see online at: <https://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Policy-Paper-New-Strategy->

West at large has found no answer of how to counter Russian involvement besides the usual rhetoric of condemning Russian activity.

As for the ensuing conflict in the east of Ukraine it saps Ukrainian government's energy, resources and diverts attention from other pressing domestic problems whether of economic and/or social nature. Russia is fully aware of this fact and uses it to its own advantage. Thus, the ensuing conflict in the east of Ukraine is expected to continue.

## Conclusion

The aforementioned cases underline the inability of the littoral states to solve accumulated security problems. Neither countries alone, nor under NATO's umbrella are capable to face belligerent Russia for a variety of reasons. Thus, the author comes with a list of suggestions that may help the littoral states to overcome their security deficit.

A common security threat assessment is needed for NATO's Black Sea eastern flank that would classify the level of vulnerability of each NATO state, both in the military and non-military realms.<sup>21</sup> I would add that a common security threat assessment should also include Georgia and Ukraine as the only non-NATO member states that strive to join the Alliance. Both countries are very vulnerable to any attack from Russia and, as non-NATO members, both countries have to rely on their military alone. If as Bugajski

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[Center-and-Marmara-Group-February-20171.pdf](#) - see online February 2017.

<sup>21</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Doran, *ibid.*, p. 15. See also V. Naumescu, *ibid.*, p. 205.

and Doran say the governments of Romania and Bulgaria were largely unprepared for the prospect that the NATO umbrella *does not automatically shield them* [author's italics] from regional security dangers<sup>22</sup> than what can be said about the governments of Georgia and Ukraine that are miles away from the NATO membership?

NATO's eastern flank countries need to undertake more elaborate plans regarding their civil and military response strategies to acts of subversion and aggression. Both Romania and Bulgaria must identify domestic vulnerabilities that could be targeted by Moscow and prepare a comprehensive and credible response framework.<sup>23</sup> It can be added that the experiences of Romania and Bulgaria should be shared with Georgia and Ukraine. Thus, these four countries' defences would be bolstered and prepared for any potential attack by Russia, a point that would be dismissed out of hand by Russian officials, but that could be expected.

Economic development is crucial for NATO states in the Black Sea as this would help shield each society against Russia's disinformation, political penetration and populist appeals to sectors of society that have not benefitted from EU membership. Constanta and Batumi (in Georgia) could also play a major role as key ports in trade and economic investment.<sup>24</sup> We need to add to the list Varna and Burgas as major key ports and East-West transport corridors of Bulgaria and also Odessa's port as the

largest port in the Ukrainian Black Sea basin. There is no doubt whatsoever that the littoral states' economic prosperity and enhanced security are the best indicators for withstanding Russia's offensive and wide-ranging strategy that incorporates military, informational, economic, energy-wide and softer hazard elements.

Although Vladimir Socor says that Turkey will remain an irreplaceable pillar for NATO in the Black Sea, the current author disagrees with him. However, the author agrees that the Alliance needs a second pillar country in this region. Romania can never take over that role with its own resources, but it could gradually step into some functions associated with a pillar country. While any competition would be out of question, complementarity would seem to answer the needs of an increasingly fluid security environment<sup>25</sup> that is likely to remain fluid in the coming years with Russia looking to exploit any opportunity to surprise other littoral states.

Therefore, we can expect a) a continued lack of regional co-operation since NATO cannot force its members to co-operate if they do not wish to; b) continued wish of Georgia and Ukraine to be included in the regional co-operation is a welcome gesture but they are not the ones who decide on co-operation; as a result, positive signals will continue to come from NATO HQ but in practice both countries' wishes are not going to be granted; c) further militarisation of the Black Sea region headed by Russia; d) Russia's continuing use of gas and oil as energy weapons to reign on Bulgaria and Turkey,

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<sup>22</sup> J. Bugajski and P. Doran, *ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

while looking for obstructing Romania's work over gas resources around the Serpents' Island; e) unwavering stand of Russia regarding unresolved or protracted conflicts that Moscow learned to manipulate skilfully to the detriment of the West at large.

This leaves the international security around the Black Sea region in limbo without a clear solution on the horizon. Despite such a gloomy outcome perhaps littoral states can learn a lesson or two from the experience of the Baltic and Scandinavian states. For that they require unity, patience, mutual understanding of each other's shortcomings, and readiness to help each other as it was done in the case of the Baltic States, when Scandinavian countries helped the latter and

the Baltic States helped each other. Furthermore, Bulgaria and Turkey in particular should be ready to overcome their painful historical legacies by learning from the reconciliation of Germany-France and Germany-Poland in particular, and ultimately be ready for co-operation in the face of Russian adversary. The latter point is likely to be the most difficult one to accomplish since littoral states differ on their perception of Russia. Russia knows this and also knows how to sow the seeds of discord between the littoral states. In order not to fall prey to Russian subversive actions research think-tanks from the Black Sea region should provide a lucid analysis of Russian actions and preventive measures that should be undertaken by their governments.

### **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ASW	anti-submarine warfare
bcm	billion cubic metres
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Force
BMD	ballistic missile defence
CEPA	Center for European Policy Analysis
CIRR	Croatian International Relations Review
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
ESD	European Security and Defence
EU	European Union
EU BG	EU Battlegroup

GFSIS	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
ICJ	International Court of Justice
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPP	Nuclear Power Plant
SFPPR	Selous Foundation for Public Policy Research

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