

THE SECURITY OF THE BLACK SEA REGION IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF GEORGIA

GELA GIORGADZE

PhD in Political Science

Assistant Professor at Caucasus International University

E-Mail: gela.giorgadze@ciu.edu.ge

ORCID: 0000-0003-0094-555X

MIRANDA MIKADZE

PhD in Political Science

Assistant Professor at Caucasus International University

E-Mail: miranda.mikadze@ciu.edu.ge

ORCID: 000-0003-0540-1615

TINATIN JAVAKHISHVILI

Doctoral Student in the Political Science Doctoral Program

Caucasus International University

E-Mail: tinatin.javakhishvili@ciu.edu.ge

ORCID: 0009-0006-7658-9052

„We are thus located in this region, in a triple complex, where the influences from Central Europe; from the South, from the Balkans; from the East, from the Russian and Asian steppes intersect“.

Gheorghe I. Brătianu

Abstract: The Black Sea forms a sort of natural bridge between Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East. From a security perspective, the Black Sea has always been of strategic importance. It is a major geopolitical and economic crossroads.

The Black Sea region has acquired significant importance over the decades, particularly following the Russian Federation's occupation of the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and the subsequent full – scale military campaign in Ukraine in 2022, which the Russian side designated as a special military operation.

The article's objective is to analyse the effectiveness of security mechanisms in the Black Sea region. To this end, the theories of „securitization“ and „balance of power“ were utilised and desk research and analysis methods were employed as research tools. A comprehensive analysis of relevant Georgian and foreign – language scientific literature, along with other documents pertaining to Black Sea security policy, was conducted. This analysis informed the formulation of two research questions:

what factors determine the security of the Black Sea region ?

what are the factors that determine Georgia's security policy in the context of Black Sea security ?

The research revealed that the Black Sea issue is relevant in the Georgian political space and that active attention is paid to the ongoing events in the region. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the geostrategic significance of the region. The research indicates a direct correlation between the international interest in the Black Sea and the significance of events in the Black Sea for Georgia's security.

Keywords: Georgia, Black Sea, security policy, challenges.

Introduction. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the Black Sea region has attracted a growing level of attention. The shifting balance of power in the region and the emergence of new conflicts have radically changed the situation. In the contemporary world, the degree of interdependence between actors has increased dramatically, and therefore the maintenance of global stability is of crucial importance. Despite the increasing interdependence at the international level resulting from the globalisation process, there is a lack of consensus among participating actors regarding common interests. It is an incontrovertible fact that actors operating within the region must establish a foundation of agreement based upon a regime of constructive dialogue. In the period following the Cold War, the Black Sea region emerged as a significant theatre of confrontation between the West and the Russian Federation. This area has been characterised by a struggle for power, reflecting broader geopolitical dynamics in the international arena.

Until 2014, the Russian Federation pursued an aggressive policy that was characterised by a combination of military campaigns, cyberattacks in the information space and expansionist approaches in the energy and economic sectors. Despite the fact that the acquisition of military superiority over the Black Sea region renders the region's stability significantly more vulnerable, the security challenges have not become the primary focus of the North Atlantic Alliance.

The 2022 Madrid Summit can be regarded as a notable inflection point in the North Atlantic Alliance's perception of threats to the Black Sea region. Within the framework of the Strategic Concept, a note is made regarding the Black Sea region, underscoring its strategic significance. The standpoint of the Russian side is also pertinent, as it regards the augmentation of Western influence in the region as a threat.

In the contemporary era, characterised by global competition, the world is confronted with novel challenges. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the maintenance of global peace remains an urgent issue. In the contemporary international context, characterised by a myriad of challenges, the issue of security demands nuanced approaches. Recent events in Ukraine have demonstrated that powerful states are engaged in efforts to preserve the balance of power within the global system. The Russian Federation's large-scale military campaign has had a profound impact on the security environment in the Black Sea region, necessitating a re-evaluation of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Theoretical foundations of the study.

The following theoretical foundations are used in the work:

The concept of „balance of power theory“ is of particular significance within the paradigm of realism. This theoretical framework is predicated upon the anarchic system of international relations and states, as entities, are motivated to prioritise their own security and independence in order to ensure their survival. In accordance with the aforementioned principles, states, in conjunction with one another, endeavour to act in their own interests (Walt, 1985).

The concept of „Securitization Theory/Copenhagen School“ is examined in relation to the pervasiveness of the threat identification factor within the domain of security, encompassing both economic and social security dimensions. The potential for such factors to profoundly alter the geo-economic landscape of the world is a salient point of discussion (Buzan, 1998).

In his seminal work, Sol Cohen proposes a novel geopolitical theory that seeks to unify the global landscape into a single, comprehensive geopolitical hierarchy. This theoretical framework encompasses a diverse array of constituent elements, including regions, areas, domestic national actors and states, among others. By incorporating both subjective and objective factors, Cohen's theoretical model offers a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the dynamics of geopolitical systems. The geographer divided the world's political space into two main geostrategic areas: maritime and terrestrial, in which various actors are united (Cohen, 2003).

From a geopolitical perspective, the Black Sea region is considered to be a „security complex“, situated at the intersection of interests among regional and international states, in addition to international organisations (Kayser & Navy, 2021).

The evolving geopolitical landscape has permeated myriad sectors, yet contemporary geopolitical dynamics, in consideration of the prevailing circumstances, underscore the imperative for substantial transformations (Doroshko & Iuliia, 2021). In order to achieve the goals set out in the framework of the article, it is important to present the maritime area and the Black Sea region included in it.

The issue of the Black Sea region remains salient, with geopolitical theories also focusing on the region. In the works of Spykman and Kennan, the region is given special strategic importance and reflects the importance of the so-called „fortress“, within which the blocking of maritime and land routes is considered (Maisaia, 2003).

The ongoing conflicts in the Black Sea region have a considerable impact on the international security architecture. Georgia's strategic geographical location renders it an optimal transport hub within the region. The construction of the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, which connect Western Europe and East Asia, has further increased interest in Georgia. For many years, the region has played a pivotal role in the transportation of energy resources to Europe, a fact that has undeniably resulted in a convergence of interests among regional and global powers.

According to the English geopolitician Halford John Mackinder, the centre of the world is the continent of Eurasia, at the centre of which is the Caucasus. Consequently, the Caucasus is perceived as the „Heartland“, if it is subdued, control over the world becomes possible. In 1919, Mackinder published his seminal work „Democratic Ideals and Reality“, in which he articulated his geopolitical vision. As Mackinder (1962) asserts, „He who controls Eastern Europe, rules the heartland of the world, and he who rules the heartland of the world, rules the world island, hence he who rules the world island, rules the world“. It is also noteworthy that, according to the theory of Nicholas Speakman, the only method of neutralising the „heartland of the world“ was to create a so-called arc around it. The concept of the Rimland, as defined by the Dictionary of Social and Political Terms (2004), refers to the region encompassing Western Europe, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, which was subject to the control of the United States and other Western countries. This region was considered to be of significant strategic importance due to its proximity to and potential for interaction with the Soviet Union, a nation regarded as being under the influence of communism. The implementation of containment policy aimed to mitigate the spread of communist ideologies and to prevent the further advancement of the Soviet threat.

Security of the Black Sea Region in Global Politics

Since time immemorial, the region has been characterised by persistent instability, arising from a variety of challenges and the intersection of different ethnic, ideological, religious, commercial and other interests. The ongoing instability in the region is further compounded by the ongoing armed conflict, which has been described as the largest since World War II (Dumitrescu, 2023).

In the contemporary world, the Black Sea region has become an increasingly significant nexus of major geopolitical interests, concurrently signifying both a pivotal developmental configuration and a potential threat to the security architecture of the Black Sea region. It is evident that the incorporation of the Crimean peninsula into the Russian Federation has resulted in a notable shift in the global balance of power, a development that has favoured the Russian Federation.

It is noteworthy that the Russian Federation's endeavours to assert dominance in the Black Sea region can be traced back to the period of the occupation of Abkhazia, during which it became possible to appropriate a section of the Black Sea. The Black Sea region's distinctive geopolitical context has rendered it a perpetual and contentious subject in the international arena.

For the North Atlantic Alliance, the Black Sea region is of particular strategic importance, as it represents a guarantee of peace and stability, whilst also providing an opportunity to repel the aggressive policy pursued by the Russian Federation.

The political and economic agenda in relation to the Black Sea region is significantly influenced by the ambitions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. The actors are endeavouring to gain primacy in the region and history remembers a number of tense situations between the aforemen-

tioned actors. In the context of contemporary geopolitical developments, the policy pursued by the Russian Federation can be understood as an effort to preserve its influence over neighbouring states, while concurrently seeking to thwart the activities of external forces within the Black Sea region. The Black Sea Fleet poses a relatively elevated level of threat to national security, consequently the reinforcement of defence systems is a pivotal consideration.

Georgia's role in the security context of the Black Sea region

In light of contemporary global events, it is noteworthy that concomitant with technological development and globalisation, there has been a shift in the security architecture, which in essence implies security ensured through mutual cooperation between states. Security is a multidimensional concept, encompassing military, energy, transport, food, economic, social, financial and ecological domains.

The components under consideration are interconnected in a complex manner, such that a significant weakening or strengthening of one component also affects the others. The Black Sea region is characterised by its connection to the Caspian Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea basins. The region functions as a conduit between the industrially developed and stable Europe on the one hand and the developing unstable, but resource-rich Asia on the other. Consequently, the region assumes a pivotal function with regard to trade, transportation, and politics.

Georgia's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures is a constitutional obligation. Article 78 of the Constitution of Georgia stipulates: as outlined in the Constitution of Georgia, the constitutional bodies are mandated to employ all available measures to facilitate the comprehensive incorporation of Georgia into both the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization within the scope of their respective authorities. Moreover, all state documents of Georgia explicitly state that the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration is a top priority. The Georgian people are convinced that accession to the European Union and NATO is the primary assurance of Georgia's security, progress and affluence, a conviction that is firmly anchored in the decision of the majority of the Georgian population. Georgia is involved in the process of building European and Euro-Atlantic collective security and has participated actively in international peacekeeping missions and military exercises. For Georgia, the Black Sea constitutes a pivotal point of contact with Europe and plays a crucial role in ensuring security. An examination of Georgian state documents reveals a marked increase in the country's focus on the Black Sea Basin and the security of the region. This heightened engagement is indicative of a shift in Georgia's strategic priorities, a topic that will be explored in the following discussion.

The National Security Concept of Georgia (2011) was approved by the Parliament on 23 (rd) December 2011, thus superseding the 2005 concept. The document elucidates the fundamental national values and national interests, formulating a vision for the country's secure development. It identifies the threats, risks and challenges it faces and establishes the main directions of security policy. As stated in the introduction to the National Security Concept, there has been a deterioration in the security environment in the Caucasus region and beyond, as a result of military aggression on the part of the Russian Federation. The most significant factor for Georgia is the maintenance of peace in the region. The document under scrutiny places particular emphasis on Georgia's affiliation with the European and Euro-Atlantic regions. Consequently, it asserts that the ongoing integration processes within Europe, most notably the expansion of NATO and the European Union towards the east, hold significant importance for Georgia's security. The Security Concept elucidates the national interests of Georgia, emphasising that the ongoing processes in Europe, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus region exert a direct influence on Georgia's national security. Furthermore, the repercussions of ongoing processes in Central Asia and the Middle East merit consideration, as does the maintenance of stability and security in these regions, in addition to the peaceful resolution of existing disagreements, for the benefit of Georgia. The enhancement of the transit function confers upon Georgia a particular significance, thereby enabling its active involvement in international energy, transport and communication initiatives. Moreover, the document observes that Georgia's primary objective in ensuring energy security is the diversification of

energy and transport routes. This is due to the fact that the augmentation of Georgia's energy potential exerts a favourable influence on both the nation's security and economic development, in addition to the well-being of its citizens.

The document under scrutiny places particular emphasis on the three most significant regional energy projects: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and Baku-Supsa gas pipelines. These projects, it is asserted, possess not only an economic dimension, but also serve to enhance stability in the region due to their considerable importance. In addressing the threats, risks and challenges confronting Georgia, it is imperative to recognise that enhancing the nation's energy independence is paramount to ensuring its national security. To this end, it is essential to maintain the diversification of energy carriers.

Conclusion. The redistribution of power in the Black Sea region has evidently exacerbated the prevailing security environment, thereby engendering an elevated risk of new conflicts in the region. It can be posited that by occupying the Crimean peninsula, the Russian Federation has gained a strategic advantage in the Black Sea region. It is important to acknowledge the efforts of various actors who are attempting to address the challenges posed by the Russian Federation. However, it is evident that there is a lack of a cohesive, robust strategy or a clearly defined vision to guide these efforts. Despite the fact that the European Union and NATO perceive Russia's destructive actions as a threat, Russia's positions in the Black Sea region are so strong that it is necessary to establish a new format in the Black Sea region, which will involve all the states of the region. It is imperative to enhance the discourse in order to identify novel approaches and methodologies that could potentially undermine the positions held by the Russian side.

The securitization of the Black Sea basin by Russia and Turkey implies the closure of the region, and issues related to regional security are among the priority issues of world politics and regional actors. In light of the ongoing developments in the region, it is imperative to prioritise the enhancement of Georgia's maritime infrastructure. The development of ports will enable Georgia to fulfil the function of a „hub“ connecting the West and the East. It is evident that there has been a notable increase in the level of interest in the Black Sea region. Consequently, Georgia is poised to play a pivotal role in enhancing security measures in the region.

For Georgia and Ukraine, the challenges in the Black Sea region represent a dual threat to national security and an opportunity to deepen cooperation with Euro-Atlantic structures.

Georgia, a country in the Black Sea region, is characterised by several factors that are pertinent to its regional representation. These include the presence of small territories, a low population density, an economy in its growth phase that is yet to attain strength, the occupation of certain territories, and limited military resources. Notwithstanding these characteristics, Georgia has the potential to occupy a worthy place among the member states of the Black Sea region and to influence the security architecture of the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea issue has become a more prominent topic in Georgian political discourse, consequently garnering increased attention from observers. Concurrently, the geostrategic significance of the region has been emphasised. The expansion of NATO in the Black Sea region has been identified as a potential strategy for addressing current threats and challenges.

Bibliography:

1. Buzan, B. (1998). Security: A new framework for analysis;
2. Cohen, S. B. (2003). Geopolitics of the world system. Rowman & Littlefield;
3. Doroshko, M., & Iuliia , T. (2021). Baltic–Black Sea Area as a Geopolitical Reality: Does It Exist? *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne* 1, 107-136;
4. Kayser, S., & Navy , C. (2021). Geopolitics of the Black Sea. Maritime security center of excellence;

5. Mackinder, H. J. (1962). Democratic ideals and reality. Diane Publishing;
6. Walt. (1985). Alliance formation and the balance of world power. International security 9, no. 4;
7. Maisaia, V. (2003). Political Aspects of the Geostrategic Balance of the Black Sea Basin. Paris: Georgian-European Institute;
8. Georgia National Security Concept. (2011). Retrieved, <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/70/saqartvelos-erovnuli-usafrtxoebis-koncepcia>;
9. Dictionary-reference of social and political terms. (2004).