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THE «TURKISH» FACTOR IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BLACK SEA REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract

The article attempts to consider the ‘Turkish’ factor in the historical transformation of the Black Sea regional security system under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The chronological period considered by the authors is regulated from 2014 to the present, taking into account the forms and levels of interaction of the states of the Black Sea region with extra-regional actors. The relevance of using Barry Buzan’s theory of regional security complexes for analyzing the security environment of the Black Sea basin has been revealed, taking into account the formation of the Black Sea regional security complex. After all, under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the interdependence of the security of Black Sea states is increasing; the region is polarized due to the aggressive actions of Russia and external influence from the USA, NATO and the EU on the formation of a regional alignment of forces in which Türkiye occupies a central place.

It was revealed that against the background of increasing security threats arising as a result of Russia’s aggressive actions in the Black Sea region, Türkiye increasingly strives to implement an independent foreign policy. On the one hand, it supports alliances with NATO countries and, on the other hand, seeks to establish pragmatic relations with the Russian Federation. However, Türkiye has been quite active in supporting Ukraine: 1) by providing military assistance – the supply of Bayraktar equipment, which played a major role in Ukraine’s defense at the beginning of Russia’s full-scale military invasion; 2) by acting as a mediator in the implementation of the grain corridor initiative.

A decisive factor in the system of Black Sea regional security is the Montreux Convention of 1936, which gives Turkey special rights and responsibilities in the management of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war increased the importance of this document, since guiding by its provisions; Turkey can limit the access of warships to the Black Sea, maintaining the balance in the region. At the same time, Ankara is guided by its own national interests (construction of the Istanbul Canal).

The authors came to the conclusion that the Russian-Ukrainian war not only strengthened interdependence in the Black Sea region, forming the Black Sea regional security complex, but also increased the role of the Turkish factor in this process. In turn, Turkey pursues a balancing policy – simultaneously supporting its own strategic interests, developing relations with NATO, and maintaining a balance of power in relations with Russia.

Keywords: Türkiye, Ukraine, Black Sea region, Turkish factor, regional security system, Russian-Ukrainian war, the Montreux Convention

«ТУРЕЦЬКИЙ» ФАКТОР У ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ ЧОРНОМОРСЬКОЇ РЕГІОНАЛЬНОЇ СИСТЕМИ БЕЗПЕКИ ПІД ВПЛИВОМ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

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Анотація

У статті здійснено спробу розглянути «турецький» фактор в історичній трансформації Чорноморської регіональної системи безпеки під впливом російсько-української війни. Хронологічний період, який розглядають автори регламентується з 2014 р. по сучасність, зважаючи на форми та рівні взаємодії держав Чорноморського регіону з позарегіональними акторами. Виявлено доречність використання теорії регіональних комплексів безпеки Баррі Бузана для аналізу безпекового середовища Чорноморського басейну зважаючи на формування Чорноморського регіонального комплексу безпеки. Адже, під впливом російсько-української війни відбувається посилення взаємозалежності безпеки Чорноморських держав, поляризація регіону з огляду на агресивні дії Росії та зовнішнього впливу зі сторони США, НАТО і ЄС на формування регіональної розстановки сил у якій Туреччина займає центральне місце.

Виявлено, що на тлі посилення безпекових загроз, що виникають у результаті агресивних дій Росії в Чорноморському регіону, Туреччина дедалі більше прагне реалізовувати незалежну зовнішню політику. З одного боку, вона підтримує альянси з країнами НАТО, а з іншого – прагне налагоджувати прагматичні відносини з Російською Федерацією. Проте, Туреччина досить активно підтримала Україну: 1) надаючи військову допомогу – постачання безпілотників Bayraktar, що відіграли велику роль в обороні України на початку повномасштабного військового вторгнення Росії; 2) виступаючи медіатором у реалізації ініціативи зернового коридору.

Вирішальним фактором у системі Чорноморської регіональної безпеки є Конвенція Монтре 1936 р., яка надає Туреччині особливі права та обов'язки в управлінні протоками Босфор і Дарданелли. Відтак російсько-українська війна підвищила важливість цього документу, адже керуючись його положеннями, Туреччина може обмежувати доступ військових кораблів до Чорного моря, підтримуючи баланс у регіоні. Водночас Анкара керується власними національними інтересами (будівництво Стамбульського каналу).

Автори дійшли до висновку, що російсько-українська війна не лише посилила взаємозалежність у Чорноморському регіоні, формуючи Чорноморський регіональний комплекс безпеки, а й збільшила роль турецького фактору у цьому процесі. У свою чергу, Туреччина проводить політику балансування – одночасно підтримує власні стратегічні інтереси, зберігає відносини з НАТО та підтримує рівновагу сил у відносинах із Росією.

Ключові слова: Туреччина, Україна, Чорноморський регіон, турецький фактор, система регіональної безпеки, російсько-українська війни, конвенція Монтре

Problem statement. The Russian-Ukrainian war raised the question of the transformation of the Black Sea regional security system, which directly affected the role of Türkiye as an important geopolitical actor that controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and plays a key role in the security architecture of the Black Sea. The Black Sea has become a strategic center of military operations, and accordingly, Turkey's role in regional security processes has relatively increased. An important aspect of the study is Türkiye's ability to maintain a balance between Russia and Ukraine. As a member of NATO, Türkiye has an obligation to adhere to a certain position regarding the policy of aggressor states. However, significant economic and political ties with Russia, in particular in the energy and defense sectors, create additional difficulties for its strengthening, especially within the framework of open military support for Ukraine. Accordingly, Russia's war against Ukraine forced Turkey to strengthen its own defense capabilities and increase its role in ensuring regional security.

Thus, the full-scale war in Ukraine has actually changed the balance of power in the Black Sea region, in which Türkiye has emerged as a central figure. Therefore, its ability to balance the interests of the confronting states and ensure regional stability enhances its importance in the transformation of regional security system nowadays.

Analysis of previous research and publications. The issue of the Turkish factor in the transformation of the Black Sea regional security system at the current stage of the development of international relations has been the subject of a number of scientific studies and publications of mass media.

Ukrainian scholars A. Shevchuk and O. Lytvynchuk (Shevchuk & Lytvynchuk, 2024) consider the historical aspect of the influence of the Black Sea Straits on international relations, which is an important prerequisite for understanding the Turkish position on this issue. D. Isachenko (Isachenko, 2023) analyzed Ankara's reaction to Russia's war against Ukraine on the background of regional dynamics and global confrontation.

Among foreign scholars who have examined the interrelations of Ukraine, Russia and Turkey, should be noted the works of O. Coskun (Coskun, 2022) and I. Sheldon (Sheldon, 2023) in which Türkiye's role in resolving the grain issue are estimated. A. Gozkaman (Gozkaman, 2023) stresses on energy factor in Türkiye's policy.

Polish political scientist A. Balcer (Balcer, 2015) examined Turkey's role in strengthening the security of the Black Sea region within the framework of interaction with the Eastern Partnership countries: Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. P. Ayan Musil (Musil, 2024) and M. Aydın (Aydın, 2009) analyzed the prospects for the development of Turkey as a regional leader from the point of view of maritime law.

Taking into account the dynamics of the topic, a number of sources and media publications, speeches by political figures, in particular, were used. For instance, documents in the field of international humanitarian law that relate to and regulate the status of the Black Sea Straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles – the Convention on the Regime of the Straits (Montreux Convention, 1936), as well as the statements and speeches of states leaders (Recep Erdogan) and officials from international organizations.

The purpose of the study is the analysis of Türkiye's role in the transformation of the security system of the Black Sea region under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

To achieve the goal, the authors formulated the following tasks: 1) to characterize the security system of the Black Sea region, appealing to the theory of regional security complexes of B. Buzan and describe the geopolitical importance of Türkiye in the Black Sea region; 2) to investigate the factors of Türkiye's influence on the Russian-Ukrainian war (Türkiye-Ukraine-Russia relations) analyzing the role of Turkey as a guarantor of regional security in the system of multilateral interaction of the Black Sea basin states; 3) to clarify the aspects of the transformation of the Black Sea security system under the influence of militarism trend and Türkiye's relations with extra-regional actors – NATO and the USA.

Presentation of the main material. The Black Sea region has always played a key role in ensuring the security of Eastern Europe and the Balkans due to its strategic location, as well as the political, economic and military interests of neighboring countries.

The modern security system in this region has undergone significant changes under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war (since 2014), which has seriously affected the regional and global balance of power.

B. Buzan, the developer of the theory of regional security complexes theory (RSCT), argues that global security is structured around certain regions where geographically close countries have common security interests and interdependencies. Regional security complexes are systems in which the security of one country is closely linked to the security of its neighbors. This makes regions important nodes of tension or stability, where intra-regional events can easily influence global politics. According to the RSCT, in the Black Sea region the security complex includes Ukraine, Russia, Türkiye, Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, and indirectly, Western European countries and the United States because of their interests in the stability of the region. The interaction of these countries is determined both by historical hostility and modern political and economic ties, which gives rise to complicated patterns of cooperation and competition. B. Buzan noted that regions with a dominant country, such as Russia, often experience significant tension due to that country's desire for dominance and influence over its neighbors (Buzan, 2012).

Until 2014, the security situation in the Black Sea region was characterized by a balance of power in which Russia claimed leadership, but was constrained by the interests of NATO and its allies in the region. Türkiye, as a NATO member, occupied a strategic position, controlling the passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which is critically important for the Russian Black Sea Fleet. At the same time, Bulgaria and Romania, members of the EU and NATO, strengthened their ties with the European Union and the Alliance, which allowed balancing the influence of Russia.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the first major event to radically change the balance of power in the region. Russia gained control of the peninsula, expanding its military presence in the Black Sea, which increased its ability to influence neighboring states, including Ukraine and Georgia, which are seeking closer ties with NATO and the EU. The seizure of Crimea thus opened up the opportunity for Russia to deploy significant naval resources, increasing the threat to the Black Sea region and NATO.

The full-scale invasion of 2022 began a new stage of changes in the Black Sea regional security complex. The war exacerbated tensions and turned the Black Sea region into an arena of global confrontation between Russia and the West. These changes include such key aspects as the growth of NATO's role in the Black Sea, the militarization of Crimea, the deepening of ties between Ukraine and the West, the expansion of energy conflicts, and the strengthening of Turkey's strategic importance. Therefore, the Black Sea regional security system is gradually transforming with the influence of the 'Turkish' factor, taking into account following components: 1) the influence of Türkiye-Ukraine-Russia relations due to the Russian-Ukrainian war (considering Turkish military assistance to Ukraine and mediation efforts in the grain initiative); 2) regional multilateral interaction of the Black Sea states in the field of maritime security, military security (the controversial nature of Türkiye's relations with the European Union (EU) and the activities of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)); 3) the issue of militarization of the Black Sea basin as a manifestation of the influence of extra-regional actors on the regional security environment (interpenetration according to B. Buzan's theory) – NATO and the USA and, accordingly, their interaction with Turkey.

Considering Türkiye's leading role as a regional player stems from the regional security system, it is worth analyzing its geopolitical position as a component of the regional security complex. Due to its unique location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye has been an important member of NATO since its accession in 1952. The country's strategic location ensures control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits connecting the Black and Mediterranean Seas, which are important for regional security, in particular for limiting Russia's military maneuvers in the Black Sea region. Control over these straits allows official Ankara to influence energy and trade routes between Asia and Europe, which increases its weight in international politics (1936

Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits). Major pipelines, such as the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP), Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, and TurkStream, create a network for supplying energy resources to Europe. The first one is part of the Southern Gas Corridor, which transports natural gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to Europe, reducing dependence on Russian gas. This situation is due to the energy crisis caused by the reduction in gas supplies from Russia amid sanctions and geopolitical tensions. The TurkStream gas pipeline accordingly ensures stable energy supplies to partners in Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria (Gözkaman, 2023).

However, such dependence on Russian gas is of concern to NATO countries, given the threat of Russia using energy influence as an instrument of political pressure and manipulation.

Due to Türkiye's geographical location, the Black Sea serves as an important route for transporting oil and petroleum products from the Caspian region through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. As a result, Türkiye has the ability to regulate maritime traffic and control the passage of energy cargoes through the Black Sea to Europe despite the EU embargo on the import of crude oil from Russia by sea especially from the Black Sea. Seven such violations were recorded in August 2024 (Russian Crude Oil Imports to the EU Embargo..., 2024). In fact, this gives Türkiye additional leverages in relations with energy importing countries.

However, as part of its cooperation with Russia, Türkiye has become a buffer zone for energy supplies from the Caucasus and the Middle East to Europe. Thus, Türkiye manages to minimize the dependence of European states on Russian gas, as well as to ensure the conditional energy security of NATO's allies, balancing between economic interests and security challenges. Despite the fact that Turkey is a NATO member and a candidate country for the EU, it can be considered as a state that plays on both sides. It has often deviated from the models of Western allies, while at the same time applying a 'mediator strategy' regarding Russian aggression against Ukraine, benefiting both sides.

Deputy Foreign Minister of Türkiye, Ambassador F. Kaymakci, emphasized that Türkiye does not consider itself an international partner of the EU, but a part of Europe and sees its future in the EU. However, Turkish President R. T. Erdogan stated in a September 2023 interview that "...for the last 50 years we have been waiting on the threshold of the EU, and at this moment I trust the West as much as I trust Russia" (Ayan Musil, 2024). Such words openly demonstrate Türkiye's course to continue cooperation with Russia, confirming Ankara's balancing position. At the same time, F. Kaymakci emphasized that serious challenges have arisen in connection with the Russian-Ukrainian war – the most important of which are security and defense. Such a statement by the minister implies the importance of Türkiye's acquisition of EU membership to ensure the deterrent force of NATO and the EU against violators of the international order. Thus, Türkiye does not express a clear anti-Russian position, trying not to worsen relations with the West. However, in 2022, Türkiye avoided approving Western sanctions against Moscow, thus demonstrating open support for Russia. Perhaps, thanks to such a position, Russia desired and directly supported the re-election of President Erdogan in the historic elections in May 2023. Russia's Gazprom went so far as to agree to defer Turkey's debts for some of the natural gas it exported, providing some relief for Erdogan's government amid the severity of the economic crisis that preceded the election (Yarar, 2022).

Turkish-Russian relations have worsened after the Turkish government expressed support for Sweden's NATO membership and transferred five commanders of the Ukrainian Azov regiment to Kyiv (Ayan Musil, 2024).

In light of these events, Russia has refrained from renewing an UN-backed agreement brokered by Türkiye to ensure the safe passage of grain from Ukraine.

Following the presidential elections in May 2023, which consolidated Erdogan's authoritarian rule, Türkiye has nevertheless seen a shift in its balance of power. Tensions with Russia have escalated, while its engagement with the West has become more positive, leading to the publication of the EU's long-term strategy for improving relations with

Türkiye on November 29, 2023 (State of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations, 2023). This document calls for caution in this positive turn and highlights three factors that could hinder Turkey's potential rapprochement with the West: the growing influence of far-right parties in the Turkish government, its dependence on Russian gas, and its desire to assert its leadership in the Muslim world, where anti-Western rhetoric plays a crucial role (A long-term perspective to EU-Turkey relations..., 2021).

Therefore, adhering to a multi-vector policy, Türkiye plays a complex and at the same time comprehensive role in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In fact, Türkiye's relations with Russia and Ukraine are largely economically oriented, but at the same time include elements of strategic rivalry. Therefore, cooperating with Russia in the energy sector, Türkiye simultaneously cooperates with Ukraine in the military-technical sector. In particular, the supply of Bayraktar equipment, which has already demonstrated its effectiveness on the battlefield, confirms Türkiye's active support for Ukraine. The first arrivals of drones produced by Baykar Company in Ukraine were carried out in 2019. The first use of Bayraktar drones took place on October 26, 2021 in the area of the Joint Forces Operation in Donbas as part of the war in Eastern Ukraine, which began in 2014. Therefore, as of December 2022, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine ratified an agreement with Turkey on cooperation in the field of high technologies, which provides for the construction of the Bayraktar plant in Ukraine. It should be noted that with the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, the Armed Forces of Ukraine carried out a number of successful military operations to destroy the enemy using Bayraktar equipment, which caused discontent in Moscow. As a result, Türkiye classified information about the sale of drones (The manufacturer of "Bayraktar" began..., 2024).

On September 9, 2022, V. Zelensky highly appreciated the contribution of Baykar Company to increasing the power of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the fight against the aggressor and Baykar Makin CEO H. Bayraktar was awarded by the Order of Merit of the 1st degree. At the same time he addressed to President Erdogan: "Everyone in Ukraine knows what Bayraktar is, knows your company. Thank you, thank you President Erdogan for your support and the support of the citizens of Turkey in this war with Russian aggression" (Mazurenko, 2022).

Such active support by Turkey for Ukraine was highlighted by Erdogan's words of September 11, 2024, that Türkiye supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and the return of Crimea to its composition is a requirement of international law. Later, on September 16, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated the need to end the war through peaceful negotiations and unconditional support for Ukrainians, taking into account their interests. Later, Erdogan added that Ankara will contribute to increasing support for Ukraine to end the war through diplomacy and dialogue based on the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Kurkina, 2024).

Analyzing an important component of Russian-Turkish relations in the context of the Black Sea rivalry, it is worth emphasizing the historically formed and modern roots of its formation. The Black Sea is an important region for Türkiye for ensuring national security, as well as a key transport hub for economic projects, such as grain exports from Ukraine. Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Türkiye has played a key role in creating a grain corridor through the Black Sea, acting as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine. One of the tangible results of Ankara's mediation efforts is undoubtedly the grain agreement of July 22, 2022, which illustrates Türkiye's regional leadership potential in the Black Sea region. The emergence of the Black Sea Grain Initiative indicates that the agreement is also the result of the Turkish-Russian partnership and the settlement of regional conflicts, which can be observed in neighboring conflict zones in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Back in May 2022, Ankara began negotiations with Moscow and Kyiv on grain exports. At that time, Turkey and Russia developed a plan to ensure the security of transport routes, excluding Ukraine. It was assumed that the Turkish side would help demine the area around the Odessa port and escort grain ships, which would have to be controlled in accordance with Russian requirements (Coskun, 2022).

However, as of July 17, 2023, Russia terminated its participation in the agreement, which brings with it increased uncertainty about available global supplies of grain and oilseeds, the potential for greater price volatility, as well as new challenges for Turkey as a mediator.

Thus, for Russia, the Black Sea is directly related to the North Caucasus, as a part of the territorial integrity of Russia. In this context, the Caspian, Azov and Black Seas form a single space in Russia's strategic thinking, which serves not only to project power in the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Middle East, but also to protect its southern borders. The strategic connection that the Kremlin sees between Crimea, the Black Sea and the North Caucasus is not least reflected in Russian military exercises. Thus, in Ankara's approach to the Black Sea region, one can observe collective defense, following the logic of NATO, but it is mixed with the concept of collective security with Russia. The desire not to provoke Moscow is a constant theme of Türkiye's Black Sea policy. This is due not only to its past experience with Russia, but also to its complex relations with the West. According to Ankara, its balancing policy after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 is due to the lack of decisive action by the West at the time and Ankara's concern that the West would leave it without support in the face of Russia's hard policy (Isachenko, 2023).

In turn, Türkiye plays an important role as a security guarantor in the Black Sea region, in particular due to its geopolitical position, military capabilities and diplomatic activity. One of the main instruments for ensuring stability is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which contributes to regional stability through economic, political and social cooperation between member states. Thus, Turkey supports initiatives to develop transport corridors across the Black Sea, which contributes to increasing the transit potential of the region. One such project, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, which includes Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, allows countries in the region to avoid dependence on traditional routes through Russia and creates new trade opportunities, increasing stability through economic integration (Mussayev, 2024).

Türkiye regularly participates in NATO military exercises, such as 'Sea Breeze', which are held in the Black Sea and involve various countries in the region, including Ukraine, Romania and Georgia. These exercises increase the level of interoperability between allies and contribute to strengthening the defense capabilities of the BSEC countries. Türkiye's participation in these exercises sends a clear signal of its readiness to protect stability in the region and support countries facing threats. Türkiye's importance to Georgia is most clearly illustrated by Ankara's role in the development of the Georgian armed forces (equipment, training, development of a military base, joint maneuvers). In the very difficult period of 2008-2009 for Georgia, a time of tension and war with Russia, Türkiye, along with Ukraine, was the main supplier of equipment to the Georgian armed forces, accounting for almost 40% of all purchases. However, Turkey was quite ambiguous in its criticism of the Russian invasion, but, thanks to its membership in NATO, it allowed some American ships to be in the Black Sea, which put Russia in a critical position (Aydin, 2009).

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the Ukrainian Ambassador to Türkiye V. Bodnar noted that in addition to the BSEC, there was also the BLACKSEAFOR format, which created a security environment in the region and conditions for interaction and trust between the fleets. However, since 2014 this has become impossible, given the participation and membership of Russia (Russia has destroyed regional cooperation in the Black Sea..., 2022). Therefore, cooperation on such basis within BSEC is impossible due to the participation of the aggressor state in it. Therefore, it cannot guarantee security for the entire region, especially given the existence of clearly real threats and potential dangers.

Türkiye's policy in the field of ensuring the safety of navigation and the protection of the marine environment is more in line with the tasks of the International Maritime Organization than with the economic concerns of coastal states, so in general Türkiye does not violate international maritime law. Thus, in October 2002, a new Instruction on the

Application of Navigation Rules in the Straits was adopted in Türkiye, which clarified and detailed the procedure for applying the already established rules (Implementation of the Montreux Convention..., 2005).

Based on Türkiye's desire to monopolize the use of the Black Sea Straits, in 2011 Ankara announced the construction of a new infrastructure project, known as the Istanbul Canal, which represents the greatest challenge to the legal and practical status quo in the Straits. Russia's annexation of Crimea, the increased militarization of the Black Sea, which has entered its active phase since 2014, has worried Türkiye. In May 2016, the Turkish President openly condemned the Russian Federation's view of the Black Sea as a 'Russian lake' (Koru, 2017). However, this issue was resolved against the backdrop of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, when, four days after the invasion, Türkiye, at Ukraine's request, closed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to warships of any country, regardless of whether they border the Black Sea (Mongilio, 2022).

Montreal Convention of 1936 established the regime of the Turkish Straits and consolidated Türkiye's special role as the controller of maritime traffic through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The main purpose of the Convention was to ensure freedom of passage for merchant ships in peacetime and to establish control for warships, which limits the threat to the Black Sea region and protects Türkiye's sovereignty. In fact, the Convention differentiates the rules of passage for the states of the Black Sea region and other countries. Thus, in peacetime, merchant ships have free passage, but warships of non-Black Sea countries are limited in tonnage and cannot be in the Black Sea for more than 21 days. At the same time, Türkiye has the right to close the straits to warships in the event of war or a threat to its national security. In modern conditions, after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Türkiye again exercised this right, limiting the passage of warships for countries participating in the conflict. Although this decision was largely symbolic, it underscores Turkey's ability to influence the security situation in the Black Sea through the Convention (1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, n/d.).

The Convention remains relevant in the face of today's geopolitical challenges, but Türkiye is actively seeking ways to increase its control over the straits. One such project is the Istanbul Canal, a new route that could bypass the Convention. This project would allow Türkiye to control transit at its own discretion, as it would not be subject to the Montreux Convention. This would potentially upset the balance of interests and raise concerns among other countries, including NATO members, as access to the Black Sea could become more controlled and politically dependent on Türkiye (Pryce, 2020)

The Russian large-scale offensive prompted an immediate response the same day from NATO – former Secretary General J. Stoltenberg, who said that North American and European members of the alliance had already deployed thousands of new troops to eastern NATO members, noting: "We have over 100 jets [on] high alert protecting our airspace and over 120 Allied ships at sea from the far north to the Mediterranean. [...] We will continue to do whatever is necessary to protect the alliance from aggression" (Press briefing by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg..., 2022). So NATO's position, like that of the United States itself, is more than clear and transparent – their interest lies in national security, their own superiority and preventing Russian domination in the region.

It is therefore quite obvious that not only politics, but also Türkiye's military strategy within NATO and its military bases play an important role in deterring regional conflicts, especially in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. Türkiye has the second largest army among NATO countries, which makes it one of the main elements of the alliance on the southern flank. Turkish military bases, including key aviation and radar facilities, allow NATO to maintain a presence near areas of tension, such as the Black Sea and the Middle East. Thus, Incirlik Air Base provides strategic support to NATO missions and is used for operations in the Middle East and for the fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq. In addition, Turkish bases are used to host NATO forces, in particular NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which allows the alliance to respond quickly to threats, especially in the event of an escalation of conflict in the region. Konya Air Base is intended

to carry out air patrol missions, especially in the surveillance of conflict zones such as Syria. AWACS aircraft are deployed in Konya, which provides NATO with the ability to respond quickly to threats in the airspace of the southern direction (Ellehuus, 2019). Izmir Base is the center for command of NATO ground forces, where one of the main headquarters of the Alliance is located. This base facilitates coordination between allies and plays an important role in regional exercises. Izmir supports the readiness of NATO forces, especially for the possible deployment of forces in crisis situations on the southern flank (In an increasingly volatile neighbourhood..., 2023).

Former US Secretary of State A. Blinken stressed that Türkiye's decision to close the straits to Russian warships "is consistent with the spirit of international law and the security interests of the entire region". At the same time, US officials, including Deputy Secretary of State for Political Affairs V. Nuland, have repeatedly stressed that the US expects Turkey to be more transparent and coordinated in making decisions regarding the straits, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. Nuland noted: "The Black Sea has become a key front in the struggle for democracy and sovereignty, and Turkey has a unique role in defending this region". However, Ankara's position has not always met Washington's expectations. Turkey has tried to maintain a balance between Russia and the West, which has attracted some criticism. In July 2022, US National Security Council representative J. Kirby stated: "We expect our NATO allies, including Turkey, to fully support Ukraine and deter the Kremlin's aggression. Restricting access to the straits is important, but it is not enough to strengthen the security of the Black Sea" (Iarmolenko, 2023).

In the policy of D. Trump's administration and the negotiations initiated by Washington to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian war, Türkiye is quite active and does not reduce its interest in supporting the security of the Black Sea region.

Turkish President R. Erdogan on March 16, 2025 spoke with U.S. President D. Trump for the first time since his second term began in January. During the conversation, Erdogan expressed support for President Trump's efforts to bring an end to the war. He emphasized that Turkey backs Trump's initiatives aimed at resolving the war and voiced hope for a positive outcome under his leadership. Türkiye has positioned itself as a potential mediator in Russia's all-out war against Ukraine (Goncharova, 2025)

At the same time, Ankara acts from the position of its own national interests. After all, during the above mentioned conversations with the American President, Erdogan urged Trump to lift sanctions imposed during his first term on Türkiye's defence industry due to the purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems. Erdogan is reaching out to the US amid efforts to deepen defence and economic cooperation with the EU as European countries seek to reduce their dependence on Washington (Media: Turkish President Erdoğan wants..., 2025).

Ankara has also expressed the possibility of deploying Turkish troops on the territory of Ukraine. Türkiye is considering the issue of ensuring the security of Ukraine, its guarantee together with the issue of the security of the Black Sea region. On the one hand these issues are interconnected, and on the other hand, comprehensive support for security in the Black Sea is important for Türkiye's national interests due to military, economic, and energy security as a whole system.

Conclusions. Thus, the security system of the Black Sea region is a complex system, formed under the influence of various national interests that determine the political, economic and military interaction of states in this region, as well as the strategies of other global players. The significance of this region for international security lies in controlling access between the Black and Mediterranean Seas and in its role as an important energy corridor. Current Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly changed the balance of power in the region, increasing the attention of allies and strengthening cooperation between countries interested in stabilization and security. The geopolitical importance of Türkiye in the Black Sea region is largely determined by its control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which are key sea gates to the Black Sea.

Therefore, it can be argued that Türkiye's policy is becoming a determinant in the transformation of the Black Sea security system under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war due to a number of factors. Firstly, the influence of bilateral interaction in the Türkiye-Ukraine-Russia format, in which Türkiye's 'involvement' in the Russian-Ukrainian war is manifested through its role as a mediator (participation in the implementation of the Grain Corridor initiative) and a supplier of military technology. Türkiye provides military assistance to Ukraine, including drones, and supports energy cooperation, which makes it an important partner for Ukraine. At the same time, Türkiye seeks to maintain relations with Russia, striking a careful balance between supporting Ukraine and avoiding direct conflict with Russia. Secondly, at the regional level, Türkiye acts as a guarantor of regional security, playing an important role through control of the straits. Thirdly, Türkiye acts as a state through which 'penetration/involvement' of non-regional actors – NATO and the United States – into the Black Sea regional security system takes place. Its military bases, in particular Incirlik and Konya, allow it to maintain NATO's presence in the region and contribute to 'deterring' Russia.

However, it is worth emphasizing that Turkish security policy is also subordinated to its ambitions to be an influential regional power, which allows it to simultaneously fulfill the role of a reliable partner for NATO and ensure its own security interests in the Black Sea region.

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