



IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR ON BLACK SEA GEOPOLITICS

Special Editor: Bidzina Lebanidze

(Institute of Slavic Languages and Caucasus Studies, University of Jena)

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Black Sea Geopolitics after the Russia–Ukraine War: Perspectives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine

Introduction by the Special Editor Bidzina Lebanidze (Institute of Slavic Languages and Caucasus Studies, University of Jena)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine turned the European security order upside down. Many European countries are in the process of rethinking their security arrangements to better adapt to the deteriorated geopolitical environment. Most affected by Russia's aggressive policies are, however, the so-called new Eastern European states located in the wider Black Sea region and considered part of its Near Abroad by Russia. This special issue explores the perceptions of political elites and foreign policy communities towards Russia's recent geopolitical assertiveness in Ukraine and the countries of the South Caucasus—which build an important part of the Black Sea's political and economic ecosystem.

The contributions of this special issue provide an interesting comparative perspective of how local foreign policy communities in the South Caucasus and Black Sea countries view geopolitical and security challenges in the Black Sea area emanating from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Maksym Khylyko and Hanna Shelest provide a view of Black Sea security from Ukraine and explore the potential for cooperation between Ukraine and the South Caucasus states. Armen Grigoryan explores the impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on Armenia and analyses Armenian perceptions about shifting geopolitical circumstances in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea area. Anar Valiyev, Ahmad Alili and Fidan Namazova discuss the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for Azerbaijan's balancing foreign policy and Baku's "silent diplomacy" in the Black Sea region and beyond. Finally, Bidzina Lebanidze and Salome Kandelaki unpack the Georgian views of the changing Black Sea security dynamics after the Russia–Ukraine war and discuss its implications for Georgia's foreign and domestic policy.

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Bidzina Lebanidze (Institute of Slavic Languages and Caucasus Studies, University of Jena)

Perceptions of the Black Sea Region Security Amid the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: View from Ukraine

Maksym Khylyko and Hanna Shelest (both Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism")

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Abstract

The article presents an analysis of Ukrainian strategic documents and the results of expert interviews and expert surveys regarding Ukrainian perceptions and visions of Black Sea security, and current challenges and opportunities for cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine. Despite certain differences in policy priorities, Baku, Tbilisi, and Kyiv could contribute to strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region by enhancing mutual practical cooperation in the defence sector, resistance to hybrid threats, and joint energy projects. An increase in NATO presence in the Black Sea is considered necessary for strengthening regional security, as well as greater cooperation with the UK, the US, Turkey and Romania.

Introduction

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the

Black Sea region had not been listed among the priorities of the West, including NATO and the EU. This is clearly visible from the respective foreign and secu-

rity doctrines and concepts, including NATO Strategic Concepts (Shelest, 2020) and A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. Similar to Ukraine, it has prioritised economic and social development, soft security issues over military cooperation and hard security threats. Even the littoral countries did not pay due attention to Black Sea security, except for Turkey, which, at the same time, was often hyper focused on its own national interests. Russia's militarisation of Crimea transformed the peninsula into a strategically important Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) hub that, along with strengthening the Russian Black Sea Fleet, dramatically shifted the balance of power in the Black Sea in favour of Moscow.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 became a trigger reshaping the entire security architecture in the Black Sea region and the whole of Europe. However, Ukraine, in terms of security, appeared more prepared than other littoral states due to the previous years of the conflict. Nevertheless, it faced a necessity to reconsider priorities, partnerships, and future visions of the Black Sea region. The awareness of the significance of Ukraine and other Central and Eastern European actors in providing regional security considerably increased due to their proven willingness and ability to resist assertive Russian revisionism.

The article is part of the research project "Black Sea Cooperation for Stronger Security: Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan", implemented in 2022 by three independent and nonpartisan think tanks: the Georgian Institute of Politics (Georgia), the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" (Ukraine), and the Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre (Azerbaijan). Within the project, qualitative analyses of the interviews with Ukrainian diplomats and experts as well as quantitative analyses of the expert survey were conducted to explore the perceptions of diplomatic and expert communities regarding changing security environments in the wider Black Sea region. The 45-minute semi-structured face-to-face interviews took place in May 2022 via the Zoom media platform, with five experts in the Black Sea region, including two acting Ambassadors, two foreign policy and security experts and a researcher from the academic field (Appendix 1). The expert survey took place on 16–31 May 2022 via Google Form (Appendix 2), involving 15 well-known independent and nonpartisan Ukrainian foreign policy and security experts professionally dealing with the Black Sea region issues. The authors have analysed the current to-level strategic documents of Ukraine regarding the Black Sea vision and regional security issues, including the National Security Strategy, Foreign Policy Strategy and Military Strategy of Ukraine. The main goal of the article is to study Ukraine's governmental and expert perceptions of the main challenges

for Black Sea security and possible ways of cooperation between Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan after the Russian invasion of February 2022.

An increase in NATO presence in the Black Sea is considered necessary for strengthening regional security by the majority of Ukrainian experts surveyed and interviewed within this study. Experts also believe that, despite certain differences in policy priorities, opportunities, and levels of interaction with other regional actors, Baku, Tbilisi, and Kyiv could contribute to strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region by enhancing mutual practical cooperation in the defence sector, resistance to hybrid threats, and joint energy projects. Along with multilateral and bilateral cooperation, especially with the US, the UK, Romania, and Turkey, Ukrainian experts also stress the need to develop Ukraine's own defence capabilities, including the naval forces and coastal defence infrastructure. This corresponds with the national strategic concepts.

Perceptions about Security Challenges and Opportunities in Ukraine

The Black Sea region has taken a firm place in the foreign policy and security priorities of Ukraine since 2014. If, before the annexation of Crimea, the region had primarily been seen through the prism of work in regional organisations, such as BSEC and GUAM, so was the perception of threats and challenges that laid within the soft security domain—social-political, environmental challenges, trafficking and organised crime, illegal migration and frozen conflicts at most. Such a choice was determined by the perception that no direct threats to Ukraine's national security in the Black Sea existed. Thus, opportunities were also seen predominantly in the spheres of trade and maritime cooperation, tourism development, blue economy perspectives, and transport facilitation.

Russian aggression of 2014 prioritised hard security challenges and threats and brought to the fore the necessity of security cooperation with like-minded countries (Romania and Turkey) and organisations (NATO). The *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (2015) did not pay significant attention to the Black Sea region, just acknowledging the threats of occupied Crimea and its militarisation. In 2018, *Strategy of the Naval Forces of Ukraine 2035* was developed that envisaged both threats (including Russian Federation activities), partners (focus on NATO members states) and priorities for development (where two first stages were totally concentrated at the Black Sea area as defending a coast and the ability to project power to the exclusive economic zone waters).

The *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (2020) already gave broader consideration to the region. Among others, it emphasised that Russia used the Black Sea-

Caspian region and occupied Crimea as a bridge to the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the MENA. Increased militarisation of occupied Crimea was named as a challenge, as well as a threat from the Russian Federation to the freedom of navigation. Additionally, it was stated that aiming to protect its national interests and regional security, Ukraine will develop relations with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Moldova and practical cooperation with NATO member states to guarantee Black Sea security.

The *Military Strategy of Ukraine* (2021) names a number of threats at the regional level as those to pay attention to, including possible destabilisation in the Black Sea region, militarisation of Crimea, Russian occupation of parts of Georgia and Ukraine, obstruction of the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, etc.

In 2021, for the first time in the history of Ukraine, the *Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine* was adopted, where the Black Sea region and cooperation with individual states took a visible place. Ensuring security and development in the Black Sea-Baltic region is named among the top priorities of foreign policy. The Russian military projection in the Azov-Black Sea region is named among the main threats. To ensure the international security environment, among other foreign policy activities are named a maximum use of regional formats such as BSEC, consolidation of the Black Sea states positions to counter threats that Russia produces in the region, including militarisation of Crimea, development together with NATO and Georgia of the initiatives to increase Alliance presence in the Black Sea, and promotion of joint initiatives to guarantee freedom of navigation. NATO chapters of the Strategy also include a significant focus on Black Sea threats and opportunities for joint actions, including a necessity to develop the Alliance Black Sea Strategy. Strategic cooperation with Turkey, Georgia, and Romania is also considered an important element to ensure security in the Black Sea region. Very often, such cooperation is considered through the prism of the NATO perspective of Ukraine or the NATO membership of these neighbouring states.

In February 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion proved those estimations that have been done before regarding regional security. Blockade of the Black Sea ports, disturbance to commercial navigation, attacks from the sea, militarisation of Crimea, and inadequate presence of the NATO allies have continued to be inescapable parts of the situation in the Black Sea region.

The last few years' discourse among the political elites in Ukraine (Foreign Policy of Ukraine. Annual Scorecards, 2019, 2021, 2022), as well as expert interviews within this project, proved that the Russian aggression, occupation of Crimea, and militarisation of the Black

Sea region—hard security issues—were considered the main threats and challenges. At the same time, information and energy security challenges also occupied their significant place, with information and cyber moving to the hard security domain (Shelest, 2022). The ineffectiveness of the international security system was also mentioned among the main security challenges (Bodnar, 2022; Korsunsky, 2022).

The expert survey conducted within this project demonstrated that most Ukrainian respondents consider strengthening cooperation with NATO (over 80%) and future NATO membership (over 90%) crucial to strengthening security in the Black Sea region. Over 50% think that enhancing mutual military and defence cooperation and joint energy projects between Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan can strengthen regional security (Figure 7 on p. 11; Figure 9 on p. 12). In the same vein are the answers to the questions on what balance of military power in the Black Sea could best contribute to stability and security in the region, with 80% of the experts focusing on NATO dominance (Figure 3 on p. 10). It should be considered that the survey was conducted a few months into the war when the Ukrainian expert community and public opinion became less divisive regarding possible NATO membership and neutrality options insisted on by the Russian Federation.

The role of individual states is defined according to their support for Ukraine and ability to influence the situation in a victory direction. Thus, respondents named the Baltic states, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the United States (in descending order) as having an effective role in the Russia-Ukraine War and containment of Russia's assertive regional policies (Figure 1 on p. 9). The UK, the US, and NATO have a strong potential to strengthen security in the wider Black Sea region. Such views correspond to the answers of the experts' interviews conducted within the project (Figure 2 on p. 10).

Noticeably, the Ukrainian experts did not see a serious potential of the regional states, with NATO member states Turkey and Romania receiving the highest scores as actors that can contribute. However, there is a belief in Ukraine itself as the country that can influence Black Sea security; meaning, in experts' opinion, that not only can Ukraine defend itself but also positively influence future security in the Black Sea. The Turkish role is disputable; respondents to the expert interviews mentioned Turkey as an ally of Ukraine in the current circumstances but also as a country with an ambivalent position on processes in the Black Sea region that tries to balance Russia and Ukraine and declines to take sides. Additionally, according to the interviews, Ukrainian experts do not see any reasonable opportunities for joint reactions of Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (as three countries together) in

response to the challenges posed to the region by Russian aggression.

Future of Black Sea Security and a New Security Order in Wider Europe after Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine not only reshaped the security situation in the wider Black Sea region but also dramatically changed the world powers' perception of the region, its importance for global security and the roles of key regional players. Previously, the Black Sea was "rarely considered among the world's most important strategic spaces ... although an astounding ten wars have taken place on or near the Black Sea littoral since the end of the Cold War, more than any other maritime space in the world" (Hess, 2022). Key EU and European NATO member state governments "have shown limited interest in Black Sea security," lacked a coherent Western strategy on the region and even had no certainty "whether the Black Sea region is an integral part of Europe" (Flanagan, S.J. *et al.*, 2020: 149). However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shifted the Black Sea region from the periphery to the centre of the Euro-Atlantic security processes, as Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber (2022) points out in her interview within our study. The war also indicated that the Black Sea region should be considered not separately but as a part of the whole European security system, says Amb. Vasyl Bodnar (2022).

The return of large-scale war to Europe forced many countries to soberly reevaluate their security and defence sectors and become more aware of their vulnerability. The future geopolitical landscape will be shaped by a vision of Russia as a threat that should be contained, as Dr. Volodymyr Dubovyk (2022) notices. In this regard, the value of collective defence within NATO will become more evident for European countries, which will tend to be more engaged in Alliance activities.

Another important change will be the rise of the role of the Central and Eastern European actors in the future security architecture of the region, first of Ukraine, Poland, Baltic states, and Slovakia, which proved their ability and willingness to actively stand against the Russian threat, while the "old Europe" showed the lack of proactiveness in the security realm, especially during the early stages of war (Gaber, 2022). Given the combat experience of its army, Ukraine can become one of the guarantors of security in the Black Sea region according to Ukrainian diplomats and experts (Dubovyk, 2022; Korsunsky, 2022; Ryzhenko, 2022), who have emphasized that "today Ukraine is defending NATO" (Bodnar, 2022) and that Ukraine has proved to be not a recipient but a provider of regional security (Gaber, 2022).

In the context of restoring security in the Black Sea region, particular attention should be given to the issue

of Crimea, which is "a key point for Russian domination" in the region (Lytvynenko, 2020). The Crimean Peninsula extends deep into the Black Sea, making it "a strategic pivot point within the region", and Russia's military deployments on it "have transformed Crimea into the hub of an Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) bubble that spans across much of the Black Sea and its coastlines" (Brzezinski, 2021). Therefore, any stable pattern of security order in the Black Sea region is impossible without restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity.

The Ukrainian diplomats interviewed and experts surveyed within this study believe that all the previous formats of cooperation in the Black Sea region, such as Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Black Sea Harmony, BLACKSEAFOR and others, proved ineffective due to Russia's destructive role. Therefore, trying to restore these formats or invent new ones with Russian participation would be useless. Ukrainian experts believe that no common security mechanism in the Black Sea could be effective as long as the Russian navy controls the sea (Dubovyk, 2022) and until Russia becomes "a normal, an equal partner" (Korsunsky, 2022). Instead, they consider that NATO should play a key role in restoring regional security.

Sixty-seven percent of Ukrainian experts surveyed also consider that further destructive actions by Russia in the Black Sea region can be prevented by admitting to NATO those countries that seek membership. Another 27% of experts believe it is necessary to focus mainly on strengthening the capabilities of the current NATO members in the region—Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria. None of the experts sees a way out of accepting the Russia-imposed status quo or expanding cooperation with Moscow (Figure 5 on p. 11).

Considering the possible role of the nonregional players, almost all Ukrainian diplomats and experts named the US and the UK as important contributors to security in the Black Sea. For China and India, experts do not have much hope for their participation in strengthening security in the Black Sea. Despite China's interest in stability in the region as a part of its Belt and Road route, the maximum that Ukraine can expect from Beijing is neutrality, formal support for Ukrainian territorial integrity and "not helping Russia in its invasion" (Gaber, 2022).

Speaking about the role of the UN, Ukrainian diplomats note that it "should be transformed into a more effective organisation with a more adequate system of adapting decisions, bringing peace and preventing wars" (Bodnar, 2022). Amb. Korsunsky (2022) considers that the United Nations should adopt a special Code to envisage the measures of international response to any unjust aggression, including a package of sanctions, so that every actor clearly under-

stands what the consequences of the possible aggression would be.

Eighty percent of Ukrainian experts surveyed believe that the Montreux Convention (primarily clauses regarding granting access to the Black Sea of non-Black Sea states' navy ships) currently works more in the interests of only Turkey, and another 20% consider it to work in Russia's interests by restricting access to NATO ships, while none of the experts believes the convention equally meets the security interests of NATO or all interested parties (Figure 4 on p. 10). This position is in line with the views of Western diplomats and experts who also consider that under the guise of the Montreux convention, Turkey blocks NATO Black Sea initiatives aiming "to minimise Allied presence in its backyard" (Townsend, 2021).

Considering the options for Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine to contribute to strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region, the vast majority (86.7%) of Ukrainian experts believe that all three countries should primarily focus on strengthening their cooperation with NATO. Significantly fewer experts (53.3%) put hopes on enhancing the military and defence cooperation of these three countries with each other and on elaborating their joint energy projects of regional importance. A total of 46.7% of Ukrainian experts surveyed also named cooperation of the three countries in resistance to hybrid threats a possible option (Figure 7 on p. 11).

Experts favouring Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine's relations with NATO over joint security and defence cooperation among these three countries are explained by two major factors. The first is the unsuccessful experience of their participation along with Moldova in the GUAM—Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, which failed to become a real catalyst for closer cooperation, despite numerous attempts to fill it with real substance and activity. The second factor is differences in policy priorities, opportunities and level of interaction of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine with other regional actors, including Russia and Turkey. "I do not see the solid ground for common activities ... All three countries have their way of defending themselves and establishing cooperation mechanisms for their defence," says Amb. Bodnar (2002). Unlike Ukraine, which after a full-scale Russian invasion, has no other choice than to fight for its own existence, the current level of Russia's threats to Azerbaijan and Georgia leaves them more options (Dubovyk, 2022). Azerbaijan builds an alliance with Turkey, and Georgia tries to balance civil society's support for Ukraine and the government's attempt to preserve economic cooperation with Russia (Bodnar, 2022).

Given the existing differences, experts believe it would be more effective to focus on deepening practi-

cal cooperation in various fields between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine than to establish any new institutional format for interaction (Gaber, 2022).

Sixty-seven percent of Ukrainian experts surveyed consider joining NATO the best option to ensure Ukraine's security from the negative consequences of Russia's assertiveness in the region. The other 20% prefer to build new military alliances, and only 6% propose relying on possible bilateral alliances with the US, the UK, Turkey and/or Poland (Figure 6 on p. 11).

When speaking about NATO, diplomats and experts emphasise the mutual benefit of Ukraine's possible membership. In repelling Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine "proved to be a major player and security contributor" in the region (Gaber, 2022). Therefore, not only does Ukraine need NATO for its security, but "NATO also needs us for their security because we have the practical experience in fighting Russians" (Bodnar, 2022).

Given that accession to NATO will take time, Ukrainian diplomats and experts assume that Kyiv may also consider establishing some regional security infrastructure with neighbouring countries, including Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, and perhaps Turkey, as well as security mechanisms together with the US and the UK—not as an alternative to NATO membership but as a complement on the path to the Alliance (Korsunsky, 2022; Gaber, 2022). At the same time, Volodymyr Dubovyk (2022) warns that security mechanisms of such structures must be clearly articulated; otherwise, they might repeat the fate of the Budapest Memorandum.

Therefore, Ukraine and its NATO partners will have to build their strategy to strengthen security in the Black Sea, taking into account the constraints of the Montreux Convention, that is, without the possibility of a permanent presence of non-Black Sea NATO members' navy. The way out is strengthening cooperation between Black Sea NATO members and their partners in the region. In this regard, Ukrainian experts consider promising the development of cooperation between Kyiv, Ankara, and Bucharest and strengthening their navies and coastal infrastructure. At the same time, experts noticed that on the issue of enhancing NATO's military presence in the Black Sea, Romania's position "resonated much better with Russia-alert Ukraine or Georgia" rather than with such Allies as Bulgaria or Turkey (Vorotnyuk, 2020).

Along with international cooperation, Ukrainian experts also stress the necessity to develop Ukraine's own defence capabilities: "Secure environment must be based, first of all, on our own Ukrainian military force: modern, well-equipped and well-trained," notices Amb. Sergiy Korsunsky (2022). In this context, Ukraine's candidacy for EU membership is of vital importance, as the postwar restoration of the economy will need

EU assistance, and the level of economic development will directly affect Ukraine's capabilities to invest in security and defence. Volodymyr Dubovyk (2022) also notices that special attention should be given to preserving democracy under the conditions of the potential significant militarisation of the country.

Conclusions

Ukraine's view over the Black Sea region and security challenges in this area have not changed dramatically after February 2022, as the previous eight years of war prepared it both at the strategic and operational levels. The National Security Strategy, Military and Foreign Policy Strategies adopted recently clearly identify threats, where the Russian Federation actions are prime, as well as partners with the Black Sea states—Romania and Turkey, in addition to NATO, to deal with security challenges. At the same time, two other strategic partners, Georgia and Azerbaijan, have strong places in the strategies but have fewer options for the increased security dialogue.

Expert interviews and surveys demonstrated a transformational shift in perceptions of who can be the main partners influencing Black Sea security, with the US and the UK taking primary roles. NATO membership of Ukraine and other littoral states is also considered an important factor in future security architecture. Nevertheless, considering the different foreign and domestic policy priorities and difficulties, most Ukrainian experts do not see a wide perspective of trilateral Azerbaijan–Georgian–Ukraine relations. However, there are still spheres, including issues of energy security and territorial integrity of the states, that unite them.

Considering the above, there are certain actions that need to be pursued as well as political choices to be made both by Ukraine and its international partners. As maritime security is seen as of primary importance, Ukraine needs to improve its coastal defence infrastructure and continue the development of the naval forces in close cooperation with NATO and EU partners. Ensuring freedom of navigation, coastal defence, and prevention of port blockades are top priorities. Such military infrastructure should, on the one hand, be able to serve as a component of NATO collective security and, on the other hand, ensure sufficient capabilities to provide Ukraine's basic security needs independently. Ukraine should enhance maritime cooperation with Turkey and Romania to counter the existing challenges in the maritime domain, including Black Sea patrolling, monitoring and reconnaissance, and demining, ensuring the safety of navigation and critical infrastructure protection. Moreover, as an EU candidate state,

Ukraine should consider participation in EU initiatives in the field of security and defence, as well as EU military-technical cooperation, which indirectly will have an impact on its capabilities in the region.

The security of the Black Sea region is one of the key factors defining European and Euroatlantic security; thus, more attention should be given by international actors, including NATO and the EU. Restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine and establishing a necessary balance of powers in the Black Sea that would prevent the existence of exclusive A2/AD zones, guaranteeing the security of all littoral states, and restoring the freedom of navigation and maritime trade may have an impact on improved economic cooperation.

Among the factors limiting the effectiveness of military and economic cooperation of the Black Sea countries interested in the security and stability of the region is their different status in interaction with NATO and the EU. Successful addressing of the Black Sea security issues requires a significant and closely coordinated build-up of the integrated coastal defence infrastructure and naval and other forces interactions of Romania and Ukraine in partnership with Bulgaria and Georgia, which could be done much more effectively if Ukraine and Georgia join NATO and the EU. Azerbaijan and Moldova should be invited to such cooperation where it is possible and mutually beneficial. Additionally, repairing relations between the US and Turkey is of great importance for Black Sea security, and closer cooperation between the EU and Turkey is much needed. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine should reconsider the possibility of joint actions and initiatives within the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe in questions of restoring the territorial integrity of the states and militarisation of the Black Sea region to accumulate the efforts.

In parallel with their partnership with other countries and international organisations in security, economic and other realms—Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine should also focus on practical mutually beneficial cooperation with each other in multilateral or bilateral formats where their interests coincide. In particular, this applies to countering hybrid threats and developing energy projects and trade. As all three countries have a high level of cooperation with Turkey, it would be logical to involve Ankara in such a partnership where possible and beneficial. At the same time, three countries should review and reconsider cooperation within the GUAM format to be adequate to the EU candidate status of Ukraine and Moldova, as well as to search for new mechanisms of cooperation that may not be influenced by war.

See p. 8–12 for information about the authors, references, and appendices.

About the Authors

Maksym Khylyko, PhD, Senior Researcher at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Director of Russian and Belarusian Studies Programme at the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” and Chairman at the East European Security Research Initiative. Before this, Dr Khylyko worked as a Senior Researcher at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and at the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. He also worked as an analyst and consultant to a number of Ukrainian politicians and officials.

Hanna Shelest, PhD, Director of Security Programmes at the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” and Editor-in-chief at UA: Ukraine Analytica. Dr Shelest is also a nonresident senior fellow at CEPA (Washington DC). Before this, she had served for more than ten years as a Senior Researcher at the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine. Dr Shelest was an adviser of the Working Group preparing Ukrainian Navy Strategy 2035 and was involved in working groups developing the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine, Asian Strategy for MFA, and Ukraine’s NATO Public Communication Strategy. She led different policy-related projects, among others: Scorecards of the Ukrainian Foreign Policy; Ukraine-NATO: Enhanced Level; The Hybrid War Decade: Lessons Learned to Move Forward Successfully; Foreign Policy Recommendations for the Parliament of Ukraine.

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Appendix 1: List of the Diplomats and Experts Interviewed on 20–31 May 2022 within the Research Project “Black Sea Cooperation for Stronger Security: Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan”

- 1. Amb. Vasyl Bodnar, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Turkey.
- 2. Amb., Dr., Sergiy Korsunsky, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Japan, previously Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Turkey.
- 3. Capt. (ret.) Andriy Ryzhenko, Captain (Navy, retired), expert of the Centre for Defence Strategies think tank, previously Deputy Chief of Staff of the Ukrainian Naval Forces.
- 4. Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, Senior Fellow at the Centre in Modern Turkish Studies of the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, previously Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Ukraine.
- 5. Dr. Volodymyr Dubovyk, Director of the Center for International Studies at Odesa Mechnikov National University, Fulbright Scholar.

Appendix 2: Results of the Expert Survey (N=15)

Figure 1: How Would you Assess the Role of the Following Actors in the Russia–Ukraine War and in Containment of Russia’s Assertive Regional Policies? (Standardised on a Scale of 0–100 [Very Effective])

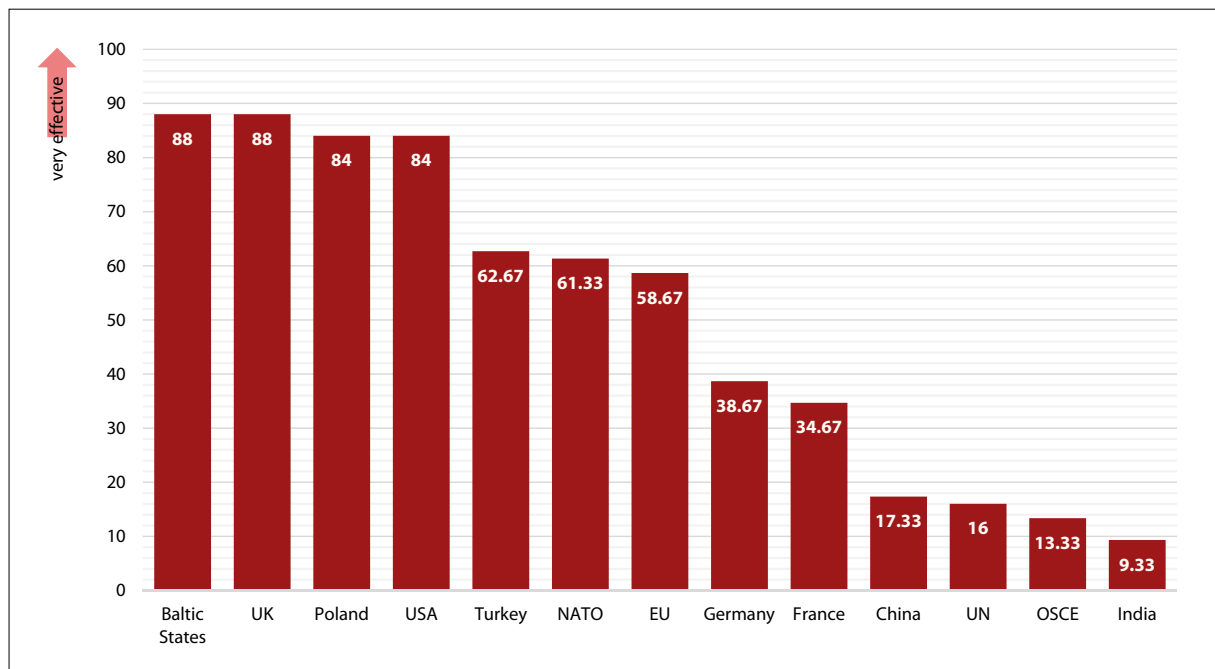


Figure 2: How Would You Assess the Possible Positive Role of the Following Actors in Strengthening Security in the Wider Black Sea Region? (Standardised on a Scale of 0–100 [Very Effective]; 3SI = Three Seas Initiative)

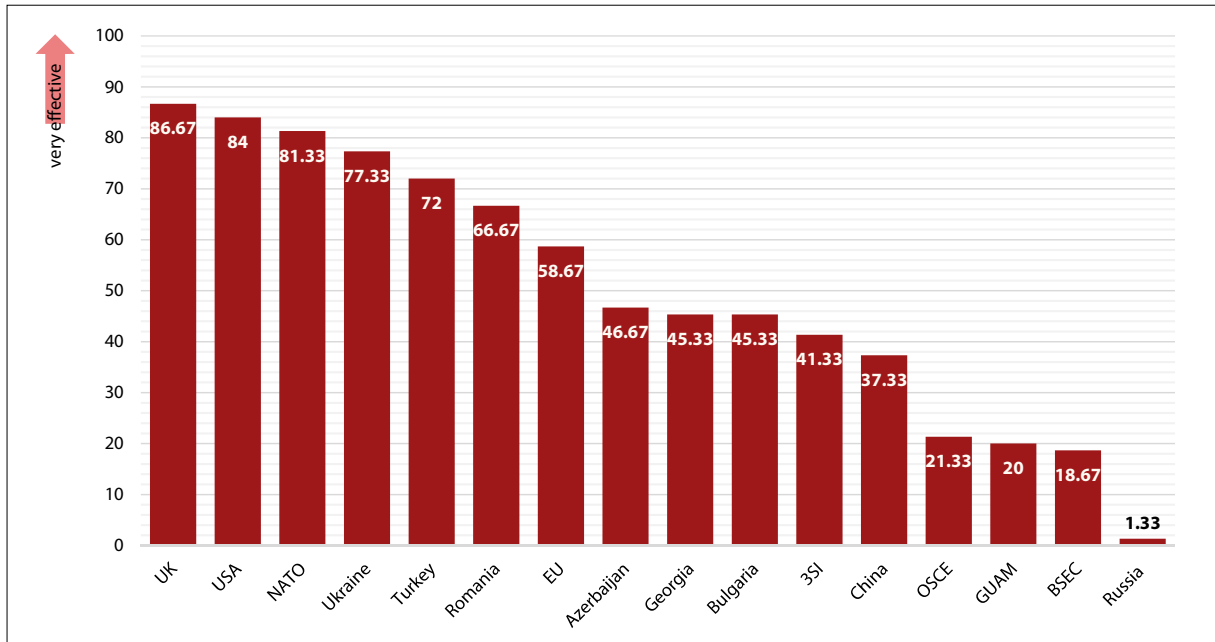


Figure 3: What Balance of Military Power in the Black Sea Could Best Contribute to Stability and Security in the Region?

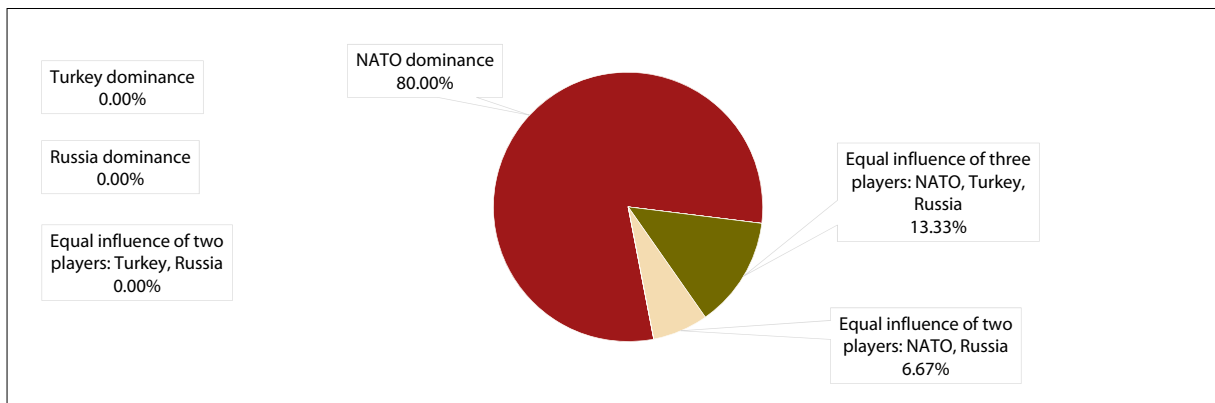


Figure 4: How Does the Montreux Convention Affect the Security of the Black Sea Region Nowadays?

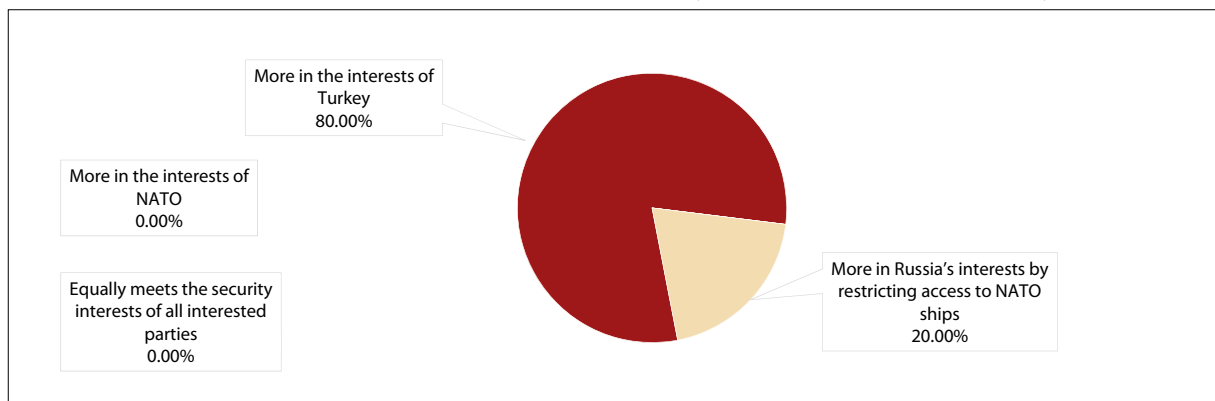


Figure 5: How Can NATO Allies Prevent Further Destructive Actions by Russia that are Destroying Security in the Black Sea Region?

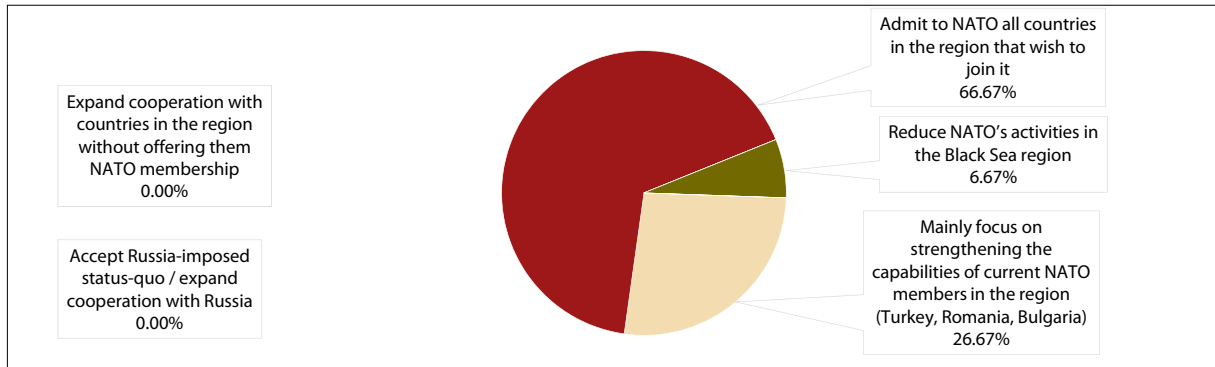


Figure 6: In Your Opinion, What Is the Best Policy Option for Your Country to Insulate and Protect Itself from the Negative Consequences of Russian Assertiveness in the Eastern Partnership Region?

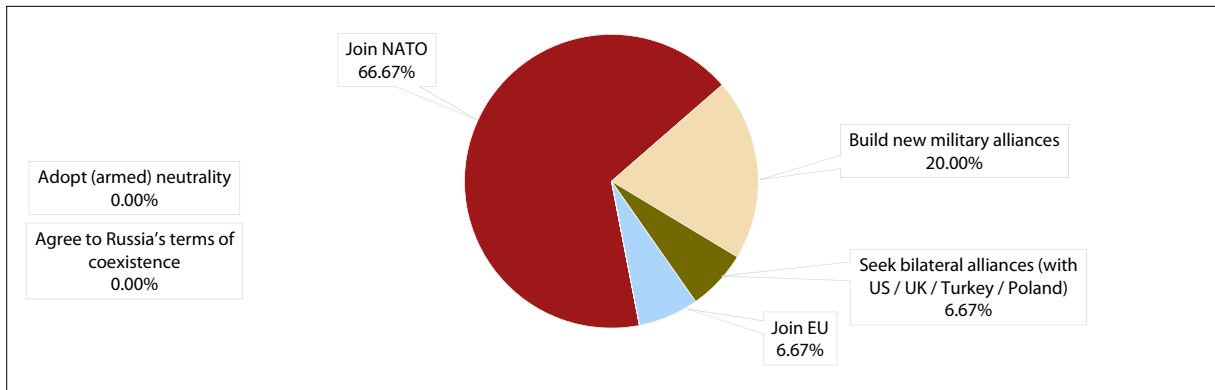


Figure 7: What Could Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine Contribute to Strengthening Security in the Wider Black Sea region? (Respondents Could Choose More Than One Option; Results Are Represented in %)

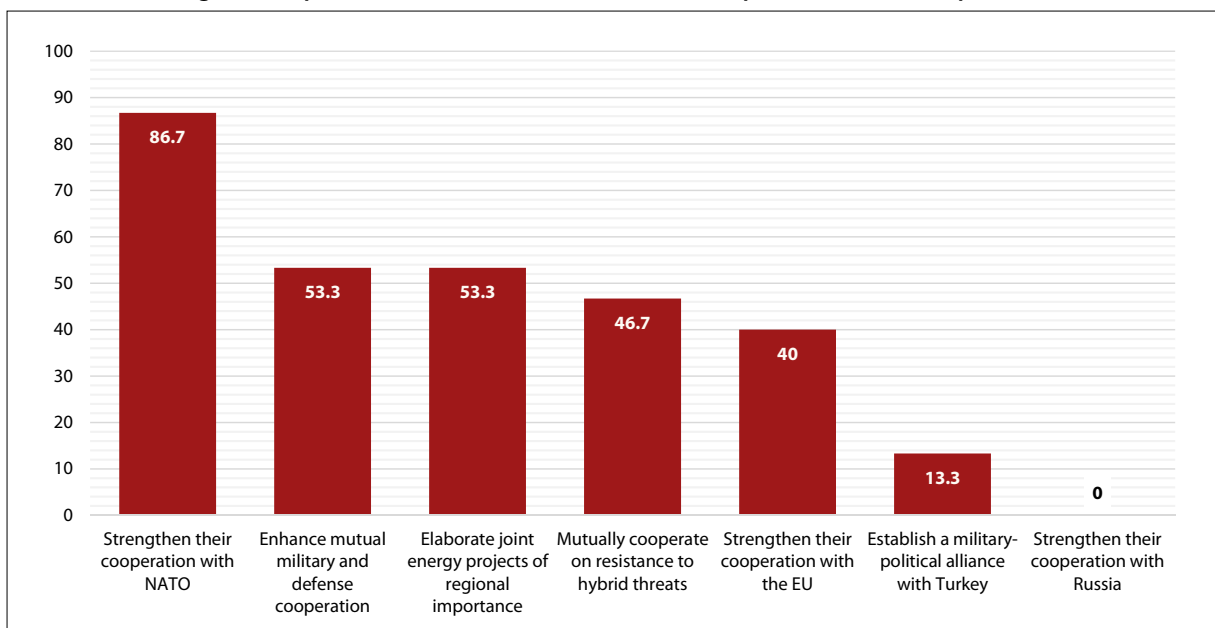
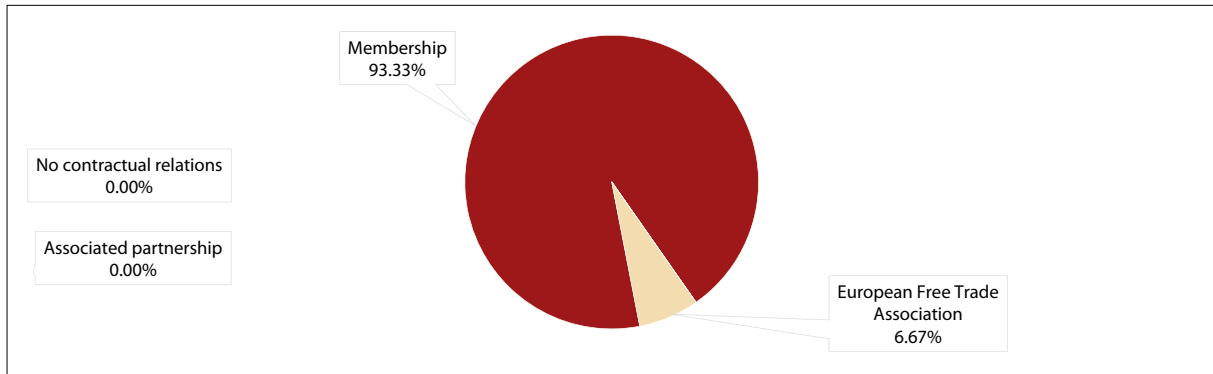
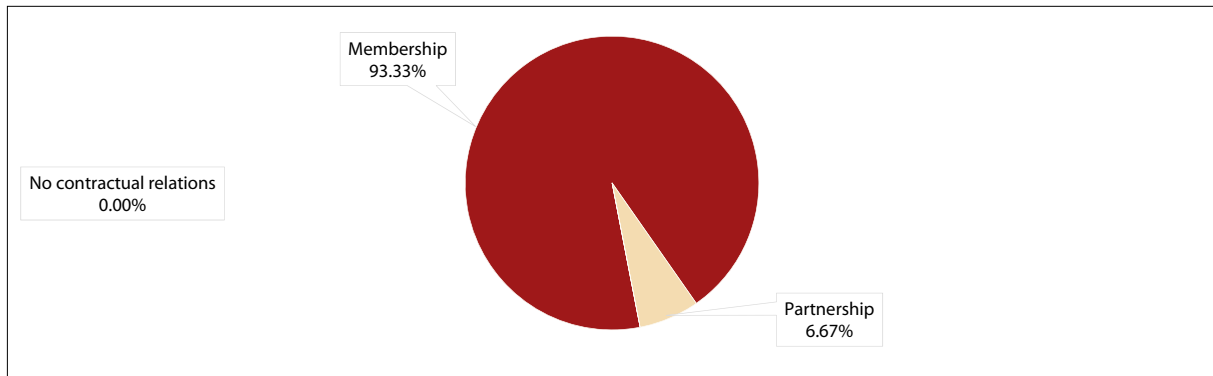


Figure 8: How Do You See Your Country's Final Stage of Relations with the EU?**Figure 9: How Do You See Your Country's Final Stage of Relations with NATO?**

Black Sea Geopolitics after the Russia–Ukraine war: The View from Armenia

By Armen Grigoryan (Centre for Policy Studies, Yerevan)

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Abstract

This article reviews the impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the changing regional security situation on Armenia with a reference to Armenia's own security predicament, which has been persistent since the disastrous 44-day war in 2020. In that context, this article explores the perceptions of Armenia's political elite and experts on the regional situation based on public statements and published articles and interviews.

Introduction

For landlocked Armenia, access to the Black Sea via Georgian ports has been vital, as they provide ferry connections to Bulgarian and Romanian ports and, before the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February,

ports in Ukraine. Furthermore, a ferry link from Poti to Russia's Port Kavkaz has been in use periodically, supplementing and sometimes substituting overland automobile cargo traffic between Armenia and Russia. As the recent rounds of Armenian–Turkish consultations

do not seem to be leading to a border opening in the short term, access to Georgian ports will remain highly important in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna have raised some hopes regarding the theoretical possibility of a new North–South transportation corridor linking Iran with Georgian Black Sea ports via Armenia, as well as new oil and gas pipelines in the same direction. However, Iran’s ongoing uranium enrichment seems to have indefinitely delayed any agreement on the partial lifting of international sanctions; this may even result in the failure to reach such an agreement (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Impact of the Russian–Ukrainian War on Armenia and Perceived Security Challenges

Some of Armenia’s policy priorities during the early stage of the Russian large-scale aggression could be summarised as follows: avoiding recognition of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic; avoiding military support for Russia and, consequently, international isolation and sanctions; evading any direct involvement in the sanctions imposed on Russia; and securing a continuous supply of grain and other staple foods from Russia. Such efforts to maintain a neutral stance have included abstaining from voting at the UN Human Rights Council when the Ukrainian delegation requested an urgent debate on the human rights violations during Russian aggression and from voting when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine, as well as engaging in absenteeism during the vote at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to adopt a document on the consequences of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine (Grigoryan, 2022a). In contrast, before February 2022, the Armenian delegations at various international fora almost invariably voted in Russia’s favour on issues regarding its occupation of parts of Ukrainian territory.¹

In addition, officially, Yerevan has been sensitive to allegations of Armenia’s support of this Russian aggression, especially those originating from Azerbaijan, including the alleged possibility of the redeployment of some Russian troops from its 102nd military base in Gyumri to Ukraine (Kucera, 2022) or that Armenia supplied four Su-30SM fighter aircraft (acquired in 2020) to Russia for deployment against Ukraine. In the latter case, the authorities invited defence attachés from the embassies of EU and NATO member states to the air-

base to disprove these allegations (Armenia Ministry of Defence, 2022).

At the same time, avoiding antagonising Russia has been a long-term principal feature of foreign policy. Obligations deriving from Armenia’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) or the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) have hardly ever been questioned. Even though the CSTO declined Armenia’s request to intervene because of an Azerbaijani incursion into Armenia’s territory in May 2021, Armenia sent approximately 100 troops to Kazakhstan in January 2022 as part of a CSTO mission, and the secretary of Armenia’s Security Council, Armen Grigoryan (no relation with the author), told public television that “The public has raised concern about why Armenia appealed for help and didn’t receive it and is now providing it. First of all, it’s a matter of responsibility, if Armenia has an interest in the CSTO mechanisms’ functioning, and the answer is a clear yes” (Mejlumyan, 2022). When Azerbaijan moved further into the Armenian territory during an intensive fight on 13–14 September 2022, the Armenian government formally invoked the CSTO’s collective defence provision, seeking military aid to restore the territorial integrity of the country in accordance with article 4 of the CSTO charter; however, no such aid followed (Mejlumyan, 2022). Consequently, the secretary of the Security Council noted in an interview with the RFE/RL Armenian Service that Armenia lacked any hope that the CSTO defence mechanisms would be activated (Aslanyan, 2022). Furthermore, Russia, which is the dominant CSTO member, failed to fulfil similar obligations that are stipulated by the 1997 bilateral treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance.

Notably, several foreign observers have considered the recent events in terms of Russia’s diminishing power (Walker, 2022; Cenusa, 2022). Some Armenian experts have also viewed Azerbaijan’s recent incursion into Armenia in terms of Russia’s weakness—resulting from its unsuccessful military engagement in Ukraine. Particularly, the director of the Regional Studies Centre, Richard Giragosian, has noted this and other important factors including the recent agreement with the EU, whereby Azerbaijan would supply natural gas to Europe as an alternative to Russian energy, and Azerbaijan’s rather accurate estimation of the international community’s likely reaction, which involved the usual accusations of “false equivalency” and “inappropriate parity” as well as statements calling on “both sides” to de-escalate. At the same time, Giragosian notes, some more

1 See, for example, the UN General Assembly’s resolution A/RES/76/70, ‘Problem of the militarization 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’ (UN 2021a), A/RES/76/179 ‘Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine’ (UN 2021b), or voting on similar issues in the previous years.

principled reactions, from France and the Netherlands in particular, could be rather unexpected towards Baku (Giragosian, 2022). However, Giragosian also notes that ‘There is neither a future nor relationship between Armenia and the CSTO. ... And, I think Prime Minister Pashinyan’s call for invoking security and guarantees only exposes the weakness and emptiness of that relationship. ... However, at the same time, the bigger challenge, well beyond the CSTO, is that Russia is now completely exposed as a danger. It’s a challenge of being an unreliable partner for Armenia. That’s quite a different challenge than a predictable enemy. An unreliable friend is a new challenge’ (Civilnet, 2022).

There have also been even more critical opinions in Armenia of Russia and its role in the region. The former chargé d’affaires in Russia, Director of the Analytical Centre on Globalisation and Regional Cooperation, Stepan Grigoryan, has noted how Russia abstained from the fulfilment of its duties as an ally even before launching its current aggression against Ukraine, particularly referring to Azerbaijan’s military incursion into Armenia in May 2021 as well as other occasions. According to Grigoryan’s sources in the government, Russia also sides with Azerbaijan, exerting pressure on Armenia to open an extraterritorial transportation corridor through its territory that is controlled by Russian border guards, which would effectively isolate Armenia from Iran (Tumakova, 2022).

According to some reports, Russian border guards deployed in Armenia have already installed five modular checkpoints in the vicinity of villages in the southern part of the country, close to its border with Iran, and they started checking travellers’ documents some time ago. The National Security Service of Armenia did not respond to journalists’ enquiries regarding this issue, while Russian representatives have stated that their actions are aimed at the prevention of illegal migration and smuggling (Khulyan, 2022). Considering the border control regime is already in place, the Russian explanation has not eliminated the existing concerns.

According to information publicised on 16 September 2022 by a watchdog nongovernmental organisation, the Union of Informed Citizens, some of the modular checkpoints are not being used at the moment, although the Russian border guards had previously attempted to build fences and effectively mark the corridor along the road connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan; thus far, such attempts have been unsuccessful (Factor TV, 2022). In turn, former member of the National Assembly (2019–2021) and political scientist Mikayel Zolyan notes that Armenia has suggested opening all regional communication routes, but Azerbaijan apparently supports the corridor approach, which would give it a direct connection to Nakhichevan and

Turkey while otherwise keeping Armenia isolated; thus, the latest military escalation was an attempt to exert pressure on Yerevan, whereby Russia remained passive because the corridor approach suits its interests as well (Dubnov, 2022).

However, Chairman of the Centre for Political and Economic Strategic Studies, Benyamin Poghosyan, while also considering that “[t]he ongoing war in Ukraine created additional complications for Russian and CSTO military involvement”, at the same time, argued that “Russia is likely to perceive any decision by Armenia to withdraw or freeze its membership in the CSTO as a hostile action ... [a] decision to withdraw or freeze Armenia’s membership in the CSTO would negatively impact Armenia–Russia relations. It would further deteriorate Armenia’s external security environment” (Poghosyan, 2022).

Brief discussions with other Armenian experts, as well as observations in the media and on social networks, also show that scepticism towards CSTO membership and Russia’s security guarantees has grown considerably. Russia’s apparent interest in providing a transportation corridor under its control to Azerbaijan is also interpreted in terms of the possibility of having an additional overland connection between Russia and Turkey—a significant factor, given Turkey’s ongoing active collaboration with Russia regarding the circumvention of international sanctions. Furthermore, military escalations continue to serve as inspiration for the pro-Russian opposition to apply domestic pressure on the Armenian government, even advocating the possibility of joining the Russia–Belarus union state, which is likely Russia’s next policy goal vis-à-vis Armenia (Grigoryan, 2022a; 2022b).

Prime Minister Pashinyan’s statements have been sceptical yet cautious. Most recently, he mentioned his conversation with a CSTO official among many issues covered in a lengthy interview with Public Television of Armenia: “it was even said that the CSTO was concerned that it might lose Armenia. To which I replied that there is the opposite concern in Armenia — that Armenia will lose the CSTO. Or when they say that Armenia will leave the CSTO, in Armenia there is the opposite concern — that the CSTO will leave Armenia. And this is not a play on words. We expect a clear political assessment of the situation” (Dovich, 2022).

Conclusion

In summary, the security vacuum and lack of options for a peaceful settlement with Azerbaijan on favourable terms, largely because of Russia’s continuing dominance of the negotiations while remaining an unreliable partner, amidst a lack of U.S. and EU regional engagement, are perceived as security challenges for Armenia. This

situation is further exacerbated by Armenia's economic and infrastructural dependence on Russia.

Regardless of the eventual outcome of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and any postwar settlement, the entire European security architecture can hardly return to the *status quo ante*. While some of Armenia's policy-makers' recent decisions have clearly resulted from short-term considerations, longer-term planning, including a reassessment of some of the priorities and available opportunities, has become especially important.

It still remains to be seen whether EU's diplomacy will keep expanding its activities, including mediation,

also after the side event of the first European Political Community summit, which may help to avoid further border incidents (European Council, 2022). While not a substitute for security guarantees that Armenia has recently been lacking, such activities increase the possibility of a peaceful settlement, which would eventually improve economic and social perspectives. While abrupt moves perceived hostile by Russia would create additional security risks, maintaining the long-term dependence on Russian security guarantees, as well as economic dependence, may multiply the risks in the longer term.

About the Author

Armen Grigoryan is co-founder and vice president of the Yerevan-based Centre for Policy Studies.

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Azerbaijan Amid the Ukrainian Crisis: Perceptions, Implications and Expectations

By Anar Valiyev (ADA University, Baku), Ahmad Alili (Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre, Baku) and Fidan Namazova (ADA University, Baku)

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Abstract

The Ukrainian crisis has greatly affected the political and economic perception of the Azerbaijani public and has had huge implications for the country's development. The war has put the country in an uneasy condition, in which Baku needs to balance with Moscow on the issue of Karabakh and work closely with the West in ensuring its energy security. Moreover, the continued standoff between Russia and the EU/USA limits Azerbaijan's field for manoeuvring, and it has taken criticism from both sides. It seems obvious that Azerbaijan will continue its policy of "silent diplomacy" that stipulates to not irritate the powerful centres as well as its policy of restoration of territorial integrity and keeping its independence as a country through small steps and actions.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a vast domain of uncertainty that increases the need for stability. The main ramifications of the situation in Ukraine on the foreign policy of Azerbaijan include a reduced space for manoeuvring and increased costs/risks of foreign policy actions. The war has seriously affected and continues to affect the calculations of the decision-makers in Baku. The war requires a new policy towards not only regional countries but also the USA and EU.

Therefore, we can argue that the current crisis will be a reset point for Azerbaijan. If, as a result of the war, Russia becomes stronger, then Moscow is going to increase its pressure on the South Caucasus and other countries of Eurasia to yield to the Kremlin's new terms. If Russia becomes weaker, then Azerbaijan must become ready for the possible decentralization and instability in the North Caucasus, leading to certain radicalization. The crisis has also placed Azerbaijan in a tricky situation, in which it must balance more carefully than before to

avoid being viewed as a Russian ally in the West while also not angering Russia (in view of Russia's increased role in Karabakh). The crisis weakens Azerbaijan's room for manoeuvring and increases the risk of steps taken in either direction. Therefore, Azerbaijani diplomacy is forced to take more cautious steps than before and loses its flexibility to a certain degree. The following article will examine the perception, implications, and expectations of Azerbaijan in the current situation and how the country will behave in these uneasy times.

In the writing of this article, several data collection methods have been employed. First, the researchers interviewed four experts/political analysts on the current situation in Ukraine. Second, the researchers conducted a content analysis of the mass media as well as official statements of public officials. Finally, the researchers conducted an online survey among 15 experts on questions related to the Azerbaijani situation amid the Ukrainian war.

Perception and Political Implications

Certainly, the war in Ukraine has not led to the fractures or division between political elites and society in Azerbaijan, as in many countries of Eurasia, but instead united the country in its attitudes towards the Russian aggression. As before, President Aliyev remained the main character forming the opinion of Azerbaijani elites related to the conflict in Ukraine. During the international conference on April 29, 2022, President Aliyev strongly supported Ukraine, calling on Ukraine to not accept the occupation of its territories (Trend.az, 2022). Referring to the Western position of pacification as wrong, he urged Ukrainians to rely on their own forces and not to depend on outside support. Furthermore, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev said that the Russian–Ukrainian war was a source of concern, and Azerbaijan supported a “diplomatic solution” to the conflict, stressing the priority of state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Aztv.az, 2022).

The Azerbaijani government has been pursuing a balanced approach to the war in Ukraine since its start on February 24. Azerbaijan helps Ukraine by sending humanitarian aid; oil companies provide cheap oil to emergency vehicles, etc. While supplying Ukraine with humanitarian aid and much-needed energy resources, Baku did not join sanctions on Russia. However, to define whether this balancing has thus far been “effective”, one needs to look at the change or continuity in Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with these countries and what it achieved with this calculated balancing. Perception matters greatly, and the downwards slope we observed in Azerbaijan–Russia relations in this period shows that Moscow perceives Baku's independent moves in this regard as a challenge to its cause in Ukraine and

the wider neighbourhood. Harsh rhetoric against Azerbaijan in Russian media and among officials right after the beginning of the war indicates that Moscow sees Azerbaijan as being on the opposite side in the worsening zero-sum game between Russia and the West, but it hesitates to strain ties with Baku amid the looming chaos in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the Kremlin perfectly understands its vulnerability and problems with losing Azerbaijan, has closely cooperated with Baku in Karabakh and has helped to facilitate peace with Armenia.

The Azerbaijani public, meanwhile, supported the Ukrainian cause, and regardless of the position of the Azerbaijani government in the political sphere, the “grand rally” in front of the Ukrainian embassy in early March shows that the Azerbaijani people support Ukraine. As stated by the media, Azerbaijani society, the media, and public figures, for the most part, support the Ukrainian side and point of view. They recognize that what is happening now in Ukraine is not a special operation but a full-scale Russian invasion of the territory of Ukraine (Kuzio, 2022). Meanwhile, a large majority of Azerbaijani society took a pro-Ukraine approach in this crisis and went to the streets against the Russian invasion, associating it with the occupation of one's territories by a foreign occupant (Oc-media.org, 2022). Whenever Azerbaijani society sees Russian troops enter foreign lands, they immediately remember the Karabakh and the Russian troops there. That is why society reacts negatively to Russia's invasion. The support of the people can be confirmed by the abundant humanitarian aid sent, support in social media and the demonstration, during which many people gathered at the Embassy of Ukraine in Baku. This was quite an influential moment for Azerbaijani society, and while protesting Russian actions in Ukraine, they were, by proxy, protesting Russian actions in Karabakh (JAMnews, 2022).

Impact on the Karabakh Conflict

For Azerbaijan, there is uncertainty not only for the general security system but also in Karabakh. Thus, the situation there may create different shades of security dilemmas, pushing different sides to miscalculate. The war obviously has deepened contradictions between the West and Russia. This may lead to the following scenarios: a) intensified rivalry between the West and Russia over including the South Caucasus (SC) under different spheres of influence, b) weakening Russia's position in the SC, and c) withdrawing the West from the SC and intensifying Russia's position here. Depending on which scenario takes place, the Karabakh issue will be affected consequently. The Azerbaijani government has tried to quickly resolve the Karabakh conflict, moving it from the international agenda to the domestic agenda. Thus, the government announced that the Karabakh conflict

has already been solved and that Baku does not need mediation to deal with its Armenian population. Azerbaijan needs assistance only with building peace relations with Yerevan and building communication lines with neighbouring countries. For a certain moment, Baku closely cooperated with Moscow in Karabakh, and Russia helped Baku in the smooth de-occupation of several villages and the city of Lachin. Baku fears that the active involvement of Brussels and Washington in the Karabakh conflict (although Baku denies the existence of conflict) will make Moscow see the region as the new front line. Thus, the conflict will not be resolved, and Russian peacekeepers will become the protectors of separatists. The Ukrainian crisis will determine whether one of two scenarios will take place in Karabakh (more broadly in the Caucasus region): 1) preservation of Russia-centred configurations, particularly in Karabakh, or 2) replacement of these configurations with European-centred configurations. Which of these will occur depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, and it is difficult to predict what the outcome will be. On the diplomatic front, the EU seems to be the best candidate to emerge as an alternative mediation platform to the mostly Russia-led process. This approach is in Azerbaijani interests, as it works according to the agenda set by Baku (no status, no OSCE, no conflict + future orientation). Baku's vision of the resolution of conflict is that all residents of the region are citizens of Azerbaijan, and no special privileges should be applicable for anyone. Moreover, no foreign country/organization can intervene in Azerbaijan's internal affairs. At the same time, an increasing number of direct contacts between Armenia and Azerbaijan will also weaken Russian leverage. Finally, military experts stated that the war would have tremendous influence over the military strategy of Azerbaijan. It is obvious that Azerbaijan will stop purchasing weapons from Russia, try to move away from the Russian-style military system and rely more on the Turkish/NATO model (Baku Dialogues, 2021–2022).

The Ukrainian crisis is believed to have greatly affected the Karabakh conflict. Since the beginning of the Russian–Ukrainian war, some processes in Karabakh and beyond have indicated such an effect. There has been spreading news that the Armenian population of Karabakh has been left without gas and of intensified hostilities in Karabakh, with the Azerbaijani army progressing and taking control of Farrukh village in Karabakh's Khojali region in March, the recent clashes between Azerbaijani and separatist forces as well as a "revenge" military operation and control of another strategic location, Mount Buzdukh, and the adjacent heights. These processes were also accompanied by the exchange of declarations, accusations of false information/statements and denials by the Ministries of Defence

of the AR and RF. The crisis may have a great impact on the Karabakh process. Considering the current situation, Russia is not interested in the escalation of the conflict and has taken measures to avoid escalation. As a result, Russia has followed the points of the agreement signed on November 9 and played a positive role in convincing Armenia to transfer the Lachin corridor to Azerbaijan. In this context, due to its preoccupation with the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has positively affected Karabakh processes. On the one hand, we see how Western countries and institutions have reactivated their engagement in the issue after almost a decade of Russian dominance. Baku and Yerevan, as well, seem enthusiastic to explore new, alternative platforms for their bilateral relations and the Karabakh issue, one being Brussels. The real outcome and impact can be seen and evaluated after the Ukraine war: we have yet to see whether Russia will emerge from the conflict stronger or weaker. In the former scenario, the Kremlin may have an upper hand to keep dominating the Karabakh issue, while a weaker/humiliated Russia may either try to make gains elsewhere (Karabakh) or be squeezed out of the region (Expert Interview 1, July 2022).

Economic Expectations and Implications

The war in Ukraine has prompted the European Union (EU) to speed up its energy diversification strategy. On March 8, 2022, the bloc proposed an outline of a plan called Repower EU, which seeks the complete removal of Russian fossil fuel imports well before the end of the decade. This is a daunting task given that the EU imported more than 43.5% of its total gas consumption, 27% of oil imports and 46% of coal imports from Russia in 2021 (European Commission, 2022). The European energy crisis, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, makes the expansion of the SGC project especially relevant and timely. All elements of the gas corridor are expandable. Currently, Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz Stage 2 is the only source of gas for the SGC, providing approximately 16 billion cubic metres (bcm) of natural gas, with 6 bcm going to Turkey and 10 to the EU markets, including Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria (Caspiannews.com, 2022). Given Azerbaijan's enormous gas reserves, estimated at approximately 2.6 trillion cubic metres, the country can double natural gas exports to Europe within 5 years should the necessary investments and mid/long-term commitments from the potential buyers be made (Caspiannews.com, 2022). Baku's ambitions to increase its renewable capacity in electricity generation to 30% by 2030 will provide additional natural gas volumes for exports to European markets. The EU, for its part, has recently allocated a two-billion-euro financial assistance package to Azerbaijan (Apa.az, 2022), which is widely regarded as a prelude for deepening the energy

partnership between Brussels and Baku and increasing the EU's influence in the region.

Baku could also arrange swap transactions with Turkmenistan and even with Russia, which are the only holders of significant natural gas reserve capacity in the region, meaning that their resources are immediately available. Baku has already been participating in a swap arrangement with Ashgabat and Tehran since November 2021. Under the swap deal, Iran receives up to 2 bcm of gas from Turkmenistan and delivers an equivalent amount to Azerbaijan at the Astara border. In addition, Turkmenistan may directly send some volumes of natural gas to Azerbaijan from the offshore Dostluq field, which is envisaged to be jointly developed by Baku and Ashgabat. The produced volumes can be shipped to Baku's Sangachal oil and gas terminal by building a short interconnector from the Dostluq field to Azerbaijan's existing offshore infrastructure in the Caspian. According to the new EU–Azerbaijan MoU on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy signed on July 18, to boost shipments, the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor will be increased to at least 20 billion cubic metres annually by 2027. The deliveries have already increased from the Azerbaijani side from 8.1 billion cubic metres in 2021 to an expected 12 billion cubic metres in 2022 (Bloomberg.com, 2022). Similarly, if Azerbaijan manages to obtain cheaper gas from Russia for its domestic use and electricity production, it could free up its own resources for export to Europe. With this strategy, Azerbaijan does not bypass sanctions but uses Russian gas for domestic consumption. On February 22, Azerbaijan and Russia signed an allied cooperation agreement to further advance bilateral relations. Points 31 and 32 of the documents are particularly interesting, as they discuss the deepening of energy cooperation, including the transportation of energy resources.

The war in Ukraine has also affected the physical supplies of Azeri oil. Approximately 80% of the country's crude oil is exported via the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which is located far away from the conflict area and takes Azeri Light crude from the Azeri–Chirag–Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea (iea, 2020). The remaining volumes, however, are shipped via the Baku–Supsa and Baku–Novorossiysk pipelines to the Black Sea ports, which have been severely affected by the war in Ukraine. Due to safety concerns, BP, a leading energy producer in Azerbaijan, shut down the oil pipeline it operates to Georgia's Black Sea coast and redirected the crude oil exports to the BTC route (Eurasianet.org, 2022).¹ The latter can transit up to 60 million tons of crude a year

but has been recently operating at approximately half capacity, thus providing enough space for accommodating approximately 4.2 million tons of crude supplies envisaged for the Baku–Supsa pipeline. Rerouting, however, comes at a cost. The BTC route, in addition to being two times longer, also traverses Turkey, which has recently increased the transit fee for its section of the pipeline from \$0.55 per barrel of oil to between \$1.50 and \$2. Meanwhile, transit through the Baku–Supsa pipeline costs only \$0.42 per barrel. While the Baku–Supsa oil has been redirected to BTC, physical supplies of Azeri crude via the Baku–Novorossiysk pipeline seem to be unaffected. However, as the Black Sea route currently incurs a war risk premium, the Russia-associated Urals crude blend at the port of Novorossiysk has been traded at the steepest discounts in years. While, for example, during the week of June 6, the price of Azeri light crude was averaged at approximately \$129 per barrel, Azerbaijan's Urals crude traded at approximately \$88 (Trend.az, 2022).²

The Future is Unstable

Right from independence Azerbaijan was looking at the Black Sea region from the perspective of access to the world market for its energy products. It is not surprising that the GoA as well as the public perceived the Black Sea area as vital for the country. While Azerbaijan is squeezed between Russia and Iran, has near-war conditions with Armenia, and has limited export opportunities for its energy products, the Black Sea remains one of the important transportation links to the West. In line with the country's strategic initiatives, the countries of the Black Sea region, specifically Georgia and Turkey, were considered strategic partners through which Azerbaijan was building its transportation and political and economic relations with the West.

The Ukraine crisis will have both pros and cons for Azerbaijan's position in structural terms. On the positive side, Baku emerges as a reliable energy supplier for the EU, and its geographical location increases Azerbaijan's strategic importance for energy resources (not only for the West but also for Russia and China). Apparently, it has positive side effects on its negotiating position in Karabakh. Azerbaijan can also emerge as a connectivity hub after sanctions on Russian railways. The middle corridor, with Azerbaijan as a crucial part, can divert some part of the cargo from the northern route passing through Russia and Belarus. On the negative side, Azerbaijan will be part of a worsening zero-sum game between Russia and the West. Until recently, Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy behaviour afforded it the

1 More information here: <https://eurasianet.org/ukraine-war-forces-closure-of-azerbaijani-oil-export-pipeline>

2 More information here: https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/195254.html

manoeuvring capability to avoid geopolitical pressures. Manoeuvring between the competing interests of Russia and the West has always been the hallmark of Azerbaijani foreign policy. Now, the Ukrainian crisis has complicated the issues further. Baku will need to engage in geopolitical multitasking.

Under the current conditions, it is wise for Azerbaijan to use its old tactic, called “strategic patience”. The foreign policy of the country would concentrate on the provision of energy security to Europe, building good and partner relations with the EU and the USA in eco-

nomie, transport and cultural spheres. Meanwhile, Baku will not pursue political integration. At the same time, the country will also maintain friendly relations with Russia and will not be involved in any anti-Russian sanctions or actions. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan will not join Russian-led initiatives such as the CSTO or Eurasian Economic Union. The country will also work with Russia to reach long-term peace with Armenia since Moscow has a huge influence on Yerevan and has the ability to help both countries to open transportation corridors.

About the Authors

Dr. *Anar Valiyev* is Associate Professor at ADA University, Baku, Azerbaijan.

Mr. *Ahmad Alili* is Director of Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre, an independent think tank based in Baku.

Ms. *Fidan Namazova* is master student of public affairs at ADA University.

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Black Sea Geopolitics after the Russia–Ukraine War: View from Georgia

By Salome Kandelaki (Georgian Institute of Politics) and Bidzina Lebanidze (University of Jena)

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Georgia’s foreign and domestic policies and the country’s place and role in the Black Sea region. It draws on interviews and expert surveys to examine how Georgia’s foreign policy community views recent dramatic developments in the Black Sea area and the impact of the latter on Georgia’s security, stability, and development. The article further critically assesses Georgia’s response to the Russia–Ukraine war and how it fits with the country’s main foreign policy trends, including the much criticized Finlandization policy towards Russia. The article concludes that while the Black Sea area remains of paramount importance to Georgia, the Russia–Ukraine war made Georgia’s security more vulnerable to risks and threats emanating from the region. Furthermore, the war deepened the political and societal polarization in Georgia and, as our data suggest, exacerbated the schism between Georgia’s mostly pro-Western foreign policy expert community and the government’s balanced foreign policy.

Introduction

The article is part of the collaborative research project “Black Sea Cooperation for Stronger Security: Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan”. It explores the impact of the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war on Georgia and the perceptions of Georgia’s foreign policy community towards changing geopolitical circumstances in and around the Black Sea region. The article draws on qualitative interviews with Georgian political experts as well as a quantitative expert survey.¹ The article starts with a brief articulation of the importance of the Black Sea area for Georgia. It continues with a discussion of the impacts of the Russia–Georgia war on Georgia’s domestic and foreign policy as well as subsequent changes in the Black Sea area and Georgia’s role in the region.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had profound effects on not only Ukraine but also the entire security architecture of the Black Sea region and Europe. The ongoing war has fundamentally reshaped some key assumptions on politics and security and initiated a broader debate on the region’s future. The war has had profound effects on Georgia as well. Specifically, the Russia–Ukraine war has had a paramount, mostly negative impact on Georgia’s foreign and security policy as well as domestic politics. It has had less of an impact on the perceptions of Georgia’s foreign policy community², which, however, was expected. Unlike many European or regional countries, Georgia already had quite

a negative view of Russia and considered NATO and other Western actors as key pillars of security and stability in the broader Black Sea region and broader Europe. Therefore, the results of the survey conducted in this study do not deviate much from the overall spirit in the country that existed prior to the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Importance of the Black Sea Area for Georgia

Over the last three decades, the Black Sea region has played an important role for Georgia from three key perspectives: economic, military-political, and ideational. From an economic perspective, Georgia’s location in the Black Sea makes it a strategically important transit country. In terms of geographic scale, the Black Sea has two main functions: regional/local and global. Regionally, the Black Sea connects the littoral states with each other. In a peaceful environment, this transportation and connectivity ring could generate significant economic dividends (Dzebisashvili, 2022). Globally, the Black Sea connects Asia to Europe and the West to the East and gives the Black Sea littoral states, including Georgia, the potential to develop transport infrastructure and become a regional and global trade and transportation hub (Dzebisashvili, 2022). If this transit potential is fully realized, the South Caucasus could become a landly-connected Suez Canal—an important transit artery for the entire world (Tsereteli, 2022).

1 Overall, 5 expert interviews were conducted (one state official, one parliamentarian and three policy experts) and 16 security and policy experts participated in the expert survey. The main criteria for selecting respondents for expert survey and interviews (except state officials) was their political expertise, high academic and public visibility, nonpartisanship, and party-political neutrality. We excluded experts who are either affiliated with government or opposition parties or whose opinions are broadly regarded as politically biased.

2 We mostly understand the foreign policy community as an epistemic, or a knowledge-based, community. According to the conventional definition, an epistemic community refers to “...a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (Haas, 1992). While we acknowledge the limited representability of our field research (21 participants overall), considered with the desk research, the generated data can still provide an approximate snapshot of the dominant views and opinions of the Georgian expert community.

From security and military perspectives, the Black Sea builds an important security and geopolitical ring around Georgia that can be a source of both dangers and opportunities. Russia's aggressive policies and its continued occupation of Georgian territories are often viewed as major sources of threat. For Russia, Georgian stateness as such remains a problem (Tsereteli, 2022). Therefore, for Georgia, through its palette of activities, Russia remains an operational, tactical, and strategic threat (Tsereteli, 2022). In regional terms, Russia's assertive regional policy is also viewed as a spoiler of peaceful cooperation and regional development among the Black Sea countries (Dzebisashvili, 2022).

Finally, from the ideational perspective, the Black Sea is also seen as Georgia's geographic compass and an important bridge to the EU and NATO (Kakachia et al., 2022). The Black Sea is the only area that offers Georgia direct geographic links to the EU and NATO member states of Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania. The Black Sea helps Georgia to disconnect itself from the non-European world, connect symbolically and physically with the Eastern European States and find its way "back to Europe". This narrative is also enshrined in Georgia's strategic documents. For instance, according to the Georgian National Security Concept, "as a Black Sea and Southeast European country, Georgia is part of Europe geographically, politically, and culturally; yet it was cut off from its natural course of development by historical cataclysms" (MOD Georgia, 2011).

On balance, Georgia perceives the broader Black Sea region as an important pillar of its security and prosperity and the main passageway to the EU and NATO. Therefore, the Russia–Ukraine war and further destabilization in the Black Sea area have endangered Georgia's strategic interests and have had strong spill-over effects on the country's domestic and foreign policies.

Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Georgia and Its Place in the Black Sea Area

The Russia–Ukraine war has highly affected both Georgia's domestic and foreign policy as well as the country's overall security environment. First, the war added another layer of cleavage to the country's already highly polarized domestic politics and triggered a severe political crisis. The failure of the Georgian government to firmly oppose Russian aggression sparked mass protests, and the opposition demanded the resignation of the government (Pfeilschifter et al., 2022). Second, in terms of foreign policy, the Russia–Ukraine war exposed the limits of the balancing foreign policy of Georgia's ruling party, the Georgian Dream (GD). While supporting the pro-Ukraine resolutions in international organizations, the Georgian government did not join sanctions against Russia and half-heartedly supported Kyiv politically and diplomatically. Some scholars call Georgia's new-

found balancing policy towards Russia a new Finlandization strategy aimed at accommodating the concerns of its northern neighbour through self-restraint and strategic patience (Kakachia and Kakabadze, 2022). GD's nonirritational Russia policy is negatively viewed by many observers in Georgia. As one of our interview respondents argued, "[a] nonirritational policy towards Russia is not a real option for Georgia if it does not want to further have its sovereignty reduced and become a second Belarus" (Muchaidze, 2022).

A moderate reaction to the Russia–Ukraine war has been accompanied by rapidly deteriorating relations between the Georgian government and its Western partners. The pro-governmental voices responded to the growing criticism of democratic shortcomings from the EU and the US by accusing the West of attempting to drag Georgia into war with Russia (Civil Georgia, 2022). Lack of progress in areas of democracy and the rule of law is indeed seen by many in Georgia as an important impediment to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. As Giorgi Muchaidze noted, "it is very important, next to military reform, to also pay attention to reform agenda in democracy and rule of law, since without these reforms Georgia will not advance either with NATO or the EU, and even the door to NATO will remain only partly open" (Muchaidze, 2022). As he explained, democratic reforms mean security dividends for Georgia, as Europe and the USA see democratic states as more akin to allies, and they view the shift of democratic borders towards the East as part of their security interests (Muchaidze, 2022). Russia-accommodating foreign policy and mounting criticism towards Western partners by the GD government could perhaps also be viewed as extension of Georgia's domestic politics. As Georgia's European integration advances, the EU and other Western partners expect more stringent democratic reforms from the authorities, which could endanger the GD's grip on power. Hence, the GD faces a known dilemma of Georgia's ruling regimes of pursuing two conflicting, not fully reconcilable objectives: conducting democratic reforms and ensuring their stay in power.

The Russia–Ukraine war and changing geopolitical circumstances have also provided Georgia with new opportunities as the EU decided to consider Georgia, alongside Ukraine and Moldova, for candidacy in the EU. However, the opportunity soon turned into another political crisis after the EU decided to not give Georgia candidacy status due to democratic recession in the country. Unlike the Georgian government, Georgian society remains staunchly pro-European. The decision not to grant Georgia candidacy status was accompanied by the largest rally in a very long time. Some 120,000 people protested against the failure of the Georgian government to

obtain candidacy status (Georgian Journal, 2022). Georgia's political elites, however, both in the government and opposition, seem to be caught in a politically immature zero-sum game of polarization, radicalization, and political infighting. Overall, decoupling from Ukraine and Moldova seems to be a geopolitical loss for Georgia. While Ukraine (and Moldova) enjoyed certain geopolitical bonuses due to Russian aggression, Georgia was removed from the Associated Trio and grouped with a group of EU potential candidates from the Western Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. This change also broke up an important geopolitical grouping (the Associated Trio) around the Black Sea area once designed to advance EU-led good governance practices in a region marked by authoritarianism and bad governance.

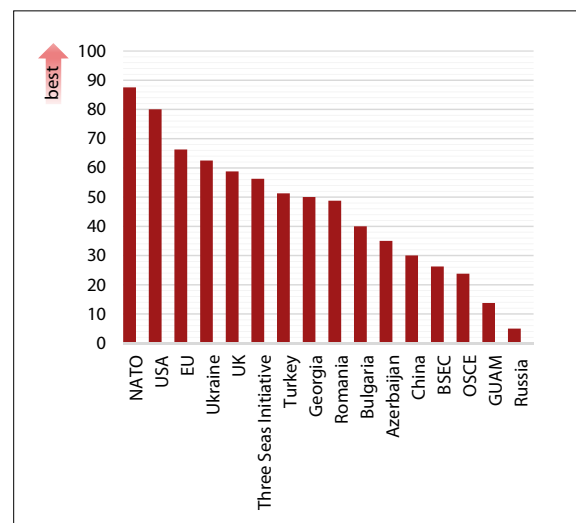
Finally, the Russia–Ukraine War also directly affected Georgia's security environment—in at least three ways. First, direct threats to Georgia's security and stability have further increased. Many scholars consider Georgia alongside Moldova to be the next target of Russian aggression (Kapanadze, 2022). The Georgian government also partly justified its ambivalent positioning towards the war by a need to avoid a new confrontation with Russia. In the case of renewed fighting, Georgia will be very vulnerable to Russia's military machine. The asymmetry in military capabilities of the two countries is particularly visible in the Black Sea area, where Georgia does not have significant military naval presence and is exposed to Russia's naval supremacy in the Black Sea. Second, the war in Ukraine has also affected the occupied zones in Georgia. Russia has reportedly withdrawn some of its troops from the Abkhazia and Samachablo regions and even sent local South Ossetians to fight in Ukraine (Eurasianet, 2022). Local economies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia may further suffer from sanctions against Russia and may see Russian subsidies further reduced due to Russia's economic crisis (Pfeilschifter et al., 2022). Finally, the Russia–Ukraine war may open new economic opportunities for Georgia as a South Caucasus and Black Sea transit country, as the EU may rely more on alternative routes to trade with Asia and focus more on Caspian energy resources to partly substitute for Russian gas and oil. However, structural deficiencies such as the absence of the deep sea port in the Black Sea may seriously inhibit Georgia from making best of its transit potential.

Perceptions about Security Challenges and Opportunities in the Black Sea Area

According to Georgia's foreign policy epistemic communities, the Russian–Ukraine war has not changed much regarding the security of Georgia and the wider Black Sea region. The expert survey shows that the majority

of Georgian experts consider NATO, the USA, and the EU to have the most positive roles “in strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region” (Figure 1). This perception corresponds to an overall image of Georgian society as a staunchly pro-Western and Russia sceptic. The USA was also unequivocally named the most important ally of Georgia by interviewed respondents, along with the UK, Poland, the Baltic States, the EU, and NATO (Akubardia, Tsereteli, Muchaidze, Dzebisashvili, 2022). Interestingly, the experts did not mention other Western powers, such as France and Germany, among Georgia's key strategic partners. On the other hand, Russia's role is considered the least positive, as is China's. Interestingly, Georgian experts also have very low trust in non-Western international and regional organizations. For instance, the BSEC, OSCE and GUAM all received very low scores as security-providing organizations for the Black Sea region (Figure 1).

Figure 1: How Would You Assess the Possible Positive Role of the Following Actors in Strengthening Security in the Wider Black Sea Region? (Standardized on a Scale of 0–100 Best)



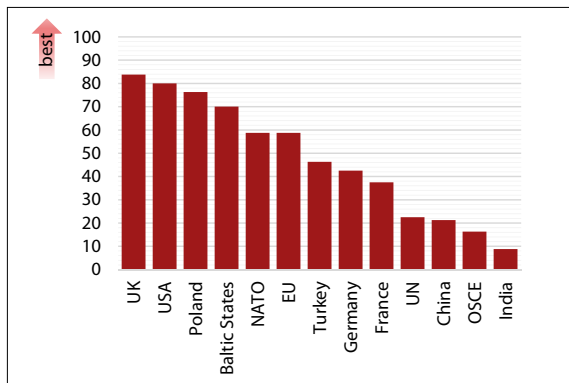
See Appendix 2 on p. 27 for the data used to create this chart.

The picture is mostly similar but with few interesting deviations in regard to the perception about the role of key actors in the Russia–Ukraine war. The UK seems to have become a particularly trusted actor in terms of the “containment of Russia's assertive regional policies”, while Germany and France received less than average scores and are seen as the least favourable Western actors by Georgian experts (Figure 2). Interestingly, Poland and the Baltic States also scored higher than NATO and the EU. The EU's image seems to have suffered somewhat during the Russia–Ukraine war. One expert predicted: “The EU will probably fail to learn lessons and become a strategic actor” (Tsereteli, 2022). Therefore,

they believe that Georgia needs to look for new regional security configurations that could emerge among Poland, the UK, Ukraine, Turkey and other Eastern European and Black Sea States (Tsereteli, 2022). Another positive development in the Black Sea area would be strengthening the Three Seas Initiative³ (Akubardia, 2022). This initiative could become a significant boost as a result of Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO and the Baltic Sea becoming a NATO sea (Akubardia, 2022).

On the other hand, the Russia–Ukraine war seems to have further cemented Georgian scholars' low trust in non-Western international organizations as well as in non-Western state powers. The UN, OSCE, China and India are the least trusted actors to have a positive role in the Russia–Ukraine War and in the containment of Russia's assertive regional policies (Figure 2). Lack of trust in international organizations is certainly linked to their inability to enforce principles of international law in the Black Sea area. According to one respondent, "Russia violated the Helsinki principles and stopped acknowledging that small states too are sovereign. These key principles should be reestablished and relations between large and small states should be based on respecting each other's sovereignties" (Tsereteli, 2022).

Figure 2: How Would You Assess the Role of the Following Actors in the Russia–Ukraine War and in the Containment of Russia's Assertive Regional Policies? (Standardized on a Scale of 0–100 Best)

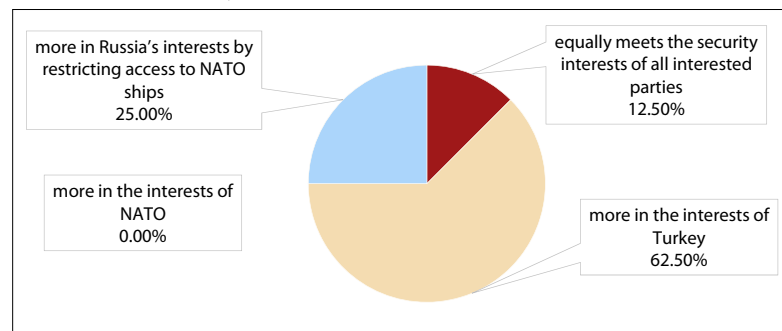


See Appendix 2 on p. 27 for the data used to create this chart.

Interestingly, the Georgian expert community seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards Turkey. On the one hand, Turkey is seen as a key strategic, military, and economic partner of Georgia. At the same time, Turkey's hesitant position towards NATO's involvement in the

Black Sea region and Ankara's opportunistic relations with Russia make many in Georgia feel uncomfortable. As one respondent noted, "Turkey's Black Sea Policy has not been directed at [the] active involvement of NATO in the Black Sea and has been prioritising the regional formats of cooperation [with Russia's involvement] to solve the problems and challenges in the Black Sea area. For instance, the 3+3 initiative was aimed at exclusion of the West and problem-solving together with Russia" (Muchaidze, 2022). According to the interviewed experts, Turkey's balancing policy between NATO and Russia should be a concern for Georgia (Muchaidze, 2022). Moreover, while Turkey is positioned to remain Georgia's key trade partner, Tbilisi also needs to further diversify its connectivity and trade roots. According to one respondent, "While [a] railway connection to Turkey is important, for Georgia it is of paramount importance to have [a] direct connection to Europe via the Black Sea ports of Constanza, Odessa and other ports" (Tsereteli, 2022). The experts were also sceptical about the utility of the Montreux convention.⁴ The majority of surveyed respondents agreed that it was more in the interest of Turkey, while none of them believed it was in the interest of NATO (Figure 3).

Figure 3: How Does the Montreux Convention Affect the Security of the Black Sea Region Today?



Georgians seem to have even less positive opinions of China. According to one expert, "Unlike Central Asia, in the South Caucasus, it is unlikely that China will balance Russia. In contrast, China can become a promoter of Russia's interests in the South Caucasus in exchange for Russian concessions in Central Asia" (Muchaidze, 2022). Even in terms of economic cooperation, Georgian experts advise caution with China: "Georgia may

³ According to the official webpage of the initiative, it is "a politically inspired, commercially driven platform for improving connectivity between twelve EU Member States allocated between Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas" (Three Seas, 2022).

⁴ The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits was signed in 1936 by Australia, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and Turkey. It "gives Turkey control over the water route between the Black Sea (...) and the Mediterranean Sea and beyond" and "sets limits on the passage of civilian vessels and military warships through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus straits, with the Sea of Marmara between them forming the seagoing link between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean" (Ozerdem 2022).

benefit from cheap Chinese loans and procurements, but Georgia should [be] careful that strategic objects, if privatized, are given to Western and not to Chinese companies” (Muchaidze, 2022).

Unsurprisingly, Russia is unequivocally viewed as a major spoiler of Black Sea security among Georgian foreign policy experts. According to an interviewed expert, “Russia intends to turn the Black Sea into its zone of influence, its defensive bastion. It should serve a platform from where Russia can project its power in the Mediterranean region, and, on the other hand, to contain Western involvement in the post-Soviet area” (Muchaidze, 2022). In this sense, Black Sea—and the South Caucasus republics—should be kept as a buffer zone to halt the advancement of democracy.

Regarding the future of the Black Sea region and Georgia’s place in it, Georgian experts seem to have similar opinions. To strengthen security in the wider Black Sea region, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine need first to strengthen cooperation with NATO (Figure 4). A large majority of surveyed experts also indicated that preventing further destructive actions by Russia in the Black Sea region could be achieved by admitting all countries in the region to NATO that wish to do so. Most surveyed and interviewed experts said that the final stage of Georgia’s relations with both EU and NATO should be membership. Some interviewed experts considered NATO membership to be a guarantee of security and survival more important than EU membership (Tseteteli, 2022). To prove this point, one of the respondents paraphrased the Estonian policymaker: “NATO for us is about life, and EU is about good life” (Muchaidze, 2022). On balance, Georgian experts’ perceptions about the future of the Black Sea region seem to be strictly Western-oriented and focused on regional collaboration

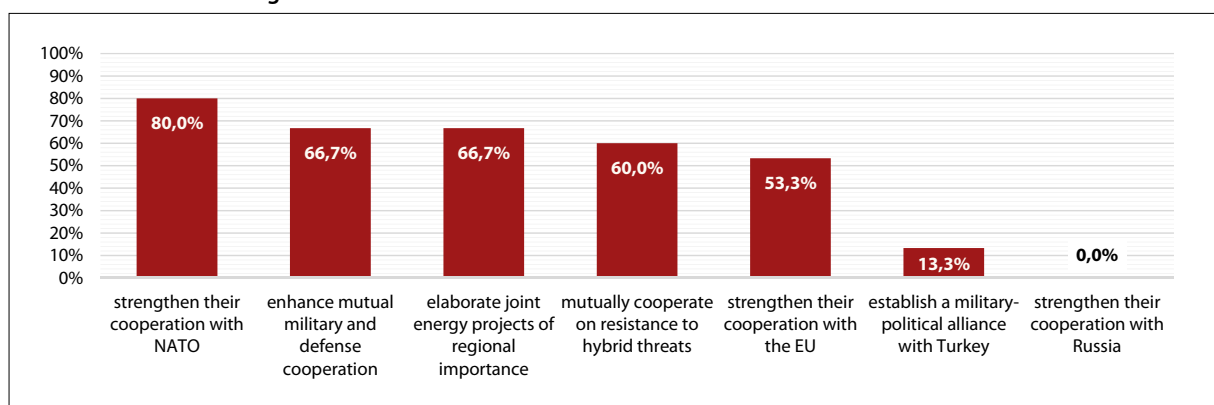
among smaller littoral states (Figure 4). In contrast, very few experts seem to trust Turkey, and none of the surveyed respondents wish to strengthen cooperation with Russia (Figure 4 below).

Conclusion

This article analysed the perceptions of the Georgian foreign policy community about the new geopolitical shifts in the Black Sea region after the Russia–Ukraine war. On balance, Georgian experts and security practitioners depict strong pro-Western views. The USA, NATO and the EU are seen as key stabilizing forces in the Black Sea area, while Russia is seen as a major spoiler. The UK’s image has received the largest boost in light of the Russia–Ukraine war, while expectations remain low towards regional and international organizations (OSCE, UN). Views towards non-Western state powers also vary from ambivalent (Turkey, India) to rather negative (China). Finally, while Georgian experts unequivocally support Georgia’s NATO and EU membership, they also see more regional opportunities emerging on the horizon after the Russia–Ukraine war, such as the Three Seas Initiative or the UK-supported regional grouping of the Black Sea states (Akubardia, 2022).

Interviews and surveys of Georgian experts, even if limited in number, also show a certain discrepancy between foreign policy visions of Georgian government and at least part of Georgia’s foreign policy community. GD’s Russia-accommodating foreign policy coupled with increasing criticism of the West seems not to be the consensus among Georgian experts and the foreign policy community. Moreover, the Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to have further widened the schism regarding foreign policy priorities in Georgia.

Figure 4: What Could Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine Do To Strengthening Security in the Wider Black Sea Region?



See p. 26–27 for information about the authors, references, and appendices.

About the Authors

Dr. *Bidzina Lebanidze* is a research fellow and leads the Jena-Cauc project at the University of Jena. He also holds an Associate Professorship at Ilia State University and is a senior analyst at the Georgian Institute of Politics.

Salome Kandelaki is currently a Project Coordinator and Junior Policy Analyst at the Georgian Institute of Politics. Salome is a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Tbilisi State University and a visiting lecturer at European University, Georgia.

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Appendix 1: List of the Diplomats and Experts Interviewed During 31 May – 13 June 2022 for the Research Project “Black Sea Cooperation for Stronger Security: Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan”.

1. Akubardia, Teona. Parliament of Georgia, Deputy Chairwomen of the Defence and Security Committee. Personal communication: 3 June, 2022, Tbilisi, Georgia.
2. Anonymous. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Personal communication: 20 June 2022, Tbilisi, Georgia.
3. Dzebisashvili, Lasha. University of Georgia (UG), Supervisor of the Programs of IR and Politics Department. Personal communication: 13 June, 2022. Tbilisi, Georgia.
4. Muchaidze, Giorgi. Atlantic Council of Georgia, Executive Director. Personal communication: 31 May, 2022. Tbilisi, Georgia.
5. Tsereteli, Mamuka. American Foreign Policy Council, Senior Fellow for Eurasia. Personal communication: 1 June, 2022. USA.

Appendix 2: Tables with Data for Figure 1 on p. 23 and Figure 2 on p. 24

Table 1: How Would You Assess the Possible Positive Role of the Following Actors in Strengthening Security in the Wider Black Sea Region? (Standardized on a Scale of 0–100 Best) (Data for Figure 1 on p. 23)

NATO	87.50
USA	80.00
EU	66.25
Ukraine	62.50
UK	58.75
Three Seas Initiative	56.25
Turkey	51.25
Georgia	50.00
Romania	48.75
Bulgaria	40.00
Azerbaijan	35.00
China	30.00
BSEC	26.25
OSCE	23.75
GUAM	13.75
Russia	5.00

Table 2: How Would You Assess the Role of the Following Actors in the Russia–Ukraine War and in the Containment of Russia’s Assertive Regional Policies? (Standardized on a Scale of 0–100 Best) (Data for Figure 2 on p. 24)

UK	83.75
USA	80.00
Poland	76.25
Baltic States	70.00
NATO	58.75
EU	58.75
Turkey	46.25
Germany	42.50
France	37.50
UN	22.50
China	21.25
OSCE	16.25
India	8.75

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Corresponding Editors

Heiko Pleines and Andreas Heinrich, both Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, pleines@uni-bremen.de / heinrich@uni-bremen.de

Layout

Matthias Neumann, Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, fsopr@uni-bremen.de

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Research Centre for East European Studies • Country Analytical Digests • Klagenfurter Str. 8 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de • Internet: www.laender-analysen.de/cad/