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- BLACK SEA SECURITY
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- COOPERATION VS CONFRONTATION

The Black Sea

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE BLACK SEA: PERSPECTIVE FROM REGIONAL PLAYERS	3
<i>Yar Batoh</i>	
WARGAMING OF THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE STRATEGIES FOR THE REGION	10
<i>Natalia Wojtowicz</i>	
BLACK SEA SECURITY DEADLOCKS: NATO-RUSSIA CONFRONTATION	18
<i>Maryna Vorotnyuk</i>	
NAVAL WARFARE SCENARIOS FOR 2020	24
<i>Andrii Klymenko</i>	
ENERGY CRACKS OF THE BLACK SEA SECURITY.	29
<i>Mykhailo Gonchar, Vitalii Martyniuk, Igor Stukalenko</i>	
BLACK SEA POLICY OF UKRAINE	37
<i>Hanna Shelest, Yevgeniya Gaber, Artem Fylypenko</i>	
TURKEY'S BLACK SEA POLICY: BETWEEN "RUSSIAN LAKE" AND "NATO'S BACKYARD"	43
<i>Yevgeniya Gaber</i>	
BLACK SEA INSECURITIES AND ANKARA'S DILEMMAS	53
<i>Dimitrios Triantaphyllou</i>	
GEORGIA AND THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER COOPERATION.	61
<i>Tengiz Pkhaladze</i>	
US ROLE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION	66
<i>Volodymyr Dubovyk</i>	
THE BLACK SEA AREA IN JAPAN'S EXPANDING STRATEGIC HORIZONS.	72
<i>Violetta Udovik</i>	

GEORGIA AND THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER COOPERATION

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Security of NATO's eastern flank depends a lot on the situation in the Black Sea region. Today the Alliance is trying to develop a common strategy on this issue. In this process, it is highly important to appropriately assess littoral countries' role and capabilities in the common security architecture. Georgia is one of the essential partners for NATO. It makes significant contribution to the Euro-Atlantic security through active engagement in the Alliance's international missions, as well as the intensive development of efficient partnership programmes. Strengthening Georgia's and other coastal countries' defensibility will considerably advance the elaboration of the Alliance's Black Sea strategy and enhance security of the eastern flank of NATO.

The Black Sea has always had a special role for European development and security. From time to time, since the Golden Fleece age to the present days, this role has been changeable: The sea has served as either an interconnector or a border between the West and the East. Consequently, its name has changed several times: the Pontus Sea, Hospitable Sea, Inhospitable Sea. Such political and geopolitical twists and turns always had an enormous impact on coastal countries' prospects and destiny.

In the 20th century, this place served as a separation line between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, preventing cooperation even among littoral states. After the Cold War, when nations freed from the Soviet empire decided to regain their historical place in the European family, the Black Sea once again started its transformation into a "hospitable" place for international cooperation. The West again turned its

attention towards the Black Sea region and a number of partnership initiatives developed.

Today the Black Sea countries are facing another challenging milestone. Russia's growing ambitions, aggressiveness, especially towards neighbours, military invasion and occupation of parts of Georgia, illegal annexation of Crimea, and war in Donbas extremely jeopardised security of the entire region. Since 2014 (Crimea's annexation), NATO has finally started developing a policy towards the Black Sea and the region has gradually become part of the Alliance's agenda. However, a unified strategy for long-lasting security is still a long way off. Differences in the visions and perceptions of member states still require further scrutiny and concessions. Nevertheless, security guarantees of NATO countries are fairly sustainable, but, at the same time,

the real threats for their regional security lie beyond NATO borders, on the east coast of the Black Sea, in Georgia and Ukraine.



Georgia is a stronghold of the Western alliances and NATO's eastern flank in the region, and has demonstrated the best possible performance expected from an aspirant country

Georgia in the Euro-Atlantic Security System

Georgia is the smallest among the Black Sea littoral states. However, this tiny country has strategic importance. Georgia is located at a critical nexus of the South Caucasus region that bridges the west with the east and the north with the south. It provides access to the Black Sea for eight out of the 14 landlocked countries of the Eurasian continent and opens wide opportunities for trans-regional cooperation. A straight virtual line on the map, from the north to the south borders of Georgia forms a gateway to the “Oxygen Corridor” for the East–West cooperation. This safeguards economic opportunities and connection for European markets as well as Asian resources. If the international community accepts shutting down this corridor, it will affect overall prosperity and welfare.

Georgia is a stronghold of the Western alliances and NATO's eastern flank in the region, and has demonstrated the best possible performance expected from an aspirant country. Eighteen years have passed since Georgia officially declared its request to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.¹ Twelve years ago, in Bucharest, NATO leaders promised Georgia and Ukraine they would one day join the Alliance.² Over this period, Georgia has established its democratic credentials as a frontrunner in the region. It is an unshakable, committed, reliable, and burden-sharing partner to NATO, firmly standing to protect common welfare and security. Georgia has relatively small defence forces, up to 37,000, and no navy. Subsequently, one can question the country's capability to contribute to the Black Sea security, but such an impression is very superficial and delusive. The Georgian army is well trained and completely interoperable with NATO. Since 1999, Georgia actively participates in NATO-led international missions. The country continues its participation in Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan and remains one of the largest contributors to the mission.³

In 2014, Georgia received the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP) as part of the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative and joined NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative, allowing non-NATO partners to contribute to the Alliance's missions and exercises.⁴

- 1 *Statement by President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze at the EAPC Summit, NATO Prague Summit, 21-22 November 2002* [<https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm>].
- 2 *Bucharest Summit Declaration issued by Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest, NATO, 03 April 2008* [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm].
- 3 *Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures, NATO, July 2019* [https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_2019-06-RSM-Placemat.pdf].
- 4 *Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, NATO, 05 September 2014* [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm].

In 2016, at the Warsaw Summit, NATO confirmed that Georgia's relationship with the Alliance contains all the practical tools to prepare for eventual membership.⁵ Year in and year out Georgia has made valuable contributions to the international missions in Kosovo, Iraq, Central Africa, Mali, and Afghanistan. Nowadays, Georgia remains the largest per capita contributor to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Currently, Georgia meets NATO member states' standard of allocating 2% of GDP to defence and spending around 20% of the defence budget on major acquisitions.

The Substantial NATO–Georgia Package is aimed at improving Georgia's defence capabilities, increasing its resilience, enhancing interoperability with NATO, and supporting NATO membership preparation process. According to the 2016 Warsaw Summit decision, two priority areas were identified in addition to 13 initiatives under the SNGP.⁶ Currently, the SNGP consists of 14 initiatives: the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC), Defence Institutional Building School (DIBS), Logistic Capability Development, Intelligence Sharing and Secure Communications, Aviation, Air Defence, Special Operations Forces, Military Police, Acquisition, Maritime Security, Cyber Security, Strategic Communications, Crisis Management, and Counter Mobility. The Strategic and Operational Planning Initiative was successfully concluded in October 2017. Implementation of the SNGP is supervised by the deputy secretary general of NATO, whereas practical execution of each initiative is supported by experts from NATO member and partner

states. Majority of NATO experts reside in Georgia on a rotation basis and a number of experts conduct regular visits.⁷

The NATO–Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre opens up a unique opportunity for international military cooperation. The JTEC is a combined NATO–Georgia project based on Georgian and regional needs and complementary to existing training programmes, policies, and doctrines. It is tasked with strengthening the capabilities of Georgia's defence and security sector in addressing a range of threats, as well as improving the interoperability of Georgian and Allied Forces, and contributing to regional security cooperation. It will achieve these goals through promotion of inter-agency coordination, facilitation of national, bilateral, and multilateral exercises, as well as training, evaluation, and certification activities, supported by the use of modern training technologies – live, virtual, and constructive simulation.

As a result of the Russian military aggression in 2008, Georgian naval forces were destroyed. It was decided to merge the Georgian navy with the Georgian coast guard the following year. This reform was extremely important for Georgia's defensibility. In 2008, in line with foreign partners' recommendations, the coast guard and the Ministry of Defence navy have been integrated into the one maritime force as the Coast Guard under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) Border Police of Georgia. The MIA Border Police Coast Guard Department was formed as a multifunctional maritime agency, which autonomously or in cooperation with other relevant

5 *Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016*, NATO, 09 July 2016 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm].

6 *Substantial NATO-Georgia Package*, Ministry of Defence of Georgia [<https://mod.gov.ge/en/page/65/substantial-package>].

7 *Ibid*

agencies is involved in control of the legal regime of the territorial waters, carries out maritime defence, border policing, legal and administrative activities, conducts search and rescue operations, and protects the maritime environment. At the time of martial law, the coast guard carries out the navy functions.



As a result of the Russian military aggression in 2008, Georgian naval forces were destroyed. It was decided to merge the Georgian navy with the Georgian coast guard the following year

In spite of the heavy consequences of the Russian aggression of 2008, the infrastructure of the coast guard has been fully rehabilitated. While the patrol boats are being renovated, some of them are modernised and the others, the older ones, replaced. Permanent training and retraining of the coast guard personnel is an issue of priority. Modern radar stations of the coast guard cover the whole coastline, as well as territorial waters and exclusive economic zone of Georgia. With the assistance of friendly countries, the Joint Maritime Operations Centre has been established. The main task of the centre is to prevent and detect illicit acts and maritime incidents in the maritime space of Georgia and coordinate collaborative responses to those challenges in order to secure regional stability.⁸ The Joint Maritime Operation Centre under the

Ministry of Internal Affairs actively exchanges information with NATO command; risks are identified and prevented.

Georgian ports have often hosted NATO warships; the Alliance has also conducted joint exercises with the coast guard of Georgia. Georgia frequently hosts the Alliance's military drills. In 2019, Georgian General Staff was leading a NATO–Georgia multinational crisis response exercise for the first time. It was also the first exercise that involved NATO planning processes from start to finish.⁹ At the same time, Georgia enjoys developing bilateral military cooperation with NATO member states, especially with the US. The most ambitious US–Georgia project, Georgia Defence Readiness Program (GDRP), has officially launched in 2018. The programme is aimed at increasing the defence capabilities of the Georgian military units for territorial defence. It also provides training, management education, and mentorship to GAF tactical unit commanders and staff. The GDRP training programme contributes to the security of the Black Sea region and, thus, the stability of the greater European security environment.¹⁰

According to the NATO–Georgia Commission Statement from 03 October 2019, the Allies have increased their support for Georgia, including training of the Georgian coast guard boarding teams, enhanced interaction between Georgia's Coast Guard and NATO's Standing Naval Forces, port visits, exercises, and the sharing of information to enhance situational awareness.¹¹

8 MIA Border Police of Georgia, Coast Guard Department [<http://bpg.gov.ge/en/coast-guard>].

9 *Georgian Defence Forces Led NATO-Georgia Exercise*, NATO, 18 March 2019 [<http://www.act.nato.int/articles/georgian-defence-forces-lead-nato-georgia-exercise-2019>].

10 *The Most Ambitious Project in the History of Armed Forces of Georgia*, Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 18 May 2018 [<https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/6557/the-most-ambitious-project-in-the-history-of-the-georgian-armed-forces>].

11 *NATO-Georgia Commission Statement*, NATO, 03 October 2019 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_169323.htm?selectedLocale=en].

Conclusions

All abovementioned indicates Georgia's considerable opportunities for regional defensibility and resilience. This country, as well as other littoral states, has its distinctive niche in the Black Sea security architecture. Unique capabilities of particular countries (both NATO members and aspirants) must aggregate and complement one another. Only through such joint effort will they make conceivable elaboration and development of a unified strategy towards the region.

Today, the Black Sea region faces the real threat of a new Iron Curtain. Realisation of such a scenario will bring gravest consequences not only to Georgia and Ukraine but to the West itself. Agreeing on Russia's policy of privileged interests will not only strip the West of its important partners but also deprive of access to the Caspian Sea

resources, limit the cooperation with Asian markets, and lastly, inflict immense damage to the West–East transport corridor.

The Black Sea region is one of the crucial regions for European security. Just littoral states' efforts cannot protect it from Russia's growing ambitions. Only a firm and unified Euro-Atlantic policy could generate substantial protection of NATO's eastern flank, as well as prevention and combating hybrid threats in Europe.

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