

Vision for a Peaceful, Secure and Prosperous Black Sea Region

Non-paper of the Crimea Platform Expert Network

The Black Sea Region is a strategically important part of Europe and its gateway to countries and regions far beyond the continent. Europe Whole and Free and at Peace is only possible with the region's integration into the European political, defence, and economic space. Therefore, the restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in their internationally recognised borders is the essential precondition for that. It's also necessary to see the region in a broader context of world affairs and interests, as well as its interconnectedness with the Baltic, Mediterranean, and Caspian Sea regions. The patterns of Russia's aggressive behaviour are similar in the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and Barents Sea, which requires a united and coordinated response.

Due to a fragmented vision and lack of strategy, Russia wasn't deterred from waging its wars of aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. The attempted illegal annexation of Crimea and its heavy militarization allowed the Kremlin to significantly increase security risks to the regional states, which lack weight and capabilities to balance Russia on their own. The Sea Lines of Communications across the Azov Sea and the Black Sea have been threatened since 2018, and most recently with the blockade of the Ukrainian ports that endangered world food security. Crimea also enabled Russia to project power into the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. The seizure of Crimea has allowed Russia to integrate the Northern and Southern parts of its 'bubbles of insecurity' (A2/AD) architecture, lessening the strategic depth of NATO and partner nations. With Kalibr missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads to most European countries, Russia stepped up its nuclear sabre-rattling and reckless behaviour that may lead to unprecedented consequences. Crimea is a homeport for such platforms and has two nuclear storage facilities recently restored, so the nuclear danger posed by Russia requires a counter-strategy.

Meanwhile, there are several factors that affect regional security in addition to the Russian aggression. Conflicts in the Middle East had added direct (to Türkiye) and indirect (to the rest of Europe) security threats. Domestic political situation in some regional states as well as the rise of the anti-Western sentiments promoted by Russia's proxies, affect stable development and security. Weakening of Transatlantic ties and different views over Chinese role and involvement may bring complications. Therefore, deeper understanding of the national security concerns of the individual states is required. It's in the interest of NATO, the E.U., and their member states, as well as regional states to look for arrangements that will meet security needs of all states (excluding the aggressor one) in a mutually beneficial manner.

While there's still much the regional states could do to enhance their own capabilities and deepen interactions with each other, without the involvement of external actors, the security environment will degrade and may cause a spill over of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

The stakeholders (regional states, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, NATO, the E.U., etc.) **should acknowledge the necessity of forging a comprehensive strategy and establishing structures to carry it out.**

Security domain

The stakeholders should develop a **comprehensive strategy** to enhance security, that will include among others a **permanent, sustainable presence** along NATO's Eastern flank, as well as the rotational presence of warships and military aircraft of non-Black Sea countries that had been playing a crucially important stabilising role, taking into account provisions of the Montreux Convention. **The European Union Maritime Security Strategy** should be updated so it is relevant to the deteriorated security environment in the region. Some missions and operations may be launched after the Russia – Ukraine war is over, while others should be commenced forthwith.

NATO with the active U.S. contribution, should champion setting up a **Joint Multinational Headquarters** responsible for training, planning, and coordination of all military activities of the Allies and Partners in the Black Sea Region. NATO and Ukraine should establish a **permanent working group at the International Military Staff** in Brussels and restore Ukraine's **permanent presence at the Allied Maritime Command** in Northwood, U.K. NATO, and partner countries should work on contingency planning, joint policies, actions, and situation awareness regarding the Black Sea-Mediterranean theatre.

The stakeholders should create a **Joint Naval Platform** in the Black Sea for regular patrols to promote the **Freedom of Navigation**, protect **Sea Lines of Communications**, and carry out other non-combat operations in the Black Sea. It's time to launch a maritime **demining coalition** to cope with the consequences of Russia's aggression and secure the safety of the Sea Lines of Communications. NATO and the E.U. should extend mandates of its naval missions and Operation Atalanta, so there would be a possibility to cope with **the violation of sanctions, transfers of weapons, and dual-use equipment, as well as countering transfer of grain and other commodities illegally seized by Russia. Turkey may take a leading role as a regional stakeholder.**

Given the growing missile threats posed by Russia and Iran, the U.S., its Allies, and Partners should approach the idea of establishing an **air and missile defence network** interoperable in an initial phase and integrated into a final one, including those systems of the Baltic nations. It may enhance elements of the **U.S. National Missile Defence** in Romania and Poland. Protecting the naval base in Constanța, Romania, and the port of Odesa, Ukraine should be a top priority. The air and missile defence may also stretch as far as **Israel, thus establishing A2/AD zones from the North of Europe to the Middle East.**

The stakeholders should work to improve **communication and intelligence sharing** and increase **cyber defence** capabilities. They also should enhance regional state's capabilities in **intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance in all domains.**

The stakeholders should work to establish **Joint Situational Awareness Centres** on a national level and integrate them into a single network, connecting the Black Sea Region, the Baltic Sea Region, and the Mediterranean. It would allow enhancing situational awareness by networking civil and military radars, other optical and electronic surveillance facilities, satellites, and databases, as well as by enabling information sharing.

The stakeholders should work out a plan to boost **defence industry's capabilities** to meet urgent needs, as well as venues of cooperation in the **research and development** of new weapon systems that would enhance defence capabilities of littoral states. The PESCO framework should be considered as an entrance for the U.K., Ukraine and other partner-states.

The stakeholders should work out a plan to help regional states to **enhance their coastal defences, navies, border, and search and rescue services** via direct and targeted assistance, land lease, procurement of necessary assets, joint production and research and development. Joint lessons learned framework should also be considered.

The U.S. should consider the possibility of including Ukraine in its **European Deterrence Initiative**, particularly with regard to Infrastructure Improvement and Enhanced Prepositioning.

The stakeholders should work out the legal framework for securing **access of NATO and its member states' forces to partner countries** (in line with receiving states' constitutional requirements), as well as on **Host Nation Support**.

The stakeholders should work out a plan to counter **Russia's abuse and misuse of international law** in order to obstruct the Freedom of Navigation (by closing the navigation over large areas of sea in violation [in certain instances] of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea), attempts to legalise the illegal annexation (by using the NAVAREA mechanism and issuing the distorted nautical and navigational charts). They also should work out a strategy for countering Russia's **spoofing of the Global Positioning System** (GPS), causing it to malfunction, and other cyber and technical interferences.

Sanctions and their enforcement

The stakeholders should consider imposing **sanctions against Russian ports on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov** (Port Kavkaz, Rostov-on-Don, Temryuk, Azov, and Novorossiysk) for helping to violate "Crimean" sanctions (loading goods in Crimea but stating those ports as departure points), shipping illegally seized Ukrainian commodities, employing civilian cargo ships for weapons and dual-use goods delivery, forging shipment documents, etc. The sanctions package should also be widened to all shipping and associated companies involved in such illegal activity.

The stakeholders should consider banning the handling of direct maritime traffic between the ports of their respective countries and ports of the Crimean Peninsula and the Russian mainland under the sanctions and verify the authenticity of ship's papers on ports of destination/departure, so Russia isn't capable of violating oil price cap and export commodities illegally seized in Ukraine.

The stakeholders should work out a strategy for dealing with the **shipowners and operators, insurers as well as other related companies, legal and physical persons (including captains and crew members) who violate sanctions** and conduct shipments of Russian commodities, as well as approach the issue of the **"shadow fleet,"** Russia employs to violate the oil price cap scheme.

Economic dimension

The U.S., the E.U., and certain G20 nations should **bolster economic ties** with littoral nations, increase **Foreign Direct Investments**, launch **energy and infrastructure projects**, etc, so as to facilitate economic development and stability in the region, and reduce dependence on Russia.

The U.S., the E.U., and certain G20 nations should consider strategic **investments into the upstream sector**, particularly on the continental shelf, as well as into green energy, so the littoral states may satisfy their energy needs, diversify energy supplies and make a green energy shift while integrating into the E.U. system.

The stakeholders should look into possibilities to **strengthen transport, energy, and digital infrastructure connectivity** in the region between the Baltics, Black, Caspian, and the Mediterranean Seas.

Governance and countering Russia's malign activities

All respective international actors should strategize their continued support for regional states to strengthen their **democratic institutions** to prevent corruption and accelerate their advancement into the European and Euro-Atlantic community.

The stakeholders, in particular, the EU, NATO and the US should look into ways to boost capabilities for **combating Russian disinformation and propaganda** in the Black Sea region.

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The Black Sea states and their allies and partners can do much more even under the circumstance of the ongoing Russia's war of aggression. The additional initiatives should be elaborated with the aim to be launched right after the Ukrainian deoccupation of Crimea and the Black and Azov Sea region. The long-term vision of the broader Black Sea Region as part and parcel of the European political, defence, economic and other spaces (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova' membership in NATO and the E.U.) requires the European Union and NATO to forge a comprehensive strategy for the region's integration.