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The Black Sea

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THE BLACK SEA AREA IN JAPAN'S EXPANDING STRATEGIC HORIZONS

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This article deals with Japan's relations with the Black Sea region. They are examined through evolution of Japan's foreign policy, including relations with post-Soviet countries. Introduction of the value-oriented diplomacy and the concept of "active pacifism" contributed greatly to Japan's further involvement with the region. It is believed that strengthening bilateral relations between Japan and Ukraine, countries that share the same universal values, can contribute to stabilisation and further development of the Black Sea area.

Significance of the Black Sea Region for Japan

The Black Sea region, though geographically distanced from Japan, has taken due place in the system of Tokyo's foreign policy priorities. Japan is interested in the strategic geographical position of the Black Sea that serves as a crossroads connecting Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Politically, the Black Sea area provides opportunities for cooperation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States, which is Japan's main security ally, and Russia – Japan's neighbour. Japan reacted to the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia by calling for non-recognition of the change of status quo by the use of force as well as for adherence to the norms and principles of international law. As an island state, it has also been

making consistent efforts in order to ensure maritime security and naval freedom at all the seas, including the Black Sea area.

In terms of economy, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) group represents an attractive market of 333 million consumers and a combined GDP of USD 2.8 trillion, accounting for 14% of Europe's economy and 4% of the world's¹. It has also served as a corridor for energy resources transportation – an important point of interest for Japan, which depends on imports for 94% of its primary energy supply².

Considering that the region is quite heterogeneous, representing nations that are members of the European Union, NATO, GUAM, Eastern Partnership, Commonwealth of Independent States, and other initiatives, Japan had been focusing on development of bilateral relations with BSEC countries and

1 *Market Intelligence*, World Tourism Organization, 2018
[<https://www.unwto.org/es/market-intelligence> access: 02 March 2020].

2 *Japan's Energy Supply Situation and Basic Policy*, Federation of Electric Power Companies in Japan, 2015
[https://www.fepec.or.jp/english/energy_electricity/supply_situation/ access: 02 March 2020].

became engaged with the region as a whole only at the beginning of the 21st century.

Evolution of Japan's Foreign Policy

Japan's strategy in the Black Sea area is closely related to its aspirations to play a more active role as a global power. The basis of Japan's modern foreign policy was laid in the post-WWII period and is reflected in its pacifist constitution as well as three foreign policy principles adopted in Japan's main foreign policy document – the *Diplomatic Bluebook* – in 1957 such as participation in the United Nations, cooperation with the Western world, and promotion of ties with the Asian nations³.

The 1990–1991 Gulf War and international reaction to Japan's financial contribution to the anti-Iraq coalition as non-corresponding to Japan's level of dependence on oil imports urged the government of Japan to adopt the Act on Cooperation with UN Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations, which allowed Japan's Self-Defence Forces to be dispatched abroad. Japan also provided support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and participated in the reconstruction of Iraq.

In 2013, the government of Japan adopted the concept of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" or "active pacifism" as the basic principle for Japan's national security strategy promoting Japan's active contribution to regional and global stability and security in cooperation with the international community while maintaining defence-oriented posture and observing the Three Non-Nuclear Principles⁴. Thus, starting from the 1990s, Japan has commenced its transition to an

"ordinary country", which possesses control over its military instruments and plays a more active role in international relations.

Post-Soviet Area in Japan's Foreign Policy Strategy

The collapse of the Soviet Union greatly influenced Japan's foreign policy. Firstly, it prompted Japanese government to actively seek resolution of the issue of the Northern Territories⁵ and signing of a peace treaty with Russia. Secondly, it created an opportunity for Japan to establish relations with the newly independent states, including such future BSEC members as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Thirdly, Japan became involved in international efforts aimed at providing assistance to the post-Soviet countries, consisting of humanitarian, financial, and technical support. Finally, Japan has played an important role in the process of elimination of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

As for the political dimension, Japan focused on establishing closer ties with the Central Asian states, rich in natural resources such as oil and gas. The main reasons for this were Japan's growing demand for diversification of the energy supplies as well as the need to stabilise the region for improvement of Eurasia's security environment. In 1992, Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Watanabe Michio visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and in 1993–1994, the presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan paid their visits to Japan.

The next stage for promoting relations with Central Asia was developed in virtue of

3 2. *The Basis of Japan's Diplomacy (Ni, Wagakuni Gaikou no Kichō)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1957 [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1957/s32-1-2.htm> access: 02 March 2020].

4 *Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace*, Government of Japan, 2014 [https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2014/spring-summer2014/japans_roactive_contribution_to_peace.html access: 02 March 2020].

5 Four islands located off the northeast coast of Hokkaido in Japan, namely Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu, also known as the Kuril Islands.

an initiative by Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro adopted in 1997, known as “Eurasian Diplomacy” or “Silk Road Diplomacy”, which was aimed at strengthening the ties with the region through multilateral cooperation. In 2004, Japan established Central Asia plus Japan dialogue in order to strengthen collaboration among the Central Asian states under Japan’s leadership. It is believed that this framework has become a sort of alternative to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by another regional power – China.



The launch of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” led to the establishment of GUAM plus Japan dialogue in 2007, aimed at promotion of cooperation between such Black Sea area states as Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, on one side, and Japan, on the other

Such policies were greatly supported by over USD 5 billion⁶ of Japan’s Official Development Assistance provided to Central Asia in order to support development of the region.

The “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and a New Phase of Relations with the Black Sea Area

The Black Sea region appeared in Japan’s foreign policy agenda with the introduction of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” by Minister for Foreign Affairs Aso Taro in

2006. In his speech “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons”,⁷ Minister Aso stressed the importance of putting emphasis on “universal values” such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy, while carrying out foreign policies. He proposed an idea of creating an arc of freedom and prosperity at the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, stretching from Northeast Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states, which would be supported by Japan. As a result, “value-oriented diplomacy” was set as the fourth pillar of Japan’s foreign policy, having become an important instrument of strengthening Japan’s relations with the partners that value freedom and democracy, as well as extending Japan’s diplomatic reach to new regions.

It is important that the Black Sea, Ukraine, GUAM, as well as the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) were mentioned for the first time in Japan’s foreign policy concept. In detail, Aso Taro mentioned the need to bring stability to the GUAM nations and highlighted the efforts of Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Romania that formed the CDC, which, in the minister’s opinion, “promotes formation of stronger roots for democracy in the Baltic-Black Sea region as well as in the Caspian Sea area”. He expressed a view that Japan “should foster as many opportunities as possible for contact with the countries of the CDC as well as countries such as those in the GUAM”, stressing that “it is best to pursue cooperation with countries that are capable of partnering with Japan”.⁸

6 V. Udovik, *Зовнішня політика Японії на пострадянському просторі (1991-2016 рр.)* [Japan’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Region [1991–2016]], “Skhid”, September–October 2016, p. 58.

7 *Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons”*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html access: 02 March 2020].

8 Ibid

The launch of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” led to the establishment of GUAM plus Japan dialogue in 2007, aimed at promotion of cooperation between such Black Sea area states as Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, on one side, and Japan, on the other, in such fields as tourism, energy, transit and transportation, environmental protection, trade, and investment. In 2015, the parties adopted the Japan–GUAM Cooperation Programme, in which they outlined main goals of cooperation, including consultations on a “broad range of actual problems of international and regional relations in order to maintain international peace and security on basis of the UN Charter, generally recognized principles and norms of international law, particularly those related to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states”.⁹ This meant that after the occupation of Crimea, the scope of consultations between Japan and GUAM was extended to the security area.

The main instruments of cooperation between GUAM and Japan are meetings at ministerial and national coordinators’ levels, working organs of GUAM with participation of Japanese experts, ad hoc expert groups, workshops, and seminars. GUAM plus Japan meetings have been held six times: twice in 2007, in 2008, 2009, 2013, and 2015; Foreign Ministers’ meetings – seven times: in 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Workshops on energy security, medical field, and water management have been held as a series of GUAM–Japan workshops on a regular basis.

The deepening of relations between Japan and the Black Sea area was greatly backed by Japan’s think tanks and foreign policy experts. The year 2005 saw the first Japan–Wider Black Sea Area Dialogue, “Peace and Prosperity of the Wider Black Sea Area and Japan’s Role”, organised by the Global Forum of Japan¹⁰ under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Yomiuri Shimbun, one of Japan’s leading newspapers. The 2nd Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue “Japan and Black Sea Area in the Rapidly Changing World” (2007), the 3rd Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue “Prospects of Changing Black Sea Area and Role of Japan” (2010), as well as the 4th Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue on “How to Develop Japan and Black Sea Area Cooperation” (2013) were supported by BSEC and held with the participation of its representatives.

Following the policy recommendations offered at the above-mentioned forums, in 2010 Japan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) to BSEC. The status of Sectoral Dialogue Partnership is very flexible and it allows dialogue not to be restricted to any specific field. It enables Japan to attend the meetings as well as to observe discussions including working group meetings, which are held at BSEC member states and high-level councils such as foreign ministers’ meetings¹¹.

Besides the Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue, the opportunities for cooperation between Japan and BSEC were discussed on a number of occasions. In 2012, BSEC Secretary General Victor Tvircun paid a courtesy visit to Parliamentary Vice-Minister for

9 *Japan-GUAM Cooperation Program*, GUAM Organization, 2015 [https://guam-organization.org/en/guam-japan-cooperation-program/ access: 02 March 2020].

10 *Peace and Prosperity in the Wider Black Sea Area and the Role of Japan*, “Report of the Japan–Wider Black Sea Area Dialogue”, Global Forum of Japan, 27 November 2005 [http://www.gfj.jp/e/dialogue/20051127.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

11 *Report of the 4th Japan-Black Sea Area Dialogue*, Global Forum of Japan, 20 February 2013, pp. 41–42 [http://www.gfj.jp/e/dialogue/20130220.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

Foreign Affairs Hamada Kazuyuki in Tokyo¹²; in 2013, BSEC and Japan held the Seminar on Disaster Prevention Measures in Japan organised in Istanbul within the framework of the cooperation of BSEC and Japan as BSEC Sectoral Dialogue member¹³; in 2020, BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) Secretary General Michael Christides held meetings with heads of missions of SDPs including Japan in Ankara¹⁴.



Enlisting of value-oriented diplomacy in the National Security Strategy as one of Japan's priorities has long-term implications and provides a positive environment for further strengthening of relations with the Black Sea region

It should be noted that although the name of the fourth pillar of Japan's foreign policy – the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” – has not been used frequently in Japan, value-oriented diplomacy is deeply rooted in the foreign policy thinking of Japan's political elites. The National Security Strategy of Japan adopted by Prime Minister Abe in 2013 identified maintaining and protecting the international order based on universal

values and rules as one of Japan's national interests. The above strategy also mentions “strengthening cooperation based on universal values to resolve global issues” – in virtue of supporting democratisation through proactive and strategic use of Official Development Assistance, responding to development challenges and global issues, mainstreaming the concept of human security, strengthening free trade frameworks, further people-to-people exchanges, etc. – as one of the strategic approaches that Japan should take to its national security¹⁵. Enlisting of value-oriented diplomacy in the National Security Strategy as one of Japan's priorities has long-term implications and provides a positive environment for further strengthening of relations with the Black Sea region.

Cooperation between Japan and BSEC States

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Japan has been providing support to post-Soviet countries, aimed at stabilisation, democratisation, and assistance for transition to market economy. In total, Japan granted USD 3 billion including technical assistance such as accepting trainees from and sending experts to the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as emergency humanitarian assistance and credits to facilitate trade and economy. In

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- 12 *Visit of BSEC Secretary General Tvircun to Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hamada Kazuyuki (Tovirukun Kokkai Keizai Kyōryoku Kikō (BSEC) Jimu Kyōkuchō no Hamada Seimukan Hyōkei)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 15 November 2012 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/24/11/1115_05.html access: 02 March 2020].
 - 13 *Summary Proceedings of the Seminar on Disaster Prevention Measures in Japan*, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 2013 [<http://www.bsec-organization.org/UploadedDocuments/AreasOfCooperation/EmergencyAssistance/Reports/Annex%20III%20-%20Summary%20Proceedings%20BSEC-Japan%20Seminar.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].
 - 14 *Working Visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and on Consultations with BSEC Observers and Sectoral Dialogue Partners (Ankara, 20-23 January 2020)*, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 2020 [[http://www.bsec-organization.org/news/16368working-visit-to-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-and-on-consultations-with-bsec-observers-and-sectoral-dialogue-partners-\(ankara-20-23-january-2020\)](http://www.bsec-organization.org/news/16368working-visit-to-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-and-on-consultations-with-bsec-observers-and-sectoral-dialogue-partners-(ankara-20-23-january-2020)) access: 02 March 2020].
 - 15 *Japan's Security Policy*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html access: 02 March 2020].

addition, Japan has also been participating in multilateral assistance efforts to the states of the former Soviet Union. It hosted the Tokyo Conference on Assistance to the New Independent States in October 1992, provided USD 20 million to the International Science and Technology Centre, contributed to the USD 24 billion support package, and cooperated in rescheduling of debts. Also, Japan has actively provided technical assistance, food aid, and financial support to the reform efforts of Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Japan's assistance to the region amounts to approximately USD 4.5 billion in total.¹⁶

Today Japan is concentrating its support efforts on providing support for Ukraine and Moldova; sustainable development of these states is indispensable for the stability of the Black Sea region. In response to the situation in Ukraine, since 2014 Japan announced and is steadily implementing assistance of approximately USD 1.85 billion, which is one of the largest-scale on individual country basis, to support Ukrainian reforms. In addition, Japan implemented in Ukraine such projects as the Seminar on Knowledge and Experience-Sharing in order to provide assistance for Ukraine's democratisation (2015); provided Economic Reform Development Policy Loan aimed to support rebuilding the state finances and carrying out a range of institutional reforms (2015–2016),¹⁷ and launched the Project for Capacity Development of the Public Broadcasting of Ukraine (2017)¹⁸.

As for the Caucasus, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, in 2018, the Japanese government launched Japan's Caucasus Initiative consisting of such pillars as Assistance for Human Resource Development for State-Building (training programmes for self-sustained development) and Assistance for Paving the Way to Appealing Caucasus (infrastructure development and business environment improvement support)¹⁹.

Development of infrastructure projects and economic ties with the Black Sea partners is another important direction for Japan's foreign policy in the region. Infrastructure and environmental protection assistance has been provided through Japan International Cooperation Agency in the form of Official Development Assistance, Japan's government aid designed to promote economic development and welfare of developing countries. The main projects include East–West Highway Improvement Project in Georgia; modernisation of the port of Bourgas and extension of Sofia metro in Bulgaria; Bosphorus Rail Tube Crossing Project in Turkey; the Bucharest International Airport Rail Access Link Project in Romania; Greater Tirana Sewage System Improvement Project in Albania; Boryspil State International Airport Development Project and Modernisation of the Bortnychy Aeration Station in Ukraine.

From the 2010s, Japan has been promoting bilateral cooperation with BSEC members in the security area. In 2013, Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Defence

16 *Section 2. Objectives and Priorities of Japan's Foreign Policy*, "Diplomatic Bluebook", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1992 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1992/1992-1-2.htm access: 02 March 2020].

17 *Japan's International Cooperation*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000282089.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

18 *Maps of JICA Major Projects Ukraine*, Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2019 [https://libportal.jica.go.jp/library/Data/PlanInOperation-e/Europe/760_Ukraine-e.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

19 *Japan's Caucasus Initiative*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000436761.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

Sato Masahisa visited Azerbaijan. In 2015, Japan's State Minister of Defence Sato Akira visited Bulgaria. In 2015, Minister of Defence of Japan Nakatani Gen met his counterpart from Georgia, Khidasheli Tinatin, in Tokyo. Japan also launched bilateral security dialogues with two Black Sea regional powers – Ukraine and Russia.



***One of Japan's close partners
in the Black Sea region is
Ukraine – a country that shares
the same values and approaches
to international relations***

Consultations with Russia in a “2+2” format with the participation of the representatives from the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence were launched in 2013. Following Crimea's occupation, such consultations were put on hold, but were resumed in 2017, then held in 2018 and 2019.²⁰

In 2018, the “2+2” security consultations were held between Japan and Ukraine resulting in the signing of the Memorandum on Cooperation and Exchanges in the Defence Sector.²¹ Japan-Ukraine security cooperation was further strengthened by the meeting between Defence Ministers Andriy Zagorodniuk and Kono Taro at the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2020. Japan also plans to take part for the first time in Sea Breeze exercise in 2020, which is traditionally organised by Ukraine and the United States.²²

Japan's interest in the security environment of the Black Sea area can be explained by two reasons. First, Japan has been promoting adherence to the norms and principles of international law as well as the non-recognition of change of the status quo through the use of force around the globe. After Russian occupation of Crimea, Japan expressed support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and became the only country in Asia to introduce sanctions against Russia.

As a maritime nation, Japan has made consistent efforts in order to ensure freedom of navigation. Practical implementation of this position is reflected in Japan's support for the UN General Assembly Resolutions on the “Problem of militarisation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov”, which were adopted in 2018 and 2019.

Japan-Ukraine Synergy and the Future of the Black Sea Region

There are positive expectations regarding further development of cooperation between Japan and the Black Sea area. Except for the territorial dispute with Russia, Japan has enjoyed friendly relations with BSEC members, which provides a firm basis for their strengthening in the future. Japan is deeply involved in the dialogue with its Black Sea partners on bilateral, regional, and international levels on a wide range of issues, including democratisation support, economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and improvement of security

20 *Bilateral Cooperation and Exchanges in Defense Area (Kakkoku to no Bōei Kyōryoku Kōryū)*, Ministry of Defense of Japan [https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/index.html access: 02 March 2020].

21 *First Ukraine-Japan Bilateral Consultations on Security Issues Held in Tokyo*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2018 [https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/67780-v-tokio-vidbulisya-pershi-ukrajinskyko-japonsyky-konsulytacijy-z-pitany-bezpeki access: 02 March 2020].

22 *20 Countries to Participate in Sea Breeze 2020 Exercise*, “KyivPost”, 08 February 2020 [https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/20-countries-to-participate-in-sea-breeze-2020-exercise.html access: 02 March 2020].

environment. Japan's expertise as an active member of the UN and G7, world's third economy, technological know-how leader, and one of the biggest international donors provides vast opportunities for the stabilisation of the region as well as promoting of prosperity and well-being of its people.

On the other hand, Japan's involvement in the international processes in the Black Sea region has allowed it to broaden the horizons of its international outreach. With the introduction of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and adoption of the National Security Strategy, value-oriented diplomacy has become an important pillar of Japan's foreign policy. Integrity of its policies towards Central Asia, the Black Sea region, the Balkans, Eastern and Central Europe has been ensured. Such strategy provides Japan with an opportunity of better understanding the dynamics of regional affairs. It also confirms its leading role in fostering cooperation between Asia and Europe as well as supports the reasoning for Japan's bid for UN Security Council permanent membership.

One of Japan's close partners in the Black Sea region is Ukraine – a country that shares the same values and approaches to international

relations. Bilateral ties between the two states are based on common interests in the region, such as promoting democracy and market economy as well as ensuring peace and security.

Japan's support for Ukraine in the backdrop of illegal occupation of its territories and its first ever participation in a naval exercise in the Black Sea go in line with the concept of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" and confirms Japan's status as an active player of international relations. Further strengthening of synergy between Ukraine and Japan through such structures as BSEC, GUAM plus Japan, as well as Japan's support for Eastern Partnership will contribute to the achievement of common goals and lead to better coordination of joint activities in the Black Sea area.

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