DOI 10.14746/ssp.2021.1.7

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Baltic – Black Sea Area as a Geopolitical Reality: Does It Exist?

Abstract: As the social and political transformations observed in the modern world have recently made current the issue of formation of new geopolitical regions, the Baltic – Black Sea Area deserves particular attention because the geopolitical status of this junction territory still remains questionable. The geopolitical boundaries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area are constantly changing not only functionally, but also structurally, which is why it can be considered as a specific geopolitical formation located at the junction of the two geopolitical mega-regions of Western Europe and Northern Eurasia. This area is highly fragmented and still undergoing very painful political, cultural, and economic transformations. The power competition between Russia, NATO and the EU, as well as the region's historical legacy have determined the path of its development. As a result, the Baltic – Black Sea Area does not have any system of political division or economic management, but close connections between the countries located there and many spheres of their common interest promote comprehensive cooperation and dialogue on a variety of issues. If their cooperation leads to multilateral relationships based on the principle of the sovereign equality of states which are trying to expand the scope of their collaboration and limit the scope of confrontation, they could organize a system of complementary elements which provide synergies and ensure the existence of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a geopolitical reality.

Key words: Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Baltic – Black Sea Area, geopolitical reality, multilateral cooperation

Introduction

The spatial and geographic realities of the social and political transformations which began in the 21st century have made current the issue of the systemic modelling of space that was protractedly characterized

by the segmentation of its construction due to the incomplete social and political development and state formation which started in the period of disintegration of continental empires. The conceptualization of the geo-constructs underlying the process of formation of new regions, through the unification of traditional geographical areas in accordance with the retro-inspired projects which existed in the 20th century focused on the development of mega-regions, being of fundamental importance for some parts of the world in terms of the strategic interests of actors in international relations located therein (Ulunian, 2011, p. 25). However, modern geopolitical processes indicate the need for radical changes in academic research on the regionalization of the world, as the key transformations of the geopolitical map take place at the meso- or micro-levels nowadays. Moreover, they are not accompanied by the economic or political integration of countries: the latter often focus on selective projects, while developing their multilateral cooperation in areas of common interest. Thus, the aim of this article is to theoretically comprehend and to practically define the main components of interstate interactions within the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a single geopolitical reality which exists due to the realization of joint projects and programs, but is not officially established as a separate geopolitical region.

Summarizing the existence of a single geopolitical reality in the Baltic – Black Sea Area, the authors of the present study use a number of methods to prove this hypothesis. The choice of the methodology of systems analysis for this exploration is determined by the authors’ understanding of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a system of interstate relations which is constantly being built and changed. Based on the study of features and patterns of the establishment of various international interactions, systems analysis makes it possible to comprehensively explore the Baltic – Black Sea system of interstate cooperation and identify the specific interactions of its elements. The analytical method is used to analyze the diplomatic efforts of Baltic – Black Sea states in the context of assessing their importance for effectively solving existing foreign policy challenges. The comparative-historical method helps to examine the historical events, political opinions and academic concepts which contribute to the disclosure of the specific construction and functioning of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a single geopolitical reality.

The use of the above-mentioned methods allows the authors to conduct a comprehensive study of the Baltic – Black Sea Area, while identifying its geopolitical importance as a separate state-centric realm

which plays a significant geopolitical role by being a system of multilateral cooperation.

Theoretical Prerequisites

For a long time, regionalization was considered the only version of differentiation on a territorial basis: it stemmed “from the simple fact that member states geographically close to each other shared common history, common values and common interests in a variety of issues. So, commonalities encouraged regionalization” (Antola, 2009, p. 9). Indeed, the geopolitical structure of the world can be seen as a global territorial political organization arising from interactions among the subjects of international relations and being identified by the methods of political and geographical, or geopolitical zoning of the entire geospace. It is composed of a number of geospatial models represented, in particular, by geopolitical regions. The latter can be defined as territorial, political, meso-level systems that are formed under the combined impacts of political and geographical prerequisites. Every geopolitical region is characterized by close and stable political, economic and social and cultural ties, but it has rather dynamic boundaries depending on constant change in the global balance of power. As a result, Nataliia Koroma, while considering this phenomenon, distinguishes between the geopolitical regions in the contemporary world that exist *de jure* and those modern geopolitical regions that exist *de facto*. She believes that the *de jure* geopolitical region is a territorial, political, meso-level system operating in a certain territory within a strict legal framework (e.g. economic, political, military communities or unions of states). In its turn, the *de facto* geopolitical region is a territorial, political, meso-level system which exists objectively, but its boundaries may not coincide with those of international organizations or structures; a cell of political space where the states are connected by common historical processes, by cultural, ethnic and other similarities, as well as by intensive political and economic ties (Koroma, 2012, p. 6).

As the boundaries of geopolitical regions are constantly changing not only functionally, but also structurally under the influence of global political, economic and social trends, the peculiarities of the construction of geoprojects in the context of modern political geography concern the fact that a new global geopolitical space being created nowadays includes the key geopolitical images of a world which intersect, interact, clash and,

furthermore, are permanently transforming. The most effective geopolitical images set their own geopolitical contexts, imaginative spheres of influence and ancillary, ‘buffer’ geopolitical images which often operate precisely as *de facto* geopolitical regions (Zamiatin, 2002, p. 53). In this context, the latter are transformed into areas of geopolitical confrontation, being territories located at the junction of neighboring geopolitical mega-regions that are characterized by significant dynamics of geopolitical processes, as they fall within the spheres of ‘privileged interests’ of the great powers, or military and political structures in different historical epochs. Most often, these junction areas have very favorable economic and geographical positions because various trade routes connecting different economic centers pass directly through their territories. In addition, these realms are always important for ensuring the security and stability of the adjacent mega-regions and the system of international relations as a whole. Thus, the transit locations of the junction areas always draw geopolitical attention of the great powers or geo-economic unions of influential countries (Yariomenko, 2014, pp. 279–280).

In such areas, the territory itself “has limited value in the classical sense of geopolitics, as most regional territories are ‘bridges’ and ‘transit areas,’ with policies that have been sculpted to fit these qualities” (Flikke et al., 2011, p. 6). According to Vladimir Kaganskii, there are two types of junction areas that are formed during the interactions between different social, political, cultural, economic, etc. systems. The researcher qualifies junction areas of the first type as the ‘areas of double incompatibility,’ since they form their own environment which differs from the adjacent mega-regions more than they differ from each other. Junction areas of the second type are represented by so-called ‘areas of double compatibility,’ which combine features of the mega-systems directly affecting them (Kaganskii, 1999, p. 54). In this vein, the countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area deserve particular attention, since they are border states, i.e. they are located in a junction area and, therefore, “acquire characteristics of the mega-regions of Western Europe and Northern Eurasia” (Ilin, 2009, p. 50). As a result, these states not only turn into objects of geopolitical and geo-strategic importance, but also become the targets of the powerful influence of various actors in international relations.

Indeed, the Baltic – Black Sea Area is not considered in its entirety as a *de jure* geopolitical region: it can be deemed as a specific geopolitical formation which is located at the junction of the two geopolitical mega-regions of Western Europe and Northern Eurasia. However, it would be

a mistake to think that this area is gravitating towards Europe or Asia. For centuries, this area has been the basis for the formation of a separate intermediate civilization characterized by its own mentality, culture, economic order, incomplete processes of state formation and the search for its place on the European and global geopolitical maps (Zazhigaev, 2009, p. 120). Its value was once stressed by Halford Mackinder, who considered Eastern Europe the key to the Heartland, by saying: “Whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the world” (Mackinder, 1919, p. 113). According to Saul Cohen, the states of Central and Eastern Europe form a crucial ‘gateway region’ lying between Europe and Asia, and they act as a link between these geopolitical mega-regions and can restore the balance of power in the world (Cohen, 1999, pp. 60–66).

Their role has become especially relevant after the destruction of the bipolar international order and the intensification of integration processes at the global and regional levels: the collapse of the Soviet Union contributed to the development of a qualitatively new type of regional cooperation which acquired the form of post-bipolar regionalism, being notable for the aspirations of small countries for equal partnership with the states that play the role of regional leaders (Marshaniia, 2011, p. 11). Based on the idea of Baltic – Black Sea solidarity, the process of formation of a new Baltic – Black Sea system of interstate cooperation also began in response to the rise of post-bipolar regionalism. However, this has not taken the shape of an entity integrating the entire region: within the framework of a relatively large geographical area, there are several micro-level structures which are conceptually designed as cultural and historical and political constructs. For instance, Central Europe is closely linked to Western civilization, including the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Polish-Lithuanian historical heritage. It borders Russia and other Slavic peoples, as well as the countries of Southeastern Europe, whose cultural and historical traditions are based on the Ottoman hangover (Ulunian, 2011, p. 15). Thus, the main features of formation of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a separate geopolitical reality appear due to the modern political and historical development of this territory, and its unity is supported by the general social, cultural and historical, civil, legal, and economic relationships that have emerged between the states constituting this geopolitical reality. The need for the geospatial construction of this reality was postulated by the objective process of searching for the foreign policy identities of the

Baltic – Black Sea states, and the necessity of preserving these identities with due regard to all the transformations that took place within the modern system of international relations.

From the geopolitical point of view, the allocation of geopolitical areas is not an objective aspect of the functioning of international policy. Substantially, geopolitical areas “are formed by attracting the political means that maximize advantages obtained in the process of implementation of certain kinds of state policy by interested actors” (Rudnytska, 2015b, p. 100). The Baltic – Black Sea geopolitical reality is politically constructed, too: unlike the Baltics, the Black Sea region has never performed the functions of an entire space with a special regional identity; consequently, the unification of these territories is based on the formation of the foreign policy identities of the actors in international relations whose national interests are realized against the background of interactions with other states located in this realm. Therefore, the latter can be considered not only a political, cultural and economic ‘bridge’ between different civilizations, but also, according to some analysts, a ‘strategic barrier’ between the centers of geopolitical confrontation (Lesser, 2007, p. 12).

Geopolitical Matrix and Its Main Elements

Indeed, the area located between the Baltic and Black seas is very fragmented and is still undergoing very painful political, cultural, ethical and economic transformations which constantly complicate the multifaceted political and social space (Breskii, 2011, p. 37). However, the need to jointly confront the existing challenges unites peoples and independent states lying at the crossroads of the European, Eurasian, and Middle Eastern geopolitical spaces: they form an area of the co-existence, convergence and clashing of many nations, one which has historically stood out for its complex internal relationships established on the back of the significant diversity of the Baltic – Black Sea countries and the presence of the interests of global players therein.

Geographically, the Baltic – Black Sea Area is naturally formed by the coastal states of the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine) and the coastal states of the Baltic Sea (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden). However, it is necessary to identify a number of other countries

which have common interests with the coastal states, as well as being connected with them through common historical and cultural traditions (Paulauskas, 2006, p. 13). In this sense, the Baltic – Black Sea Area can be considered as the unification of countries of the so-called ‘Wider Black Sea Region’ which includes “the littoral states of the Black Sea, Moldova, and the South Caucasian countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan” (Asmus, Jackson, 2004), as well as countries of the so-called ‘Wider Baltic Sea Region’ which consists of the coastal states of the Baltic Sea, Belarus, Norway, and the Central European countries of Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Since Antiquity, this area “has always been the ‘backyard’ of one power or another, and witnessed their competition to dominate it. The geopolitical changes since the end of the Cold War, however, have led to entirely new settings in this realm, with a possibility of establishing a truly pluralist international existence in the region for the first time” (Aydin, 2005, p. 258). No matter how great the differences between the countries are in political, economic and social terms, this neighborhood makes them responsible for a common co-existence in the Baltic – Black Sea Area that should be developed in close interaction with all the actors that are somehow linked to the coastal states (Lyubcheva, 2010, p. 4). As a result, the Baltic – Black Sea countries can be divided into several subunits which form the Baltic – Black Sea system of interstate cooperation, being the basis for the existence of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a separate geopolitical reality (Figure 1).

The first subunit comprises the great powers, i.e. independent geopolitical actors which have relatively stable national interests and can pursue targeted regional and global policies. These countries are represented by Russia and Germany, since many countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area have spent most of their history under the enforced sway of one or the other (Uznarodov D. I., Uznarodov I. M., 2018, p. 46). The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and countries of Central Europe (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) form three other subunits, due to their common history, political interests, economic cooperation and cultural heritage. The countries of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) compose another subunit of states within the Baltic – Black Sea Area, as they represent the so-called ‘post-Soviet’ nations, heavily influenced by the Russian Federation and only now trying to establish new relationships with the EU and NATO member states.

Figure 1. Subunits of the Baltic – Black Sea Countries Forming the Baltic – Black Sea Area

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) forming the next subunit “are geographically and functionally associated with the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea for reasons of their location and national interests in taking part in the regional cooperation affecting the climate of economic prosperity, security and

stability in the wider area connecting Europe, Asia and the Middle East” (Varna Forum 2.0, 2017, p. 1). However, the so-called ‘frozen conflicts’ in the South Caucasus, as well as the great energy and political significance of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia make the latter extremely important for security and stability in the Baltic – Black Sea Area. So, close cooperation with these states is a good opportunity for binding all the actors of the area under consideration together as interdependent, and legitimizing the EU and NATO to promote and improve peace and stability with the participation of all interested parties (Lyubcheva, 2010, p. 6). The last subunit includes Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey as coastal states of the Black Sea, ‘bridging’ the Western Balkans, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East and supporting common regional and intergovernmental initiatives. Turkey plays a significant part in the Baltic – Black Sea Area because it controls the strategic straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles and connects other countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area with the Mediterranean Sea, as well as with Northern Africa and the Middle East. Geographically, Bulgaria and Romania are Balkan countries. However, the historical, social and political, economic and ethno-national peculiarities of their development bring them closer to the countries of Central Europe and the former Soviet republics located in Eastern Europe (Koroma, 2013, p. 230). In addition, all three states focus on Euro-Atlantic cooperation and could be real promoters and translators of NATO policies to the governments of the post-Soviet countries situated in the Baltic – Black Sea Area. Bulgaria and Romania are member states of the EU, and Turkey is one of the official Candidate Countries to join this organization. Thus, these actors support the implementation of the EU’s policies in the Baltic – Black Sea Area as progressive, and constantly apply new models of cooperation, driving the social and economic development of the countries located in this area.So, all the above-mentioned states could jointly generate new initiatives and develop interstate relations in order to stabilize and improve the situation in the Baltic – Black Sea Area in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. Their cooperation could lead to the emergence of a new geopolitical simulacrum which could become one of the important parts of the post-Cold War international system, since the Baltic – Black Sea Area has always been the place for interactions between the three civilizations (namely Western, Slavic-Orthodox and Islamic) and, accordingly, has played a strategically important role in world politics.

Conceptualization of the Baltic – Black Sea Unity: Views and Approaches

The concept of Baltic – Black Sea cooperation is not new. Despite the fact that its scale and intensity has varied depending on the time and place of its formulation, the Baltic – Black Sea Area “has been the point of intersection of flourishing civilizations and sometimes bitter rivalries for political supremacy or control over trade and maritime routes since ancient and medieval times” (New Strategy Center, 2017, p. 4). Over long historical periods, the Baltic – Black Sea Area has played a special role in the evolution of European and Eurasian civilizations, while influencing their development, as well as their propensities toward or against conflicts that may have arisen between them. In the early days, this area served as a natural obstacle in relationships between the West and the East (Zazhigaev, 2009, p. 121). Later, the countries located between the Baltic and Black seas started alternatively using their rapprochement to achieve economic growth and ensure their security. In its turn, “modern history brought to the fore such fundamental issues as the preservation of the regional balance of power” (New Strategy Center, 2017, p. 4) and the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of some Baltic – Black Sea states.

The origins of cooperation between various state formations in the Baltic – Black Sea Area indeed date back to the 5th–12th centuries, when the cities built along trading routes actively developed and prospered, and some centers of international trade (Constantinople, Kyiv, Vilnius, etc.) gained significant geopolitical importance. In those days, the ‘route from the Vikings to the Greeks’ became an important highway, stretching from Scandinavia through Latvian territory to the Kyivan Rus and Byzantium, which was used by the Vikings and later Nordic and German traders. This famous route promoted the development of domestic trade and was particularly important for the establishment of ties between different tribes and for their subsequent consolidation around powerful centers of political activity. Being further weakened by wars and internal disintegration, the Baltic – Black Sea Area was mechanically divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia in the end of the 18th century. Most notably, the invader states governing new territories did not take into account any historical, ethnic or cultural features of their development.

Thus, only after the restoration of democratic movements and struggle of peoples for self-determination in Europe in the mid-19th century,

Adam Czartoryski once again transformed the area between the Baltic and Black seas into an object of geopolitical design. According to him, Russia could pose an ever constant threat to Europe if it expanded its influence in the South and West, as it was invulnerable in the East and North due to its nature. But it would become more successful, while raising “friends, not slaves.” Thus, also identifying the potential threat that could come from Prussia, Adam Czartoryski substantiated the need for cooperation between all the international actors in the Baltic – Black Sea Area in order to achieve their security and stability in the future (Czartoryski, 2011).

After World War I, at a difficult time for Europe, as well as after the establishment of the Bolshevik regime in Russia, the discussion on cooperation between the Baltic – Black Sea countries was gaining momentum. For instance, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi developed the idea of establishing a Black – Baltic Sea Alliance; and Stepan Rudnytskyi noted the geopolitical relevance of the Black Sea, while also stressing the importance of construction of a navigable canal connecting the Black, Baltic and Caspian seas (Kochubei, 2004). During the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), Halford Mackinder set out his vision for further development of the global system of international relations: he declared the area between Germany and Russia, on the one hand, to be fundamentally important for world politics and, on the other hand, to be the most vulnerable sector of the international system, which could potentially become the flashpoint for a new world war, either in the case of its internal political instability, or in the case of its absorption by Russia or Germany and, consequently, the borders of the two states coming together (Mackinder, 1919, pp. 113–114).

For the first time, the idea of establishing cooperation between the Baltic – Black Sea countries was translated into action in the early 20th century. During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, one of the theoreticians and activists of the Polish Socialist Party, Józef Piłsudski, formulated the idea of a Baltic – Black Sea project in a Memorandum sent to the Japanese Government in 1904. In this document, Józef Piłsudski advised a Tokyo official to take into account and use to its advantage the national liberation movements of peoples of the Russian Empire, as the latter often aim at splitting this state and liberating the countries which had forcibly been incorporated into its territory: deprived of its conquests, Russia would significantly be weakened and would cease to be a formidable and dangerous neighbor (Grzywacz et al., 2000, p. 56). While

heading the Second Republic of Poland after World War I, Józef Piłsudski stressed that Poland did not need to rely on the ‘Old West’ any more, as its security depended on countries which could become a ‘buffer’ between Poland and Russia. The geopolitical alliance among the states between the Baltic and Black seas, as he said, could halt Russian expansion into the West. Such an alliance was to assume the shape of a confederation that would reproduce the multinational and multicultural tradition of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or the so-called ‘Intermarium.’ According to Józef Piłsudski, the establishment of the Intermarium would indeed allow the states of Central and Eastern Europe to avoid domination of their regions by Germany or Russia (Hacker, 1996, p. 12). That is, considering the Intermarium as a counterweight to Russian communism and German nationalism, the Polish leader deemed it a ‘third force,’ which could become a center for promoting democracy in Europe (Breskii, 2011, p. 39).

“However, such a profound change in international relations was very hard to implement. It required at least two preconditions. The first resided in mutilating Russia’s military capabilities, which could be achieved only by a joint effort of the freed nations. The latter was the second precondition” (Nałęcz, 2019, p. 4). Thus, the idea of the Intermarium could not be implemented: the USSR and all Western powers, except France, rejected it as unrealistic and unprofitable (Sarnatskyi, Myhlovets, 2018, p. 29).

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the idea of a union of lands between the Baltic and Black seas was revived by the Polish Government in Exile headed by Władysław Sikorski. In particular, the possibility of the creation of an alliance of states in between Germany and Russia was considered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Józef Beck. As two antagonistic blocs (the German-led Fascist Bloc and the Western Bloc led by Great Britain and France) began forming in Europe during the 1930s, Józef Beck believed that it was necessary to establish another group of Central European states which could become a ‘Third Europe.’ The countries forming the ‘Third Europe’ could develop cooperation with the United Kingdom, establish strong ties with Turkey and Japan, and build deep partnerships with the smaller states of Central and Eastern Europe (Nadtoka, 2003, p. 149).

In the early 1940s, Yurii Lypa set out his vision for significance of the Black Sea as a center of geopolitical development for all the Black Sea basin countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine) (Vasylevych, 2012, p. 10). In his works, the explorer empha-

sized the common historical background of the states forming a corridor along a North-South axis – from Scandinavia and the Baltic states, to the Black Sea and Asia Minor – and demonstrated the expediency of the establishment of the Black – Baltic Sea Federation (Lypa, 2007, p. 17). Polish authors put forward similar ideas underlining the major role of territories between the Baltic and Black seas for the whole of Europe. In particular, they argued that countries located in this area held back the expansion of Western Europe to the East, and vice versa (Rudnytska, 2015b, p. 101).

However, putting the Intermarium concept into practice became impossible due to the bipolarity of international relations and the total Soviet control over the territories between the Baltic and Black seas after 1945. The idea of uniting the Baltic – Black Sea countries was only supported by Polish emigrant circles: at their initiative, 16 states of Central and Eastern Europe adopted the Convention on Intermarium Countries, declaring their union in Paris in 1948 (Dodonov, 2005, p. 129).

A new impetus and quality to the cooperation of states between the Baltic and Black seas was provided due to the geopolitical changes that took place in Europe after the Cold War. When the USSR collapsed, the countries liberated from communist rule were offered the chance to form their own foreign policies and to establish independent courses of economic development (Martyniuk, 2015, p. 132). These shifts contributed to the foundation of new international organizations (BSEC, CBSS, Community of Democratic Choice, GUAM, Visegrad Group, etc.) which became the basis for establishing and deepening cooperation between all the Baltic – Black Sea countries. For the first time, the idea of comprehensive collaboration between these states was articulated during the Vilnius Summit in 1997. At the Congress of Intermarium countries, they subsequently approved the Draft Statute for the Baltic – Black Sea Assembly, which was to become an international non-governmental organization supporting security, stability and economic development of all member states. During the International Conference ‘Baltic – Black Sea Cooperation: Towards an Integrated Europe of the 21st Century Free of Dividing Lines,’ held in Yalta in 1999, the participating countries declared their common desire to form a secure and stable Baltic – Black Sea Area; to establish multilateral cooperation through joint projects in the political, economic, environmental and energy sectors; and to work together to strengthen their capacities on the road to European and Euro-Atlantic integration (Nadtoka, 2003, p. 149).

Despite the constant emphasis on the relevance of the above-mentioned collaboration, the Baltic – Black Sea countries have not been able to form a full interstate organization. Having initially pursued common goals of foreign policy development, these international actors divided into several multi-speed groups in the beginning of the 21st century, as they had different European and Euro-Atlantic integration accomplishments. Most states, including the countries of the former socialist bloc, have joined one of two powerful geopolitical institutions, namely the EU and NATO. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are moving along their path to integration into these structures; Armenia and Belarus maintain close ties with Russia; and Azerbaijan has actually chosen a policy establishing ‘special,’ economically advantageous relations with the European Union. The post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus are still heavily influenced by Russia, while being perceived as the sphere of ‘privileged interests’ of the RF by other actors of the global political scene. It turns out that neither the European Union nor Russia has ever strived to legalize activities of the ‘third force’ that could appear in Europe (Mateleshko, 2016, p. 155). Moreover, the RF’s foreign policy strategy has always been based on ideas of the ‘non-subjectivity’ of the Baltic – Black Sea states, and the possibility of reaching compromises between world leaders at the expense of their interests. By launching the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the EU, on its part, clearly declared that the territories between the Baltic and Black seas were not only a community of nations, but also an entire social and political space. Such an approach makes it possible to construct this area in various directions, ranging from transformation of the domestic policies of states to the realization of integrative development projects, from social programs and human rights issues to institutional reforms in the countries. Thus, the relationships between Baltic – Black Sea countries are interpreted not as political ties, but as social processes developed by subjects that are deprived of the pronounced geographical profiles. This means that the Intermarium emerges as a segment of new space where its discreteness is no less important than its continuity, and its fragmentary nature is no less significant than its integrity (Breskii, 2011, p. 45).

According to George Friedman, “the Intermarium is just an idea, a vehicle for regional cooperation” (Friedman, 2017). Thus, having been revived in Polish political circles in 2015, the idea of establishing the Intermarium as an intergovernmental organization that would unite the Baltic – Black Sea countries in order to achieve their common foreign policy

goals was very quickly changed to the concept of forming the Three Seas Initiative “as an informal platform for securing political support and decisive action on specific cross-border and macro-regional projects of strategic importance to the states involved in energy, transportation, digital communication and economic sectors in Central and Eastern Europe” (*The Joint Statement on the Three Seas Initiative*, 2016). The Three Seas Initiative was actually endorsed as a forum for the EU member states situated between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas, which confirmed that “the Three Seas Initiative is open to partnerships on specific projects with interested state or business actors from around the world who are committed to the fundamental values and principles of the European Union” (*The Joint Statement on the Three Seas Initiative*, 2016).

As a result, the policy on the institutionalization of cooperation between the Baltic – Black Sea states has gradually become a part of pan-European tactics to create a geospatial construct of a united Europe, as The Three Seas Initiative left out the post-Soviet, non-EU countries and Turkey (Nałęcz, 2019, p. 15). However, this approach to constructing a new geopolitical reality rejects the stable, historically determined nature of the process of creating a modern version of the Intermarium as a specific framework for close cooperation between the countries of the Baltic, Black and Caspian seas within the Euro-Atlantic Area, since a united Europe can be considered as an integral part of it (Ulunian, 2011, p. 24). In this context, the Baltic – Black Sea Area can be seen as a living space formed by the countries “as a result of intensive interpenetration of peoples, ethnicities, faiths and cultures that interacted as permanent neighbours and bordering states, and have a long common history” (International Centre for Black Sea-Baltic Studies and Consensus Practices. Centre for Political Dialogue, 2016). Beyond the geographic proximity and historical connections of the countries, however, there are other reasons for looking at the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a geopolitical reality, namely: security, economy, and energy (Miller, 2017). Modern realities necessitate the construction of a new common identity for the states concerned that should be formed not only according to the cultural and linguistic affinity of the peoples, but also conforming to the economic and political expediency of cooperation. We can observe diverse interactions of geostrategic interests of different regional and global actors within the Baltic – Black Sea Area. They are established by joint projects which produce new modes of conduct for the countries, as well as a common understanding of the threats and challenges existing in the relevant trans-

border spaces (Makarychev, 2005, p. 149). As a result, the Baltic – Black Sea Area, stretching from the Scandinavian countries up to the Mediterranean and Caspian seas, can be considered as a geopolitical reality, since it does not have any system of political division or economic management, but close connections between the states located there and other actors of the international political scene promote comprehensive cooperation and interregional dialogues on a variety of issues affecting a lot of countries across the globe.

Spheres of Common Interest and Cooperative Potential of the Baltic – Black Sea Countries

Being squeezed in between Germany and Russia, the countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area “have been harbouring regional cooperation mechanisms since the 1990s aimed at forging collective responses among local actors to key problems: economic development, the environment, energy and security” (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 30). However, the power struggle between Russia and the EU, as well as historical legacies, have conditioned the path of the development of their collaboration and have gradually increased the number of spheres of their common interest. Fabrizio Tassinari believes that regional contexts can be defined in various ways and, therefore, identifies two main strands to categorize these contexts. One is interest-based, and focuses on strategic considerations and foreign policy priorities of the states: when it comes to security and power, interdependence in a regional context does not necessarily mean cooperation. Thus, we can claim that the Baltic – Black Sea countries are located in an identity-based regional context. The latter, according to Fabrizio Tassinari, focuses on the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and historical ties that bind certain nations together (Tassinari, 2006b, p. 14) and, thus, allow them to deepen the technical aspects of cooperation: transportation, environmental protection, protection of state borders, combating cross-border crime, development of local governance, and so on. However, energy supply controversies, political upheavals and recurring military pressures inspired by geostrategic interests mainly, pose major challenges to the pace of development of such cooperation in the Baltic – Black Sea Area. As a result, all the countries located in this area should further enhance the positive patterns of their cooperation on matters of common interest, thus contributing to a new communicative atmosphere and a bet-

ter spirit of interaction (Varna Forum 2.0, 2017, p. 3). In such a case, these states would be able to synchronize various cooperation sectors under a single ‘umbrella’ and, therefore, to organize them as a system of complementary elements which provide synergies in order to lift the Baltic – Black Sea collaboration to a qualitatively new level.

Today, deep and comprehensive cooperation in the Baltic – Black Sea Area is extremely important for other regions and the Eurasian continent as a whole. First of all, these territories have great transit and transportation importance and, therefore, all the countries needing a North – South connection are interested in the active development of cooperative ties between the states located within it. The geopolitical significance of the latter is justified in view of the available logistics and transportation potential. In the transportation sector, the mapping of the Baltic – Black Sea Area has to account for geopolitical considerations, since the Black Sea is an East – West corridor that connects Central Asia and the Caspian with continental Europe and the Baltic Sea and, accordingly, unites the latter with the Nordic countries (Tassinari, 2006a, p. 11). Back in his days, Yurii Lypa stressed the transportation capacity of the Baltic – Black Sea Area. Comparing the Black Sea region to a ‘fortress,’ he identified three main pathways to get to the Black Sea: the so-called Western (the lower reaches and the mouth of the Danube River), Eastern (the Caspian Steppe near the mouth of the Volga River) and Southern (the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles) ‘gates’ which had their ‘foundation’ on the coast of Asia Minor (Kubiiovych, 2005, p. 423). In this sense, the explorer pointed to the unifying and systemic influence of rivers in the area concerned throughout history, since the river network formed the unity of territories, trades, customs and, ultimately, languages and religions. However, the river network was not closed and did not complete the connecting chain: the rivers linked the Black Sea to another system of international transportation, namely, the Baltic Sea (Dodonov, 2005, p. 129).

Indeed, the fact that the vast majority of the rivers in the Baltic – Black Sea Area flow from North to South shows the correctness of the statement about the historical conditionality of the geopolitical direction of the development of peoples living in these territories on a North – South axis. In ancient times, for instance, the Prypiat River and its tributaries allowed people to get from the Middle Dnieper, Volhynia and Podillia to the Southern Bug and Neman rivers, and from there to Poland and the Baltic coast. This ‘route from the Vikings to the Greeks’ reached its greatest development in the days of the Kyivan Rus (Buzhanskyi, 1966, p. 35),

and eventually became a powerful transit and transportation system that linked the Baltic and the Black seas to the ancient Silk Road, when China and India played a major role.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, proposals to build a Baltic – Black Sea Canal were often put forward both in Austro-Hungary and in the Russian Empire, emphasizing the geostrategic importance of the transportation link between the two seas. In particular, Russian engineers justified the need to construct a Baltic – Black Sea Waterway in the early 20th century, as its establishment was considered important for the passage not only of merchant vessels but also of an armored fleet (Maksimov, 1907, p. 1). Having analyzed the projects of the Russian and Belgian engineers, the military departments of the Russian Empire, in their turn, proposed building the Riga – Kherson Canal. They noted that all the main rivers of European Russia could be divided into two groups, namely the Northern and Southern ones. The proper use of the river basins would allow the Northwestern and Southern regions of Russia or, in other words, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, to be united. Such a waterway was strategically important for Russia, as it would allow warships to move directly from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea in order to protect the major Russian ports in the shortest possible time (Ulunian, 2011, p. 16).

At that time, the above-mentioned object was to become an important alternative to another transportation artery, the Dnieper – Vistula Waterway. The idea of its construction had been presented to the Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the Great Crown Chancellor Jerzy Ossoliński in 1655, and the works on the establishment of this significant European water transportation connection between the Baltic and Black seas were completed through the joint efforts of the peoples of Belarus, Poland and Ukraine in 1784 (Komisiia z pytan rozvytku vodnotransportnoho spoluchennia E-40 na diliantsi Dnipro – Visla, 2013, p. 1). As a trade route, it operated until World War II, but then stopped working since a part of this way, stretching from Warsaw to Brest, became unnavigable. The Soviet leaders thought about reviving the route, but only after the collapse of the USSR did the newly independent states renew their efforts to restore this water transportation connection (Smok, 2014). In accordance with the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance of 19 January 1996, the E-40 Waterway, on the route Gdańsk–Warsaw–Brest–Pinsk–Mozyr–Kyiv–Kherson is one such water corridor (Economic Commission for Europe, 1996, p. 14). Accordingly, Belarus, Poland and Ukraine began actively cooperating on

its restoration in 2013, as achieving higher standards for modernizing existing waterways and for creating new waterways in order to meet market demands is one of the EU priorities for inland waterway infrastructure development enshrined in Article 16 of the Regulation No. 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on European Union Guidelines for the Development of the Trans-European Transport Network and Repealing Decision No. 661/2010/EU (*Regulation No. 1315/2013*, 2013). Renewal of the E-40 Waterway will give the border areas of Belarus, Poland and Ukraine opportunities to develop international multimodal cargo transportation and will relieve pressure on road networks and increase the volumes of freight traffic passing through these territories. According to Polish experts, the E-40 Waterway operation would reduce the time for cargo transportation between the Baltic and Black seas by 21 days, cut fuel consumption by a third and allow the Polish ports of Gdańsk and Gdynia to run at reduced capacity. After its complete reconstruction, this route would be able to ship 8 million tons of cargo annually (Smok, 2014). In addition, the modernization of the E-40 Waterway will facilitate multilateral trade between the European and Asian countries, strengthen the logistic relationships between the Baltic – Black Sea states and help make full use of the potentials of the Vistula, Southern Bug, Prypiat, and Dnieper rivers to develop international water tourism and adjacent infrastructure, as well as smaller villages and towns.

The Baltic – Black Sea Area is also an important crossroads for railways, which are used not only for transportation, but also for logistic purposes. In 2003, for example, the governments of Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine, together with port companies from Klaipėda, Illichivsk (now Chornomorsk) and Odessa, launched the VIKING Train as a joint project to ensure multimodal cargo transportation in the Middle Section of Pan-European Transport Corridor IX, which connects the ports of the Baltic, Black, Azov, Caspian and Mediterranean seas. As Turkey was incorporated into the VIKING Train connection in 2012, the countries could increase the volumes of freight traffic by using the ferry-railway connections with Turkey and, therefore, incorporating freight flows originating or terminating in the Middle East. The implementation of the Latvian initiative to restore the shortest Daugava – Dnieper Waterway and the Liepāja – Romny Railway (which has existed since 1874), as well as the Estonian proposition to use the developed ports in Estonia to strengthen commercial ties with Scandinavian countries could also be very promising (Rudnytska, 2015a, p. 97). Today, the transportation infrastructure

projects on the construction of the railway axis ‘Gdańsk–Odessa,’ the North – South railway axis ‘Rail Baltica’ connecting Helsinki, Tallinn, Pärnu, Riga, Panevežys, Kaunas, Vilnius, and Warsaw, and the railway ‘Rail-2-Sea’ linking the Polish Port of Gdańsk to the Romanian Port of Constanța are of crucial importance, too (Vondra, 2018).

As a result, the Baltic – Black Sea countries could now create an extremely powerful logistical system for cargo transportation from the Baltic Sea to the Black, Caspian and Mediterranean basins, and vice versa. Taking into account the fact that China considers the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a part of the New Silk Road, Beijing could in fact “exploit the favourable position of the Baltic and Black Sea ports to link the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road – the overland and sea-going sections of the New Silk Road, respectively – through a longitudinal and intermodal corridor in the heart of Europe” (Scimia, 2016).

Increasing the logistical potential of transit areas is a necessary prerequisite for economic development, as well as for facilitation of the movement of goods, services, people and capital between all the interested countries. The specific characteristics and further development of industrial infrastructure form the basis for the geo-economic transformations of the economies of states lying in these territories. Therefore, an important factor in strengthening the geo-economic capacity of the state actors is the innovative potential grounded on the rapid development of science and technology, and the introduction of new technologies into industry. Nowadays, enhanced economic development of the Baltic – Black Sea countries also depends on the depth of their economic cooperation, which may involve the simplification of business processes in a single economic space; the implementation of multilateral energy, logistics and infrastructure projects; and the restoration of transit and transportation, energy, financial, trade and social cooperation between all interested parties. These countries may be useful to each other in various economic sectors, since their economies reveal both advantages and disadvantages while modern reforms are being pushed through. As a result, the implementation of a number of intra-sectoral cooperative models and the determination of clusters of privileged cooperation in different industries would allow the majority of the Baltic – Black Sea countries to balance the development of their economies and to get rid of the ‘moderate’ economic status assigned to them by much more powerful players in this area, namely Germany and Russia. Indeed, the Baltic – Black Sea states are heavily de-

pendent on imports both from Germany and from the Russian Federation (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 34). Therefore, they could apply the ‘persuade and lock’ strategy, which identifies issues that are mutually interesting and relevant for all parties. Economic interdependence and mutually beneficial economic ties would increase the commitment of the great powers to the reciprocal nature of the relationships, as common interests work in favor of adaptation (Antola, 2009, p. 28).

Thus, economic cooperation between the countries in the Baltic – Black Sea Area will allow them to form their own economic policies, since the implementation of multilateral large-scale economic projects can offer these states opportunities to shift away from the institutionalization of their activities, which exists both within the EU and within the EAEU. Moreover, there is an urgent need to ensure the energy security of the international actors concerned, as most of them are heavily dependent on Russia for their natural gas and oil supplies. Baltic – Black Sea countries, playing an important role as energy transit corridors between Russia and the West, often become objects of their energy policies. For instance, “Russian oil exports account for (or are close to) 100% of total oil imports in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland, more than 80% of Polish imports, which is the biggest regional consumer, as well as 70% of Hungarian and 56% of Swedish imports” (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 34). After the energy crisis of 2009 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the issue of Russian natural gas exports to the countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area was highly politicized and is used by Moscow as a political ‘weapon,’ and as a tool for influencing all the energy vulnerable European states. Construction of the Nord Stream twin natural gas pipeline system, bypassing the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine, further exacerbates the situation, since Russia and Germany would be able not only to control the supplies of natural gas to other European countries, but also to significantly reduce the importance of the gas transportation capacities of a number of the Baltic – Black Sea countries and, as a result, undermine their economic development.

On the other hand, the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline, designed to deliver Russian natural gas to Turkey across the Black Sea, illustrates the importance of the Black Sea as a North – South transportation corridor. Taking into account that Turkey serves as the only viable option for alternative terrestrial natural gas and oil supplies from the Caspian Sea basin to the European states, all the Baltic – Black Sea countries could actually diversify their natural gas and oil imports, improve energy

security and reduce potential leveraging by Russia if they construct new pipelines along the North – South axis (Vondra, 2018). Indeed, the Priority Corridor North – South Gas Interconnections in Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe (currently known as ‘ROHUAT/BRUA’), being a system of bidirectional natural gas pipelines, will boost the energy market by enabling new ties to emerge between the countries along its route and the major natural gas infrastructure projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor (through the TAP and TANAP natural gas pipelines), other Central European hubs and offshore natural gas fields in the Black and Caspian seas. By connecting Slovakia with Bulgaria through the territory of Hungary and Romania, the Eastring bidirectional natural gas pipeline interconnector, in its turn, will offer a direct transmission route between the Western European hubs and Turkey. In 2021, the Gas Interconnection Poland – Lithuania (GIPL) will start transmitting natural gas in both directions and link the Polish and Lithuanian, as well as the Baltic and Finnish natural gas transmission systems to the relevant systems of the European Union.

Indeed, Alan Riley states that a powerful natural gas hub in the Baltic – Black Sea Area can now be created on the basis of existing capacities. Ukrainian natural gas transmission pipelines (with a total length of about 38,000 km) and the largest gas storage facilities in Europe, which are also situated in Ukraine, could be used for this purpose. In addition, the researcher considers shale gas production in Western Ukraine and Poland as very promising (Riley, 2016, p. 26). Shale gas extraction and the construction of liquefied natural gas export and import terminals in the Baltic – Black Sea countries would allow them to diversify energy sources and partially reduce their dependence on Russia for natural gas. In its turn, the establishment of a reliable multi-alternative energy supply system in this territory could weaken the position of the Russian Federation in the energy market, while inducing its participation in large-scale energy projects and reducing its energy pressure on European countries. Thus, both Russia and Germany would be included in a single energy chain ‘Exporter – Transit Country – Consumer’ which could appear in the Baltic – Black Sea Area through the use of the relevant capacities of all interested parties.

Energy security policy is based on the purposeful course of a state at the national, regional and global levels to ensure its energy security, as well as to identify and prevent pervasive threats to its energy stability by using the most appropriate tools (Maksak, 2011, p. 118). There-

fore, energy security is an integral part of national security, an essential condition for the existence and development of every state actor. Taking into account aggressive Russian actions in Georgia in 2008, as well as the RF’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the East of Ukraine in 2014, the actions and measures intended to guarantee the national security of the Baltic – Black Sea countries are now taking on a particular significance.

As the European frontiers have reached the post-Soviet countries, Russia has intensified its policy of creating information and military threats to the national security of Eastern European and Baltic countries and, thereby, jeopardizing the geopolitical balance that previously existed in these territories. The Russian authorities have continued the so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts taking place in some of the former USSR republics, “with disputed areas under the control of entities other than the countries to which they are internationally recognized as belonging and which consider those areas as part of their own territory” (Varna Forum 2.0, 2017, p. 9). All of them are situated in the Baltic – Black Sea Area and, as a result, are strongly influenced by the geopolitical rivalries simmering there. These conflicts also feed illegal immigration, drug trafficking and various criminal activities that pose threats to European stability, since the new international borders which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union are not well guarded (Aydin, 2005, p. 263).

The Ukrainian crisis has kept Russia away from most countries in the Baltic and Black Sea regions (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 30). They understand that the modern international system has failed to shield Ukraine from the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation. The resurgence of Russian hegemony has been one of the most important goals of the RF’s foreign policy formed by the Putin regime. The countries in the Baltic – Black Sea Area are experiencing a growing level of security vulnerability amidst tense relations between Euro-Atlantic structures and Russia (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 39). The protracted period of forceful Soviet control over the majority of the Baltic – Black Sea countries has left a significant footprint on their ethnic composition and, therefore, their Russian-speaking minorities pose a potential threat to these states nowadays. They helped Russia to legitimize its actions in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea. By appealing to the need for protecting its ‘compatriots’ abroad, Russia continues to illegally occupy the Ukrainian Donbas and to successfully manipulate the Russian-backed separatist forces. Here, the RF’s concept of ‘compatriots’ covers not only Russian-

speaking communities, but also all people who would like to be involved in the process of creating a broad-based ‘Russian World’.

Under such conditions, the Baltic – Black Sea countries, being closely connected not only historically but also geopolitically, should combine their efforts to build a system of security and stability in the Baltic – Black Sea Area, as their national security directly depends on the ability to negate or reduce the significance of the threats posed by the Russian Federation to acceptable levels. Active cooperation in the security sphere would allow these international players to establish strong and effective multilateral collaboration to strengthen their national security, which the EU and NATO are particularly interested in. Such a course of events would gradually confirm the existence of the Baltic – Black Sea Area as a separate geopolitical reality and, therefore, would defend its countries against Russian aggression: if Russia and Germany are involved in certain multilateral security projects without having the right to priority or leadership positions, the policies of these international actors towards the Baltic – Black Sea countries could be balanced, and the latter could significantly improve their national security.

Conclusion

Nowadays, intensive cooperation between the countries of the Baltic – Black Sea Area may be an effective tool to strengthen the European security and economic systems, as well as an efficient way to stop the transformation of Central and Eastern European countries into a ‘buffer’ between the West and the Russian Federation. Their cooperation should lead to multilateral relationships based on the principle of the sovereign equality of states which are trying to expand the scope of their collaboration and limit the scope of confrontation, while realizing that the latter will always exist in many different forms.

The geopolitical interdependence of the Baltic – Black Sea countries is determined not simply by their common historical destiny and political peculiarities, but by the favorable geostrategic and compact location of these actors in international relations at the crossroads of major transportation and energy corridors, the complementarity between their economies, the duration of their bilateral and multilateral contacts, the constant sectoral interactions between them, as well as the similarities between their ethnic mentalities, worldviews, and cultural and civilizational principles.

Despite the fact that the territories between the Baltic and Black seas can be divided into so-called ‘postmodern’ zones (where the rule of cooperation between states consists in their absolute sovereignty) and ‘modern’ zones (where the great powers defend their sovereignty by force, using various elements of the structures of international systems), all the countries located there may sometimes find specific points of intersection, as some states continue pursuing their national interests, while relying on the concept of state sovereignty and the balance of power, and other countries, on the contrary, actively try to use different mechanisms for the evolution of cooperation, while implementing their own foreign policy courses (Vainalavichus, 2011, p. 86). Thus, one of the main tasks of these states is to overcome the challenges of their autarkic development and to increase their activity in various spheres in order to establish active multilateral cooperation. Parliamentary diplomacy and intensive interactions should help these countries to act in solidarity, while being guided by common interests and coping with the overall challenges people face these days.

Geopolitically, the Baltic – Black Sea Area is clearly state-centric, as it comprises the territories between two distant seas: thus, the states must be international actors to give real economic substance to their activities, by launching joint transportation and energy projects, as well as to focus their efforts on establishing a new balance of power which would allow them to negate the powerful geostrategic influence of Russia and Germany. Being the center of a complicated intersection of global geostrategic interests, the Baltic – Black Sea Area is obviously an integral part of the European and Eurasian macro-region and, therefore, it must play its own geopolitical role as a system of multilateral cooperation.

Today, it is hard to imagine a situation in which Russia can be forced to accept any arrangement unfavorable to it (Nałęcz, 2019, p. 17). Moreover, the EU and NATO enlargements revived in the Kremlin the old Soviet idea of ‘encirclement’ in which the Baltic – Black Sea Area, plus the non-shared neighborhood, play a prominent role, and have many times set the tone in bilateral relationships (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 5). Thus, multilateral cooperation could be the only force able to restrain the ambitions of the Russian Federation by consolidating the positions of the Baltic – Black Sea countries and Russia itself, and, as a result, accelerating the security, political and economic development of these actors in world politics, as well as contributing to the formation of postmodern international systems in Europe, Eurasia, and the world as a whole.

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Obszar Mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego jako fakt geopolityczny: czy on w ogóle istnieje?

Streszczenie

Ponieważ przemiany społeczne i polityczne, jakie obserwujemy we współczesnym świecie, uaktualniły w ostatnim czasie kwestię powstawania nowych regionów geopolitycznych, obszar mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego zasługuje na szczególną uwagę, ponieważ status geopolityczny tego znajdującego się na rozdrożach obszaru jest wciąż dyskusyjny. Geopolityczne granice obszaru mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego nieustannie się zmieniają nie tylko funkcjonalnie, ale także strukturalnie: można więc uznać ten obszar za specyficzną formację geopolityczną, która znajduje się na styku dwóch geopolitycznych megaregionów – Europy Zachodniej i Północnej Eurazji. Obszar ten jest głęboko podzielony i nadal przechodzi bardzo bolesne przemiany polityczne, kulturowe i gospodarcze. Rywalizacja o władzę między Rosją, NATO i UE, a także dziedzictwo historyczne tego rejonu uwarunkowały ścieżkę jego rozwoju. W efekcie w obszarze mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego nie istnieje żaden system podziału politycznego czy zarządzania gospodarką, ale bliskie związki znajdujących się tam krajów i wiele obszarów wspólnych zainteresowań sprzyjają wszechstronnej współpracy i dialogowi w różnorakich kwestiach. Jeśli ich współpraca przybierze formę wielostronnych relacji opartych na zasadzie suwerennej równości państw, które starają się poszerzyć zakres współpracy i ograniczyć pole konfrontacji, państwa te będą w stanie stworzyć system komplementarnych elementów zapewniających efekt synergii, urzeczywistniając powstanie obszaru mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego stanowiących rzeczywisty byt geopolityczny.

Słowa kluczowe: Morze Bałtyckie, Morze Czarne, obszar mórz Bałtyckiego i Czarnego, rzeczywistość geopolityczna, współpraca wielostronna

Data przekazania tekstu: 30.01.2021; data zaakceptowania tekstu: 01.03.2021.