

Ukraine's Changing Foreign Policy: Implications on the Black Sea Security

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the current state of affairs in the Black Sea region by examining Ukrainian foreign policy and its implications on regional security. The focus is on Ukraine's security dilemmas and regional priorities, which have gone through drastic changes after the country's 2010 presidential elections. In order to meet Russian interests in the Black Sea region, the new Ukrainian government recently took some dramatic decisions. Among them, which were scandalously adopted by the Ukrainian parliament, was the president's decision to refuse integration into NATO and to extend stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea. These and other issues are discussed in the article, and possible future scenarios in regional politics between the regional powers and the USA, EU, and NATO are also examined. The success of the European security architecture depends on the extent to which the regional and global powers can work to establish a functioning security system in the Black Sea region.

Since 1991, the newly constructed system of international relations in the Black Sea region has not been static and has dramatically changed. The “post-Cold War” international situation in the Black Sea region has been developing due to constant geopolitical tensions on different systemic levels with a number of insiders and outsiders involved at the same time. Ukraine, as a Black Sea littoral state, remains one of the regional actors who has an important input into the new regional impetus, though it has to base its regional policy on the actions of more influential actors. The last six or seven years has showed that Ukraine's foreign policy is pretty much dependent on the geopolitical orientation of the ruling elites rather than on long-term, widely shared, accepted and supported national interests. Unfortunately, the substance of what could be named “the Ukrainian national interests” – both in domestic and foreign policy – is the subject for internal discussion and debate

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in Ukrainian society still, while official documents remain “foggy” in explaining the mechanisms of the state’s strategy.¹ Moreover, always being “in between” American and European aspirations on democracy, and its common past and economic ties with Russia, Ukrainian policy has also suffered from a political unwillingness to promote the European integration of Ukraine – the strategic aim which has been officially shared by all Ukrainian presidents, including Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko and currently Viktor Yanukovych.² At the same time, and quite naturally, the results of the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine led to an immediate turn in the foreign policy priorities towards Ukraine’s reintegration with Russia. The future, in the short- and middle-term perspective, will only show what the limits of this bilateral political and economic reintegration are.

Such shift in state’s priorities is very clear, especially in contrast with the former – using the media terminology – “pro-Western orientation” of ex-President Viktor Yushchenko. Also, the ratification of the so-called “Kharkiv agreements” in the Ukrainian parliament on April 27, 2010, which subsequently led to questions on procedure as well as strong criticism from Ukrainian opposition forces. By signing such an agreement, termed by Viktor Yushchenko “the second Chernobyl,”³ which prolongs the stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Crimea until 2042, President Viktor Yanukovych, like no one before, made one of the most crucial decisions since 1997 on the long-term strategic future of the Black Sea security system, which is still under construction though. What are the consequences of such decision for the entire Black Sea security? What kind of new opportunities to ensure its national/military security did Ukraine receive or lose? How did the new reproachment of Ukraine and Russia in the naval field influence the regional balance of power? What are implications of Ukrainian “pro-Russian” politics in the perspective of either “collective” or “cooperative” security system in the Black Sea and Europe when Ukraine has the officially proclaimed status of a non-allied, factually neutral country? What role does the “Russian factor” in Ukrainian regional policy play in relation to Turkey, NATO and the EU after 2009? Meanwhile, while trying to answer some of this questions below, and in order not to overestimate the independence of the main Ukrainian political elites, it is necessary to point out that all of these actors are reactive rather than active in making strategic decisions. Centers of power, globally and regionally, are the main causes for their reaction.

Black Sea Security Dynamics

On the regional level, the last decade of the last century was marked by the competition between two regional “super-powers”: Russia and Turkey. It led to the emergence of two regional groupings which were formed around the two centers

of power on the basis of the shared regional interests: Russia-Armenia-Greece plus Iran on the one side, and Turkey-Georgia-Ukraine-Moldova-Azerbaijan on the other along with the clear pro-NATO orientation of Romania and Bulgaria. At the same time, the international relations which have taken place in the Black Sea region in the first decade of the 21st century have already changed the balance of regional power. As always, the most influential impact of the current re-grouping has been made by Turkey and Russia. Once Turkey strengthened its geopolitical, economic, and military position in the Black Sea and neighbouring regions, and what is more important successfully resolved the Caspian energy question for itself, both Russia and Turkey changed their tactics in favor of a pragmatic political, diplomatic, economic rapprochement in the beginning of the 21st century. Mutual economic benefits are the primary reason for politics in the region now, which is actually good news for the unstable region. From the regional point of view, reduced tensions between the main regional actors mean more stability and security in the region, which prevents the two centers of power from a violent clash of interests. Recent developments show that both countries – Russia and Turkey—seem to be ready to enter a deeper strategic partnership and are not anticipating future uncertainties.⁴

At the same time, the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia may not only change the regional balance of power but also the entire Euro-Atlantic region to some extent. There are, however, still some questions. What will be, for example, the long-term political effects of Russian-Turkish relations for the energy and military status quo in the region? Even Turkey's NATO allies suspect that both Turkey and Russia oppose the NATO presence in Black Sea so that they can then share the sea for themselves. Which interests will be prioritized in the region by Ankara: the "old" Ukrainian ones or the "new" Russian ones? Same as for Moscow: the "old" Armenian interests or the "new" Turkish interests? How will the Russia-US-Georgia triangle be incorporated into the regional security discourse, which is especially important after the Russian strategy of constructing a so-called European collective security system involving Ukraine was announced? Even the global interests of Turkey's traditional partner – the USA – can be changed with the regional rapprochement of Turkey with Russia. So, how far will the American factor push Russia and Turkey towards each other and threaten Euro-Atlantic unity? Or, will Turkey be ready to act as a key agent in making two different spaces of security as one, what always was known as the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok, using its new influence on Russia?

All the possible answers and scenarios at this top systemic level have strong and long-term implications on the middle powers in the Black Sea region. For

example, the ambivalent security strategy used by both Georgia and Ukraine before 2008 is instructive. Taking into account their national strategies and the possible risks in joining NATO and the EU, each country had to decide for itself to what extent and for what price it was to follow their own pro-Western strategies. The 2006-07 case of the more radical Georgia, followed by a war in 2008 between Georgia and Russia, and the cautious Ukrainian approach may be the best examples of different choices. Their next steps clearly showed how far Ukraine and Georgia could go in defending their national interests in relation to NATO and the EU. Although, Georgia's naïve scenario of joining NATO was lost following the war with Russia in August 2008, the Georgian President Saakashvili did not change his pro-Western foreign policy priorities, although they are now less realistic. That is why the Georgian security dilemma only sharpened after the war. At the same time, although the EU is ready to develop bilateral economic cooperation with Georgia in the sphere of energy and to negotiate an association agreement and free trade zone, what was clearly demonstrated in November 2010 was that the EU was not ready to take into consideration Georgia's political application to join the Union.⁵

The Ukrainian Security Dilemma: Its Implications on the Black Sea European Strategy

The security dilemma for Ukraine remained acute even after the Ukrainian president changed in 2010. The historical dilemma of Ukraine—East or West?—is today also accompanied by the question “Should Ukraine be anywhere at all?” The new administration in Ukraine tends to present its future international position and geopolitical role as a *bridge* between East and West. This became clear when a new internal and external policy was adopted in July 2010.⁶ The bill, approved by the Ukrainian parliament and signed by President Yanukovich, excluded the strategic intention of Ukraine joining NATO and announced its non-allied, factually neutral aspirations, but left European integration as its top priority.

From a tactical and strategic point of view, Ukraine should be interested in resolving its geopolitical dilemma for at least two reasons: first, for the sake of its internal stability and future prosperity, and for national consolidation and state policy consensus; second, for the sake of the international community, which wants to see Ukraine predictable, transparent, safe, democratic and open to cooperation. The second reason is also important for Ukraine because international actors will block any aggressive-like policy towards it. In such a situation, Ukraine would have additional “trump cards” to overcome actors trying to pressure it.

At the same time, the European vector of Ukrainian foreign policy, not just the Euro-Atlantic vector, has almost no chances of survival in the new political environment in Ukraine due to the extreme and economically pragmatic pro-Russian bias that President Yanukovich's team demonstrates. It would be ideal if both the European and Russian vectors gave the same result for Ukraine: democratic and economic advancement. And here is the key question: are these vectors equal in their ability to assist Ukraine both in democracy and economic development? If they were equal, Ukraine would have a chance to stay neutral rather than multivectoral. Yet as far as they are not, there is no chance to remain neutral in the future. This means that new Ukrainian strategic multivectoral "zig-zags" are on the way. That also means that Ukrainian multivectoralism works only when there is only one vector of movement, while another one is only an *imitation*. That means, finally, that Ukraine has to choose now what brings Ukraine into the deadlock and how it is to find the right balance between the two poles of attraction.

In current political situation, President Yanukovich has chosen the pro-Russian dimension. The reasons are obvious at first sight. The Russian Federation for a number of reasons could be seen as the most influential and experienced "driver" and is leading in the "race" for Ukraine. The main reason to identify the Russian Federation as the most influential player for Ukraine is that Ukraine is still in the Russian zone of political, economic, historical, cultural and psychological influence. Ukraine has always been treated by the Kremlin as an integral part of and player in its geopolitical backyard. This "backyard" is to be protected from an external "invasion". In our minds, since 1991 the space where Russia is still able to act as a superpower by pushing its will and interests over the neighboring former-Eastern bloc countries diplomatically, economically, politically, and military was within the borders of the former USSR (excluding the three Baltic States).

Russia was displaced from being a global superpower to a superpower only in the post-Soviet space. Within this zone of influence Russia is behaving as a superpower and acting quite aggressively, which is why Ukraine looks back to Moscow quite often while taking domestic or foreign policy decisions. It looked like Russia, in order to "punish" the pro-Western-oriented Ukrainian policy with its active steps towards Euro-Atlantic and European integration back between 2005 and

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2009, was ready to put pressure on Ukraine, ranging from economic to psychological “punches”. The new government of Yanykovich wants no “punches” from Russia but business benefits and political reintegration, plus a non-visa regime with the European Union. Hopefully, such pragmatism will not damage the European integration of Ukraine which, as a reminder, was continued by President Yanukovich as a top priority.

The main reason for Ukraine’s interest in integrating with the EU must be associated with the interest in the rebirth of political will in the Ukrainian post-communist political elite in order to become a modern (in some spheres, post-modern) integrated and consolidated community which shares European values in governance, and which respects human rights, the rule of law, the market economy and guarantees its citizens individual and collective security and economic prosperity on the basis of social justice. Achieving such a desirable model will be possible only when Ukraine not only takes the EU as a beacon for its internal and external policies but is also be ready to treat the EU as an undisputed contributor, assistant, and facilitator for Ukrainian reforms.

The “Kharkiv Agreements”

The Issue of Sevastopol

It would be not an over exaggeration to say that the most crucial impact on regional security architecture in the last 13 years was made when President Yanukovich signed the so-called “Kharkiv agreements” on April 21, 2010. On the one hand there were no feasible changes in the current security situation after the agreements were signed. On the other, however, the long-term impact on Ukrainian foreign policy on non-allied state and the future possible scenarios for regional security could be unprecedented.

Needless to say, the problems of the Russian naval base in Ukraine unfortunately always went far beyond military discourse and adopted agreements. It was the Black Sea Fleet and Sevastopol which almost ruined the strategic partnership between Kyiv and Moscow in 1990s. Even if we grant Russia its understandable right to keep its part of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet at the former main Soviet Black Sea naval base in Sevastopol after 1991, the negotiations should not lead to territorial augments. As Volodymyr Kryzhanivskiy, the Ukrainian ambassador to Russia from 1991 to 1994, recalls, even minor issues were subjects to sharp debates: “We were saying the ‘Russian naval base in Sevastopol’ while the Russians insisted the ‘Russian naval base is Sevastopol’”.⁷ This is not even mentioning a decree on the status of Sevastopol by the Russian parliament on June 9, 1993,



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where it was recommended that the Russian federal status of Sevastopol be put into the constitution of the Russian Federation.⁸ The Russian Federation was one of the last countries in the Black Sea region to recognize Ukrainian territorial integrity and its sovereignty over Sevastopol and Crimea in a bilateral Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine signed on May 31, 1997. Yet as Taras Kuzio stated in 1994, attempts to resolve the Black Sea Fleet problem (at that time) failed due to Russia's inability to recognize Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea and Sevastopol.⁹ Almost from the very beginning it became clear, that the Russian Federation was interested not so much in the old-fashioned Black Sea Fleet of the USSR so much as in having the Russian navy in Crimea for the next 20 years. As a reminder, the Black Sea Fleet of the former USSR used to be also a subject for division between Russia and Ukraine in terms of the quantity of its warships and material infrastructure.

The direct connection of the talks over the Black Sea Fleet's stationing in Sevastopol and the 1997 friendship agreement also became clear in 2007 on the agreement's 10 years anniversary when it was subject for renewal. One of the scandals over this case occurred in the second half of August 2007 when the advisor to the Russian Embassy in Kyiv, Vladimir Lysenko, said that if Ukraine continued to pressure the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea (in the context of possibly raising

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rental fees), Russia could revise the 1997 treaty of 1997,¹⁰ which indirectly confirms the Ukrainian status of the Ukrainian peninsula. According to the words of the Russian embassy's assistant naval attaché, Dmitry Albuzov, Russia intended to seek an extension of the Black Sea Fleet stationing in Crimea.¹¹ Quite impressive in this sense was a statement from the First Deputy Russian Navy chief (from 1992 to 1999) Admiral Igor Kasatonov in July 2007: "Sevastopol will remain the main base of the Black Sea Fleet even after 2017. In my opinion, this is beyond doubt, though the lease ends in Sevastopol that year. The contract will be extended or renewed for a further, even longer term. The Black Sea Fleet will stay in Sevastopol as long as it is necessary for Russia."¹² Such statements were made after the Ukrainian side made a decision to refuse to extend the lease after 2017. "I have lost count of how many times the President of Ukraine, Ukrainian Foreign Minister, the Minister of Defense of Ukraine, and other high officials who are responsible for this area, said that no continuation of the contract will take place after 2017", declared the then First Deputy Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko in September 2007.¹³ Some pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine were trying to play with the Russians. The Ukrainian Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko proposed on August 29, 2007 to form a joint Ukrainian and Russian Black Sea navy as an alternative to the NATO collective security system¹⁴ (a fight over Ukraine between NATO and Russia would "adjust" the relationships between Ukraine's neighbors, setting them against each other, and would end up making the unwanted scenario for Ukraine real).

The NATO-Ukraine-Russia Triangle

In 2007 this author proposed several scenarios on how the situation could develop; let me repeat them. I stated¹⁵ that the consent of Ukrainian authorities to extend the lease after 2017, in case Ukraine does not become a member of NATO before 2017, would represent the reintegration of Ukraine into a common defensive space with Russia. On the other hand, if Ukraine continued to declare its desire to complete its process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration by joining NATO and the EU, but was a member by 2017, Ukraine would be obliged to have the Russian fleet withdrawn after 2017. However, if Ukraine joined NATO before 2017, NATO, on the request of Ukraine, could agree to accept the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine after 2017, despite the fact that NATO members are not allowed to have foreign military forces on their territory. However, in 2002, the secretary general of NATO, George Robertson, said that the question about foreign military units on the territory of a country which wants to become a member of the alliance must be decided based on the conditions in that country.¹⁶ Therefore, as stated by Ukraine and NATO, the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet

in Ukraine was not a barrier for Ukraine to join NATO.¹⁷ Ukraine, as a member of NATO, could obtain a “moral right” to continue the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea after 2017. In that case, why would NATO not agree to Russian military forces stationed on the territory of Ukraine as a NATO member, providing that both NATO and Russia were allies, and not enemies, and were ready to build a common security system?

If such a scenario would be realized the answer to skeptics who dream about an alternative to the NATO system of collective security would be given. Obviously, the pan-European security system in which NATO members and Russia cooperate strategically is in Ukraine's security interests. The Ukrainian example of the peaceful coexistence of the Ukrainian navy and the Russian Black Sea Fleet in a NATO member country (even with a refusal of Ukraine to allow the permanent stationing of NATO bases on its territory) would show a new direction for the construction of a general system of security in the Euro-Atlantic space with a parallel decline of conflict between NATO and Russia over Ukraine. In this case, Ukraine would have a chance to use its geopolitical position to push NATO and Russia into a closer geopolitical cooperation, pushing away their possible aggressive intentions.

Coming back to 2010, Ukraine not only refused to join NATO, but with signing of the “Kharkiv agreements” made the regional security system development impossible compared to earlier scenarios that saw the Black Sea Fleet being withdrawn in 2017. Instead, the agreement preserves the traditional scenario of the Black Sea being divided between two powers, Russia and Turkey. Ukraine has lost its chance to introduce a new scenario to ensure its ability to act as a regional independent sovereign actor. In addition, as we have seen, Ukraine, along with Russia, lost its chance to create the actual collective security system together with other European countries, which Russian leaders are dreaming nowadays, and made this Russian initiative almost impossible to realize. Such a situation, when Ukraine unilaterally strengthened its strategic military partnership only with Russia opposite to multilateral efforts, would remain a problem if Ukraine does not refuse at least politically from joining NATO in the future.

Why do we mention NATO again when Ukraine is not attempting to join the alliance anymore? The answer is clear: the Russian initiatives to create the collective security system would not be possible and would inevitably fail without

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a matching security space: one from the NATO side, and another from the Russian, post-Soviet side. Ukraine lost its chance to become the real “bridge” between the Euro-Atlantic security space and the post-Soviet one. Now it is problematic to expect a different rap-

prochement between these two “security spaces” when Ukraine declares its non-alignment and in fact its reintegration with Russia blocks its way to neutrality. Russia would not be weakened in the region if Ukraine kept its options open by negotiating not only with Russia but also with NATO about cooperative security mechanisms. Russia still remains a regional superpower and the Russian Black Sea Fleet remains in Crimea after 2017, and NATO never spoke about its intention to station military bases in Crimea or in the rest of Ukraine.¹⁸ The Ukrainian-NATO political dialog, even in the light of possible membership, could have been a test for Russia on its ability to accept Ukrainian independence. Moreover, the NATO-Russian partnership could be strengthened, which would remove any contradictions over Ukraine. In this way, NATO membership prospects could also have been seen as a test for the potential of Europe to integrate Kyiv: traditionally, new members in the enlarged NATO and EU became NATO members first, which opens the way to EU membership.

The Black Sea Security System: Collective or Cooperative?

Why was it necessary to examine some failed scenarios for the geopolitical environment? I would like to admit that strategically for Ukraine and even for the Black Sea region the current Ukrainian ruling elites probably made a mistake by refusing to integrate into NATO when calling for non-alignment. If Ukraine officially declares its inability to join any military bloc, how would Kyiv be ready, for example, to support the newly proclaimed Russian idea of collective security in Europe and take part and join other forms of common security system when the nature of the collective security system is based on the collective nature of common obligations? With closer relations with NATO, Ukraine could add benefit for Russia in the Black Sea region, compared to an unstable and quasi-neutral Ukraine outside the alliance’s future plans. For example, in talks with NATO, the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s presence in Crimea after 2017 was seen as rational and that it could even help support the idea of a cooperative regional security system: Sevastopol could even become the headquarters of BLACKSEAFOR, a regional cooperative naval security unit consisting of the Black Sea NATO states, Russia, Georgia, and obviously Ukraine. Having both partners in Ukraine, Kyiv

could also counterbalance the sides and strengthen its national security. In this sense, there would be no need to revise the Montreaux Convention. Crimea could become the new example of the partnership between NATO and Russia without the establishment of NATO military bases in Crimea or elsewhere in

Ukraine. Moreover, as a long-term goal, the Black Sea basin could be proclaimed a non-military zone, if not totally weapons-free but with a restricted amount of military just for the defensive purposes for the Black Sea countries. The level of regional security against global threats could be guaranteed by higher level protecting measures: the “nuclear umbrella”, satellite systems, inter-regional radar shields, etc. BLACKSEAFOR could become the ultimate military player in the region for resolving “soft” security issues. Such a scenario is not utopian, taking into account the developments in NATO-Russia relations on meeting common security interests “towards a strategic partnership” (at least in the light of the last NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010)¹⁹ and also in the frame of the author’s concept of a “New Euro-Atlantism”.²⁰ Besides these developments, the Black Sea has had periods in its history when partial “demilitarization of its shores” took place, such as between 1856 and 1871²¹ under the Treaty of Paris after the Crimean War, as well as the naval restrictions under the Montreaux Convention of 1936.

The most significant outcome of Ukrainian accession into NATO for Russia, even disregarding the issue of the Black Sea Fleet and Crimea, would be that due to the number of historical, religious, ethnic, and economic ties with Russia, Ukraine, as a NATO member, with its input into the NATO decision making mechanism could be the best guarantee that NATO would refrain from any military action against Russia in the future. To support any military action against Russia would be political suicide for any Ukrainian politician, president or government, even with a clear “pro-Western” orientation.

Ukrainian Neutrality: The Case of Russia and Black Sea

Nevertheless, some NATO-Ukrainian strategic scenarios are not now subject to be realized. The issue of Sevastopol was always more than a political issue. Once again: this was a test for Ukraine’s ability to show its functional independence and sovereignty in action; a test for Ukraine to see if it can successfully balance Western and Russian expectations on the one side with its own strategic interest on the other; a test for Russia to see if it would respect Ukrainian independent interests

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and its sovereignty over Sevastopol and Crimea. And now Ukraine has lost its chance to play a new military role in the region to protect its interests and defend its territory from outside pressure with its own capabilities, especially after it proclaimed its neutrality and non-allied orientation with the new law on the Basics of Internal and Foreign Policy adopted by the new parliament coalition on July 2, 2010 and signed by President Yanukovich on July 15, 2010. That means (in the situation when Ukraine is not trying to join NATO anymore) that Russia remains the sole military protector of Ukraine and in return it gets Ukrainian political and economic loyalty. Could this bargaining be the start of the actual reintegration of Ukraine into the Russian sphere of security and political will? From the Russian point of view the answer is obvious. As Putin commented after the signing of the agreement, “I want to emphasize again that the Russian fleet in Crimea, of course, performs the tasks of security both for Russia, and Ukraine, and not only that: it actively participates in international efforts to maintain peace and security”.²²

What about the Ukrainian point of view? In this regard there is an urgent need to pose the key question: who from the leaders of the Ukrainian state, which has positioned itself as a non-allied state, contacted Vladimir Putin about the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation to ensure the safety of neutral Ukraine? Was it President Yanukovich in accordance with his constitutional rights? Or was it just a sole initiative of the Russian prime minister? Does this mean that now, for example, Ukraine has to wait for the marines of the Russian Black Sea Fleet landing in the Ukrainian Danube island of Maikan to protect it from quite fresh encroachments from Romania? Doubtful. The only message we got from President Yanukovich concerning the “Kharkiv agreements” was his preoccupation with Ukraine’s naval security in the context of the collective security system in Europe, in which the “Black Sea Fleet will be one of the guarantors of security among Black Sea countries”.²³ Let us emphasize “collective security” and “one of the guarantors” to show the direct bilateral agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine security.

It has already been said that there are large difficulties in constructing a “collective security system” when Russia’s actions and its definition of the term contradict the concept of a “cooperative security system”. Even in the context of common efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Black Sea region with a duty to protect Ukraine, the politics of the Black Sea Fleet pose a big challenge. Some Ukrainian experts were quite pessimistic concerning the Russia’s Black Sea Fleet’s operational ability and whether it could even serve as a “guarantor” for itself. As Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet expert Vladimir Pritula stated in 2009, “given the technical con-

dition of the Black Sea Fleet ships, the situation with the 'guarantor of security' looks ludicrous".²⁴ He continued: "Thus, the most powerful ship of the Black Sea Fleet, the cruiser *Moscow*, was launched in May 1982, so it is 30 years old, outdated even by Russian standards, not even mentioning the rest... All this leads

to the not very comforting conclusion on the inability of Russian Black Sea Fleet to confront reality, even the navy of Bulgaria, not to mention the Turkish navy and the Romanian and, especially, in connection to NATO and the 6th US Navy's resources."²⁵ From that point of view, the inability to compete and the low level of military competence of Russian navy partly was confirmed in practice. As Vladimir Pritula observed, the only side the Russian Black Sea fleet could successfully compete against was "a small Georgia, which virtually has no warships".²⁶ According to Vladimir Pritula, during the five-day war in the south Caucasus, because of their own problems, at least five warships of the Black Sea Fleet were damaged without any interference from Georgia.²⁷ Vladimir Pritula asks the logical question at the end: what would happen to the Black Sea Fleet if Georgia had at least one full-fledged combat ship, or at least few anti-ship missiles? Russia's ambitious plans to strengthen the Russian Black Sea Fleet with new battleships and powerful weapons are on the way. The question is "will they change the strategic situation in the Black Sea region in favor of the Russian Federation or will they be an appropriate contribution into a regional collective security system?" remains open.

Conclusion

The 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine won by Viktor Yanukovich became one of the most powerful tools to prolong the changes in the regional balance of power in the Black Sea region. These changes were initiated in 2008 and expressed themselves in the "five-day" war between Russia and Georgia. Thus, the new tendency is as follows: the major impact on the regional stability and future of the Black Sea political system is made not by regional centers of power but by mid-level actors. Therefore, the regional dynamics of change has been taken away from the center-of-power level of relations to mid-level actors. The reason why this has happened is quite clear: the Russian Federation and Turkey, after a decade of regional rivalry in the 1990s, entered a new stage of economic and diplomatic partnership in the beginning of the 2000s. By establishing strong regional ties, basically in the energy field, and having a common regional approach towards NATO activity in the Black Sea, both Ankara and Moscow seemed ready to give

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other regional actors, namely Ukraine and Georgia, more freedom to act. Obviously, such activity should not oppose the interests of the two regional powers otherwise regional crises would become inevitable. Among them it is worth to recall the “five-day” war, the Russia-Ukraine 2009 energy crisis, etc. In such regional clashes and crises both Russia and Turkey tried to coordinate its regional interests such as, for example, in the few days after the “five-day” war finished, or when Turkey supported the “anti-Ukrainian” Russian-led South Stream project.²⁸ At the same time, Georgia continued its strategy of looking towards NATO and the EU under President Saakashvili, while Ukraine changed its priorities with the newly elected President Yanukovich, which, to our mind, left almost no space for any alternative foreign policy maneuvers.

Thus, having “pro-longed” the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine until 2042, Ukraine, which stepped into the train of non-alignment on the way to neutrality, was in a deadlock when answering at least two questions. The first one: what is the real de-facto meaning of Ukrainian neutrality when the country has prolonged the stationing of a foreign naval sea base on its territory for an additional 25 years? And the second one: will a neutral Ukraine be successful in combating regional and global threats to its security being outside any alliance of collective security mechanism in a situation when other forms of protection are ineffective?

In addition to the already made preliminary conclusions above, one long-term conclusion could be made from reflecting on one such possible scenarios: as the EU is not admitting Ukraine because the Ukrainian political elites are not ready to show they are Europeans, a post-bipolar “Berlin Wall” has a chance to be constructed on the western borders of Ukraine to delimitate “us” from “them” in order to restore the bipolar security architecture in the Black Sea region *a la* Cold-War era with one exception: now it will become totally advantageous for both Turkey and Russia.

Endnotes

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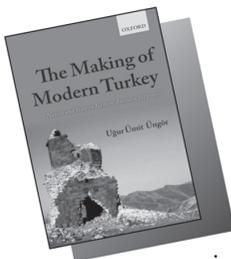
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