

Security in the Black Sea Region

The security infrastructure of the Black Sea is dominated by its status of a border region. At least two important borders cross the Black Sea region: **first**, the border between the Euro-Atlantic security system and the Russian infrastructure of security, extending well beyond the borders of the Russian Federation; **second**, the Black Sea is part of the border between Europe and the Middle East, which is today a secondary division line, yet an important one in terms of security, in particular in fields like energy and ant-terrorism.

The Major Security Challenge for the Region

The major security challenge within the Black Sea region is the growing tension between the process of democratization and modern nation building versus the resurgent strategy of Russia to preserve and extend its international 'sphere of influence'. This security challenge cuts through both military security systems and soft security agendas. Europe and the US are the main proponents of the democratization and nation building wave that reaches eastwards to the borders of the Russian Federation. On the other hand, Russia's actions are based on the imperial perceptions of Great Power politics, inherited from the 19th century Europe. Throughout the 1990s and in the early 2000s, the paradigm of extending the Euro-Atlantic security system to the East was the dominant strategic outlook for the future of entire Europe, and – possibly – Eurasia. The option of fully integrating Russia proper into the common security system of the West was initiated without being tested in the political process of East – West relationships, because of the very early stage of integrating CEE into the NATO structures and into the European mainstream.

After the 2002 NATO enlargement, the Alliance reached the borders of Russia in the North, and the agenda of further Atlantic integration of the post-Soviet space (Ukraine and Georgia at first place) started to shape up. That was the point to start serious debates about Russia's inclusion into a common security system together with Europe and the US. And this was the point, when that conversation was no longer possible for two reasons. On the one hand, Russia swiftly returned to its expansionist imperial identity of the past under the presidency of Mr. Putin. On the other hand, the major Western power - the US - was too engaged in Iraq and the anti-terror campaign to focus on the strategic context of integrating Russia. The strategy to anchor the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream had to be postponed. The agenda of the day has turned into intense security and strategic competition between the democratic West and resurgent Russia.

Present day Russia produces wide spread security dilemma for the post-Soviet space and for the new democracies of the Europe's East. The most important aspects of this security dilemma are: military security and open hostility against Georgia; instigating and supporting ethnic strife and separatist activities throughout the Black Sea post-Soviet space; full-scale

intelligence operations and institutional corruption pressures upon post-Soviet and post-communist countries from the Europe's East; monopolization of energy supplies – gas in particular – for the East of Europe and growing pan-European dependence upon Russian supplies, utilized as a strategy of disuniting Europe and regaining control upon governing elites in Eastern Europe. All those separate challenges to security of the new European democracies and to 'Old Europe' are elements of an integral Russian strategy to regain strategic control over its former imperial space of the Soviet Union, and – to an extent – over its former satellites in Eastern Europe. **The method of establishing a new strategic status quo starts with dismantling of the present status quo.** What Russia aims at initially is to dismantle the status quo of integral Euro-Atlantic Europe.

Military Security

The strategic competition between Russia and the West is not reflected directly in the military security dimension of the eastern part of the Black Sea region. Whatever the level of strategic tensions, neither Russia, nor the West are ready to resume military arms race, or any other kind of armed hostilities. Transdnistria is the only territory of the eastern Black Sea region, where Russia has indirect military presence, if we do not count the naval bases of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, contracted between Russia and Ukraine. Particular worsening of the security agenda came after 2007-2008, when Russia unilaterally suspended parts of its responsibilities after the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces (CFE) in Europe, agreed during the Cold War. The abrogation of the CFE Treaty gives Russia a free hand in exceeding the limits and stationing military equipment and forces as it likes. This made possible for Russia to breach the 1999 OSCE Istanbul commitments for troop withdrawal in the region. This allows Russia military stationing and maneuvering for sudden attacks, which lowers or nullifies the effect of confidence-building measures and raises immensely the level of tension in the region - especially after the August 2008 war against Georgia.

The major challenges in terms of military security of the Black Sea region appear in the South Caucasus. The military base of Gyumri in Armenia is the southernmost point of Russian military presence, serving as the border line between Russia and the Ottomans for more than two centuries. Russia's control over the South Caucasian corridor between Europe and the Caspian–Central Asia region is guaranteed by preserving this border line. Yet in recent years Russian control over the region was undermined by the reformist government of Georgia, which sided with the Euro-Atlantic strategy for opening this corridor between Europe and the East for free trade and energy flows, as well as for integrating the South Caucasus into the Euro-Atlantic security system. The ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where separatist efforts have been supported by Moscow since early 1990s, have terminated the regular functioning of railroad connection between Russia and Armenia via Georgian territory. The logistical infrastructure of Russian military presence in the South Caucasus was significantly damaged by Georgia's request to Moscow to withdraw its bases and military personnel from Georgian territory, which was completed by 2007. After Russia's military withdrawal from Georgia, the only logistical link between the base in Gyumri and Russian military infrastructure proper remained the small contingents of Russian peace-keepers in Georgian splinter regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgian government's ambitions to resolve ethnic conflicts endangered Moscow's control over strategic routes and

strongholds. This explains to large extent Russia's true motives to intervene in 2008, and why it didn't in the early 1990s when actually the ethnic strife in Georgia began. In other words, Russia's "peace enforcement" and "humanitarian" claims are fallacious, trumped by 19th century thinking and military doctrines.

Russia initiated series of provocative actions on South Ossetian territory in the summer of 2008 in order to involve Georgian military into a visible clash with local separatists and use the situation as a legitimate *casus belli*. In provoking the war in August 2008, Russia obviously desired to remove the government of President Saakashvili, and sought for inflicting that kind of damage upon Georgian statehood, which could postpone, if not jeopardize the accession of Georgia and Ukraine in NATO. It is not very clear whether Russia anticipated negative side effects of the August war like the deprivation of Russia from the right to maintain its peace-keeping corps on the territory of Georgia proper (except for the separatist enclaves) as they have been replaced by EU observers. The only partial compensation for this unprecedented termination of the logistical connection between Russia and Gyumri in Armenia was the declaration of independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which – in those particular circumstances – equals to annexation from Russia. The survival of the Saakashvili government in Tbilisi and the termination of Russia's military logistical link with its facilities in Gyumri – top aims for Russia's August campaign - provide arguments for some observers to foresee further military hostilities of Russia against Georgia in the near future. It is not certain though if Moscow would be able to afford that kind of an action provided the financial crisis and other economic hardships.

The next hot spot, where military hostilities might resume in the observable future, is the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. This is a conflict, which has been carefully contained for two decades now. But balance of forces between the two countries is changing. The sharply rising revenues of Azerbaijan's oil and gas exports provides Baku with the incentive for rapid military build-up and stiffens a potential compromise with Yerevan. The escalation of capabilities and the lack of progress on resolution might lead to resumed hostilities at some point. The warming up of Turkish – Armenian relations currently reduces the danger of military options, as Turkey might restrain its close partner of Azerbaijan. Yet no clear evidence for bridging positions on Karabakh is present.

At large, there is no foreseeable danger of larger scale military operations, involving significant parts of the Black Sea region in observable future. Military options for pursuing strategic interests remain possible, but only through limited and low intensity operations. No single factor in the region could afford massive and protracted campaign, capable to extend hostilities beyond restricted sub-regional spots. The declaration of Russia of suspending its obligations within the CFE Treaty is more of a political provocative thesis, rather than clear indication for the potential of Moscow to change military balances of the status quo.

Naval Security

The ambition of post-communist countries like Bulgaria and Romania (and ex-Soviet republics like Georgia and Ukraine) to join NATO is based on the assumption to participate in a broader international security system, providing them with stable security guarantees. The

collective security format also involves international NATO infrastructure of maritime security in the Black Sea. That was the reason for Sofia and Bucharest to support extending of the Mediterranean NATO operation “Active Endeavor” also to the Black Sea. Russia opposes that option for obvious reasons, but NATO member Turkey opposes it too. Both Russia and Turkey insist on international observation of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which allows international naval presence in the Black Sea for not more than 9 international vessels for maximum 3 weeks. Turkey initiated its own naval operation – Black Sea Harmony – to twin “active Endeavor” in the Black Sea and avoid international NATO vessels participation. Another naval format – BLACKSEAFOR – was also initiated by Turkey as a ‘search and rescue’ operation, involving all littoral countries’ naval forces, including Russia. Provided the very limited naval power of most other littoral countries, the combination of BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony practically guarantees Turkish and Russian naval hegemony in the Black Sea, and in effect provides Turkey with the leading position vis-à-vis the reduced potential of Russian Black Sea Fleet.

In naval terms, the NATO membership of Bulgaria and Romania, as well as the aspirations for an international security system for the Black Sea region of most other littoral countries remain highly nominal.

The August War of 2008 provided one more example of the growing security concerns in the region. It indicated that maritime security might be at stake, when Russia used its Black Sea naval forces to attack Georgia’s coast. Russia’s ship reportedly were also ready to engage nearby NATO naval group of US, German, Spanish and Turkish vessels. But this again was hypothetical, as this would mean an all out war between Russia and NATO.

Frozen Conflicts

Frozen conflicts are the legacy of post-Soviet communal disintegration, in most of the cases instrumentalized by the Kremlin authorities for the purpose of preserving post-imperial control over ex-Soviet territories. Oppressive attempts on behalf of Georgian nationalist government in the early 1990s to reintegrate splinter communities of Abkhazians and South Ossetians have caused full scale military conflict, lost by Georgian authorities in favor of local separatists. For two decades, the separatist authorities in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia survive under full Russian protection. After the August war of 2008 they were granted ‘independence’ by the Kremlin authorities. In practical terms, both conflicts on Georgian territory were ‘unfrozen’ by Russian intervention in pursuit of a promptly defined strategic effect. This purpose was jeopardizing NATO’s application of Tbilisi and removal of the pro-Western Saakashvili government. All ‘frozen conflicts’ on ex-Soviet territory serve similar interest of Russia – to keep particular nation or a region in a state of instability and vulnerability in order to arrest its free will and prevent it to strategically depart out of Russian control.

This is also the case of Transdnistria, which was designed to keep Moldova under Russian surveillance. Transdnistria is the industrial heartland of the Republic of Moldova and a combination of historical, ethnic and political factors assisted the ambitions of Moscow to keep it under Russian control after 1991. All diplomatic efforts of Europe and the US to negotiate an end to the conflict failed, provided the firm interest of Russia to preserve the

division line. Moscow also wanted to utilize the potential of the Tiraspol regime to function as an informal ‘offshore zone’ for arms trade and as a bridgehead of Russian strategic interest on the borders of Europe. The neo-communist president of Moldova Vladimir Voronin was kept hostage in tough negotiations with Tiraspol. The failure of the negotiations contributed to the present day civil unrest in Chisinau, triggered by suspicions of electoral fraud by the governing Communist Party of president Voronin.

Nagorno Karabakh is the oldest, and in a way most autonomous conflict in the post-Soviet space, which might prove most difficult to resolve. Apart of Russian mediation in the conflict, serving more the Armenian rather than the Azeri side, there are number of factors, contributing to the difficulties of this conflict resolution: the mentoring positions of Turkey in favor of the Azeri side, the practical economic blockade of Armenia, the role of powerful Armenian *diaspora*, the Russian military presence on Armenian soil.

The hazard of interethnic conflicts on ex-Soviet soil will be reduced with strengthening of institutional systems of the newly independent states and with the rising confidence in democratic guarantees for the rights of ethnic minorities. Both those prerequisites for conflict resolution require strategic stability and international security framework of guarantees – that is, they require pacification and integration of Russia into the international community.

Energy Security

There is one basic and simple conflict of interest between Russia and most other countries of CEE (Black Sea included) on the issue of energy security. Every modern energy system – national, regional or continental – is based on the concept of diversity. Diversity of energy sources, as well as diversity of types of energy. Energy has always been a strategic resource and diversifying the energy portfolio has always meant search for a favorable strategic balance. As Western Europe fell into deeper dependence upon energy sources from the Middle East after 1973, negative demographic and political effects followed. Therefore, Europe is in search for diversification – and Russian energy after the end of the Cold War is part of Europe’s ambition to diversify its energy portfolio. Another source of energy diversification is provided by newly opened routes of oil and gas supplies from the Caspian – Central Asia basin. The BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) pipeline is the first source of Caspian energy, brought to the threshold of Europe.

For CEE diversification in the post-communist era means reduction of Russian energy supplies for the economic systems of the new European democracies. For Moscow, strategic priority number one is to jeopardize energy diversification – that is preventing the independence for the CEE countries. In the post-Soviet era Russia faces significant decline in its economic and military potential. To regain and preserve strategic control over post-Soviet space and over the ‘soft belly’ of Europe – its new democracies in the East, Russia needs to concentrate its scarce resource into a fist of monopoly. That is the strategic design of Russian monopoly on energy exports. Once utilized, this monopoly could produce economic and strategic value added, decisively outgrowing the real value of Russian economic and strategic potential.

The task of a Russian energy monopoly is a two fold challenge for Moscow. **On the one hand**, monopoly could be achieved with cutting off, with plugging all alternative sources of energy, capable to pour in CEE economies. Provided geographical and strategic realities it is only the Caspian – Central Asia basin that could provide alternative supplies to Eastern Europe. Therefore, strategic task number one is to seal the route of Caspian – Central Asian energy to the European market, and – if possible - to re-direct this energy through the channels of Russian monopoly supplies. Strategic control over the Black Sea region is required in order to achieve this task. All efforts of Russia in the South Caucasus – to instigate and reproduce conflicts, to attack pro-Western governments, to jeopardize independent energy transfer projects – are dedicated to one simple task: to preserve strategic control over the South Caucasian corridor of potential alternative carbohydrates' supplies. Yet it's easier to defeat Georgia than the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. Additional effort is needed on behalf of Russia to prevent independent trade in energy resources between Western companies and the national governments of the Caspian – Central Asia region. This is why Russia exercises different types of pressure – economic, intelligence and institutional – in order to buy in a preferential scheme the gas capacities of countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and in this way – to deprive international business of the opportunity to access their markets.

On the other hand, Russian energy monopoly is subject to secure control over the transit of Russian oil and gas to the markets of Europe (CEE in particular). The key issue in energy routes control is the gas transfer infrastructure of Ukraine. The entire capacity of this infrastructure is huge – more than 180 bcm/per year. So far Russia fails to appropriate it, and finds it very hard to bypass it. In the mid-1990s Gazprom constructed the Blue Stream pipeline under the Black Sea to Turkey. Its full capacity is 30 bcm – and hard to achieve, because this is quite distant – and expensive way to European market. The Russian – German North Stream project holds the capacity of another 30 bcm, yet it is difficult to realize – for a number of technological and financial reasons. The Russian – Italian South Stream project would provide another 30 bcm, yet investment in another pipeline on the Black Sea bed is even harder. If Gazprom is lucky to construct both North and South Streams, together with Blue Stream they will have the capacity of 90 bcm – half of Ukraine's gas transfer potential. That is the source of merciless attacks on Kyiv from Moscow. That is the source of regular winter gas cut offs for Europe. There is one rationale behind it – appropriation of Ukraine's gas transfer infrastructure.

Russian energy monopoly is both a reality and an illusion. It is a reality, because Moscow has so far been successful in jeopardizing alternative projects like Nabucco and Gazprom has been successful in imposing monopolistic high prices for gas in Europe.¹ And it is an illusion, because of the highly fragile infrastructure of this monopoly status. In pursuit of total appropriation of gas transfer facilities and supplies for Europe, Gazprom has deserted the pressing task of renovating gas pipelines infrastructure on Russian soil. Investment in new sources of gas in Russia is also scarce in particular because Moscow decisively prevents foreign companies from getting concession contracts. It is a matter of time for the Black Sea – Caspian corridor to be open under international control for normal business – including

¹ As oil prices have fallen 300 per cent down in the last 8 months, the Russian gas prices for Europe have been reduced only with 11-14 per cent so far.

energy trade, and standard security guarantees to be imposed in supporting normal commercial activities. There is only one basic factor, supporting longer term Russian energy monopoly on European soil and that is the disunited national interests of EU members. If the EU succeeds to impose its rules that guard competition and diversity in all other markets in Europe to the field of energy supplies, the value added of Russia's strategy for energy monopoly will shortly melt as does the snow in April.

Corruption and Organized Crime

Corruption and organized crime are a key structural challenge to young democracies, combining fragile democratic institutions with mass scale pressure of ex-communist oligarchic circles upon the political representation and the administrative system. In many post-communist societies, in particular ex-Soviet republics and Balkan countries, there is a deep fusion between the institutions of government and the infrastructure of organized crime, originating from the security services of the old communist regime. The deeper the fusion between organized crime and government, the more vulnerable and skin-deep the democratic political system. The fragile institutional systems of post-communist societies are exposed both to penetration of their own ex-communist criminal circles and to the pressure of international organized crime networks. In this context, a special place is reserved for the intelligence operations of present day Russia on the territories of its former satellites and ex-Soviet republics.

When we speak about fusion between institutions and organized crime, we have to particularly define the nature of fusion between ex-Soviet – present day Russian – security organizations and their local counterparts in former communist countries of Europe. This fusion provides the business, financial and intelligence infrastructure of contemporary Russian influence upon its former republics and satellites. The basic purpose of this fusion is to serve the general strategy of the Kremlin for de-stabilizing and weakening of the newly established democratic institutional systems and their capacity to exercise the standards of European and Euro-Atlantic security and development. The key instrument applied is bribing at personal and group level – political leaders, party elites, government teams and entire administrative hierarchies. The EU institutions are already alarmed by unacceptable corrupt practices of some new members, yet Brussels is quite far from revealing the key factor in the governmental system of corruption and organized crime in all post-communist societies: the explicit strategy of Russia to de-stabilize their institutional systems with the instruments of intelligence networking and well targeted bribing. This is a structural factor, which will not allow any serious effort to heal the institutional systems of the new democracies in the East of Europe.

Conclusion

The security environment of the Black Sea region is directly subject to the strategic balance between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic West in their efforts to promote their competitive

interests within the region. There is no realistic chance to expect significant transformation of Russia's general outlook and strategic design for the Black Sea region. The second largest strategic factor in the region – Turkey, will remain in a position of controversial symbiosis between its Euro-Atlantic identity and EU application, and its growing affinity towards classical nationalist – imperial patterns of behavior in the region of the Black Sea. The only significant impetus to transform the regional security and strategic balance could originate from both Europe and the US, from their capacity to formulate and endorse common interest in the Black Sea region. The position of partial endorsement and partial helplessness towards Russian strategic intrusion into European affairs impedes the potential of the EU to serve as a decisive factor in modern nation building and democratization in Europe's East, in the Black Sea in particular. The absence of transatlantic consent and coordination of interest for a common strategy towards the Black Sea – Caspian – Central Asia dimension impedes the potential of NATO and the broader Euro-Atlantic security system to achieve even the minimal tasks, which have previously helped integrate in a similar way the CEE countries into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream. .