

The Black Sea Security after Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Views from Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan

Kornely Kakachia, Anar Valiyev, Hanna Shelest, Bidzina Lebanidze, Maksym Khylko, Ahmad Alili, Salome Kandelaki



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A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND



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List of Abbreviations:

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area-Denial
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Force
BSEC	Organization of the Black Sea Economic
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
GUAM	Organization for Democracy and Economic Development
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
TANAP	Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline
TAP	Trans Adriatic Pipeline
UN	United Nations

Executive Summary

The policy paper is an outcome of collaborative research project about the Black Sea Security among scholars from Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The paper depicts the views of local foreign policy communities in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia about the future of the Black Sea region and a wider European security after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The three countries build an important part of the political, economic and transit ecosystems of the Black Sea area and can play a key role in the future organization of the European security order. The results of the study, based on extensive expert survey and interviews, indicate some differences among three countries but also potential for more synergies and cooperation in the Black Sea Area. The foreign and security policy experts from Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan seem to have identical perceptions about main regional risks, threats and opportunities and indicate unequivocal support for establishing peaceful and cooperative order in the Black Sea area. The differences, on the other hand, are mostly related to preferences for future alliances and foreign policy tactics. While Ukrainian and Georgian foreign policy communities seem to be firmly pro-Western and Russia-sceptic the expert community from Azerbaijan favors more balanced and less Western-centric foreign policy.

Keywords: Black Sea, Security, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, NATO, EU, Russia

Introduction

After being neglected for a long time by Western policy makers, the wider Black Sea Area has recently moved into the center of European and world attention as the most volatile part of Europe and one that endangers post-Cold War Europe's peaceful security order. The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents a turning point that has led to a major split between the European Union (EU) and Russia and marked the beginning of a new era of intensified competition and enmity. Hence, the Black Sea seems to have become a new frontline on geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. At the same time, the region has important economic and transit potential and could give Europe access to Central Asian energy resources and Asian markets.

This policy paper explores local perceptions in three countries of the wider Black Sea area: Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The three countries, alongside with Turkey, form a central part of the security, economic and transit ecosystems of the Black Sea area and have the potential to make a significant contribution to a peaceful European security order. Post-war Ukraine, after surviving and bouncing back from Russia's full-scale invasion, has the potential to become a pivotal Black Sea country with enough firepower and state capacity to reshuffle and stabilize the Black Sea and wider European security order.

Located in the Eastern part of the Black Sea, Georgia is a key transit country, connecting Europe to the markets and energy resources of Central Asia, Far East and the Middle East and has the possibility of being a significant outpost of stability and democracy in the volatile region of the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan, as an energy-rich state, provides Southern and Eastern Europe with alternative energy sources that could partly fill EU energy demands created by the EU-Russia energy crisis. All three countries are naturally interested in establishing a stable and secure Black Sea belt to gain more economic and transit benefits. Establishment of stronger coordination and cooperation mechanisms among the three countries can bring about more stability, security, prosperity and economic development and connectivity in and around the Black Sea area and stabilize the most volatile part of the European security order. Therefore, it is important to explore the synergy potentials among three countries, as well as the similarities and differences in the perceptions of local foreign policy elites about the future organization of security, economic and connectivity ecosystems of the region, on the role and place of their respective countries. Specifically, the paper intends to answer three relevant questions:

- What are the perceptions of the political elites in Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan regarding the security challenges in the Black Sea region?
- How could Russia's invasion of Ukraine change wider Black Sea Security?
- What are the lessons learned for Georgia and Azerbaijan after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and what could be the best strategies for Ukraine and Georgia, as well as for Azerbaijan, to gain security guarantees in the future?

To explore these issues within this policy paper, a group of authors from three countries have conducted intensive field and desk research. The results presented below are based on fourteen qualitative interviews and an expert survey with participation of 45 local experts (15 in Ukraine, 14 in Azerbaijan and 16 in Georgia). The field research was further supplemented by extensive desk research that included analysis of research and policy documents, international reports, as well as strategic documents on wider Black Sea security.

The results of the study provide some interesting insights. First, the perceptions of the threats, as well as those about major spoilers of Black Sea security and stability among the foreign policy communities in three countries, is roughly similar. They ascribe a positive role to the United States (US), North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Kingdom (UK) as well as Eastern European EU member states, while Russia is considered a major spoiler of Black Sea security. The perceptions start to diverge, however, when it comes to the future organization of Black Sea security, peace and security order in Europe and place and the role of the Black Sea countries in it. While Ukrainian and Georgian experts firmly support the anchoring of the Black Sea countries into NATO and EU structures, Azerbaijani foreign policy experts prefer regional formats without contractual relations with the Euro-Atlantic partners, as well as close partnership with Turkey. Overall, however, it seems that all three states are interested in establishing a peaceful security order in the wider Black Sea region that will enable the local states to benefit from the regional economic and connectivity potential of the region.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The first part analyzes the perceptions among foreign policy communities in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia about the major risks and opportunities emanating from the Black Sea area in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the second part, the authors look at various visions from the three countries about future construction of Black Sea security and the order of peace and security in Europe. The concluding part summarizes the results and identifies the potential synergy areas for stronger regional cooperation among the three countries, with some policy-relevant recommendations derived from the joint study.

Black Sea Security amid the Russia-Ukraine War: Perceptions from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

This part of the report discusses the major perceptions about the Black Sea area among foreign policy elites in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In doing so, we try to answer in this chapter the first two questions of this paper: (1) what are the perceptions of the political elites in

Georgia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan regarding the security challenges in the Black Sea region? And (2) how could Russia's invasion of Ukraine change wider Black Sea security? Overall, while economic and connectivity potential seem also to be an important issue, security, and specifically hard security, was singled out as the most pressing issue by the experts from all three countries. This is unsurprising considering the devastating impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war and its ramifications for the entire region.

While the February 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine caught many in the world by surprise, it did not change the perceptions regarding the Black Sea in Ukraine significantly as it just proved previous assessments. Blockades of the Black Sea ports, disturbance to commercial navigation, attacks from the sea, militarisation of Crimea, and the inadequate presence of the NATO allies have continued to be inescapable elements in the situation in the Black Sea region.

The last few years' discourses among the political elites in Ukraine (*Foreign Policy of Ukraine, Annual Scorecards*, 2019, 2021, 2022), as well as expert interviews within this project, show that Russian aggression, occupation of Crimea, and militarisation of the Black Sea region - hard security issues – have been considered the main threats and challenges. At the same time, information and energy security challenges also occupied a significant place, with information and cyber warfare moving to the hard security domain (Shelest 2022). The ineffectiveness of the international security system was also mentioned among the main security challenges (Bodnar 2022, Korsunsky 2022).

Ukraine started to prioritize hard security issues in the Black Sea area long before the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion. In this regard, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 acted as a turning point in the mind-set of the Ukrainian foreign policy community. Before that, the region had primarily been seen through the prism of work in regional organisations, such as BSEC and GUAM, and so was the perception of threats and challenges that laid within the soft security domain – social-political, environmental challenges, trafficking and organised crime, illegal migration, and frozen conflicts for the most part. Thus, opportunities were also seen predominantly in the spheres of trade and maritime cooperation, tourism development, blue economy perspectives, and transport facilitation.

However, Russian aggression in 2014 prioritised hard security challenges and threats and brought to the forefront the necessity of security cooperation with like-minded countries (Romania and Turkey) and organisations (NATO). *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (2020) gave broader consideration to the region. Among other things, it emphasised that Russia used the Black Sea-Caspian region and occupied Crimea as a bridge to the Balkans, Mediterranean and the MENA. Increased militarisation of occupied Crimea was named as a challenge, as well as threats to the freedom of navigation that come from the Russian Federation. The first *Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine*, adopted in 2021, also gave a higher priority to the Black Sea region and cooperation with individual Black Sea states. Ensuring security and development in the

Black Sea-Baltic region was named among the top priorities, while Russian military projection in the Azov-Black Sea region was mentioned among the main threats.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine also brought new security challenges to other countries in the Black Sea region, including Azerbaijan and Georgia. Like Ukraine, both countries view the Black Sea region both as a source of risks but also of opportunities.

Right from independence Azerbaijan looked at the Black Sea region from a perspective of access to the world market for its energy products. It is not surprising that the government of the country, as well as the public, perceived the Black Sea area as vital for the country (Valiyev 2019). While Azerbaijan is squeezed between Russia and Iran, has almost war conditions with Armenia, and export opportunities of its energy products is limited, the Black Sea remained the only transport link to the West. Observe most of country's strategic initiatives, such as the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Southern Gas Corridor gas pipeline, and finally the Baku-Kars railroad connection. In line with these initiatives, the countries of the Black Sea region, specifically Georgia and Turkey, were considered as strategic partners through which Azerbaijan was building its transportation, political and economic relations with the West (Valiyev 2021).

From Azerbaijan's viewpoint, the Black Sea region has a great opportunity to become a transit corridor due to its location between Europe and Asia. The main role of the Black Sea would be as an alternative transit route to supply energy to Europe, as well as goods, in the case of synchronized economic, trade and custom policies by littoral states. The Black Sea is the only place where EU connects with the South Caucasus not to mention that it has ports for which the costs are comfortable for Georgia, Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, for Azerbaijan, Georgia offers alternative routes for energy transmission to Europe. In this context, Georgia is a key for Azerbaijan to sustain its energy supply to Europe (Valiyev 2021).

Like Azerbaijan, for Georgia the Black Sea area has always functioned as a transit point, although with yet unfulfilled potential (Khorkishvili & Lebanidze 2022). It has been a geopolitically and geo-economically important "transit point on global East-West and North-South trade routes" (Khorkishvili & Lebanidze 2022). Strategic documents from the Georgian government highlight the significance of the Black Sea region as a source of economic exchange, investments, and tourism (*Ibid*). What is more, for Georgia, the meaning of the Black Sea goes beyond materialist considerations, and it also involves ideational attachment to the European civilization. No longer willing to be labelled merely as a post-Soviet state, nor wishing to be identified with a fragmented Caucasus region, the Georgian polity sees its ties with the Black Sea community as a way to become affiliated with the rest of Europe (Kakachia 2013, Aprasidze 2022). This discourse is also widely present in Georgian strategic documents. For example, according to the Georgian National Security Concept, "as a Black Sea and Southeast European country, Georgia is part of Europe geographically, politically, and culturally, yet it was cut off from its natural course of development by historical cataclysms" (MOD Georgia 2011).

As in the case of Ukraine, the majority of the main threats for Georgia are related to Russia. These are manifested in the form of territorial conflicts and an ongoing occupation of parts of Georgian territory by Russia (anonymous interview 2, 2022) as well as an absence of any international presence in the occupied zones, especially in the Abkhaz section of the Georgian Black Sea coast (anonymous Interview 2, 2022). They also include a potential danger of annexation of occupied territories by Russia (anonymous Interview 2, 2022). as well as potential dangers from the North Caucasus, which is, on the surface, peaceful and stable under Russia's terror-like rule but has the potential to explode one day, and instability could spill over into Georgia and Azerbaijan (anonymous Interview 2, 2022). Regional risks and threats for Georgia are further exacerbated by its lack of internal preparedness and domestic resilience to cope with this effectively (anonymous Interview 2, 2022) and to adapt to the cyclical nature of events over time. According to surveys of experts, the inadequacy and unpreparedness of Georgian polity can even trigger new risks. For instance, if xenophobic and ethno-nationalist narratives induced by pro-Russian groups continue to spread in parts of Georgian society they could result in the deterioration of relations with neighboring Turkey (Dzebisashvili 2022).

In sum, while risks facing Georgia are manifold, Russia is considered as by far the greatest threat to Georgia's statehood (Tsereteli 2022). Russia is also the source of hybrid warfare against Georgia, manifested for instance by the borderization process (Kakachia 2018) along Georgia's occupied zones (Akubardia 2022). Overall, instability in Armenia after the latest Karabagh War, and the presence of Russian troops in the countries of South Caucasus, are also considered as sources of risk for Georgia (Akubardia 2022). Finally, cooling of relations with the West is also considered as a serious risk facing Georgia (Kakachia & Lebanidze 2022) which can only further embolden Russia to pursue its imperialist agenda in the region (Dzebisashvili 2022).

The two South Caucasus countries - Georgia and Azerbaijan - were confronted with new realities after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine full-scale war, with hard security again becoming a most pressing issue for Baku and Tbilisi. The Russia-Ukraine war also revealed a high degree of vulnerability emanating from Russia's dominance in the Black Sea area, limiting their foreign policy options. The latter was visible, among other instances, in the modest official reaction in Baku and Tbilisi to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and their refusal to participate in international anti-Russian sanctions.

The Georgian government, while formally expressing support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, did its best to keep a low profile in the confrontation (Kakhishvili 2022), did not embrace the Western sanctions against Russia and attempted to keep equi-distance between Kyiv and Moscow. Georgia's newfound balancing policy towards Russia is often associated with a Finlandization strategy, aimed at accommodating the concerns and interests of its northern neighbor through economic rapprochement, self-restraint and strategic patience (Kakachia and Kakabadze 2022). The accommodating "let's not irritate Russia" policy of the Georgian government is viewed negatively by many observers in Georgia. As one of our interview respondents argued, "a non-irritating policy towards Russia is not a real option for

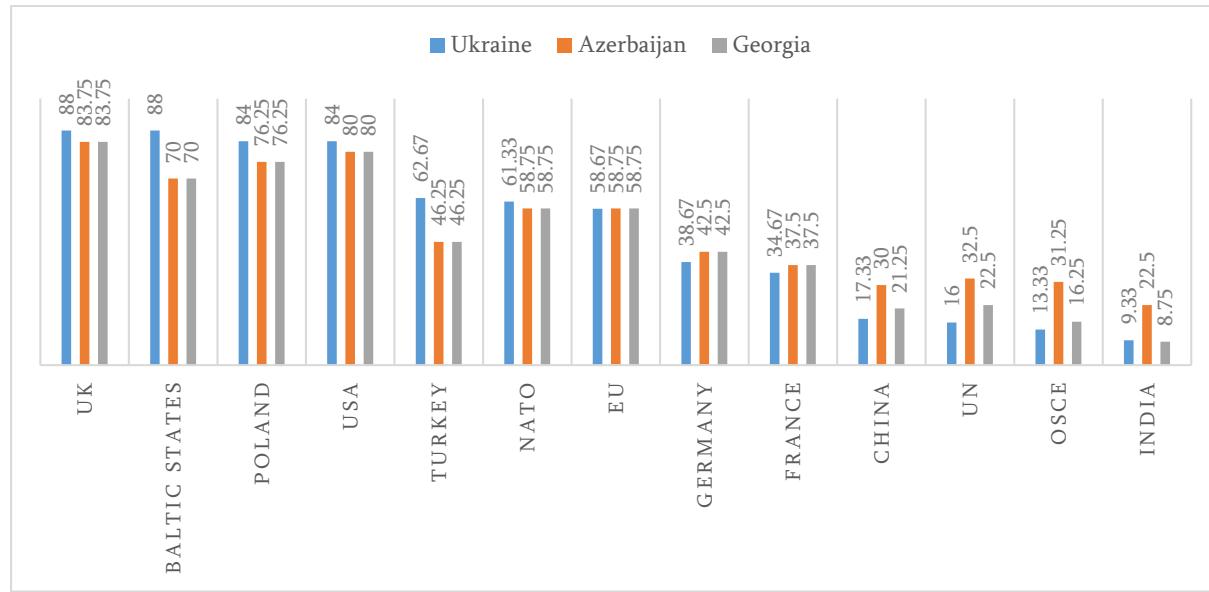
Georgia if it does not want to have its sovereignty further reduced and to become a second Belarus" (Muchaidze 2022). This is not surprising considering the long Russia-sceptic and pro-Western tradition among Georgia's foreign policy epistemic community. As one respondent suggested, not much has changed for Georgia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in terms of the long-term goals of NATO and EU membership (anonymous interview 2, 2022). However, he added that the country also needed to work provisionally to ensure its own security for the time before it joins NATO (anonymous Interview 2, 2022). From this viewpoint, Georgia's balancing policy towards Russia could perhaps be understood as a provisional solution for a vulnerable Black Sea country.

As in Georgia, in Azerbaijan the government responded to the Russia-Ukraine war with a balanced approach - supporting Ukraine to some extent, but trying not to irritate Russia too much. This could be explained by limited foreign policy options for Azerbaijan. The experts interviewed believed that the main ramifications of the situation in Ukraine on Azerbaijan's foreign policy would be *reduced space and increased costs/risks of maneuvering* (Babayev 2022). The invasion has seriously affected, and will continue to affect, the calculations of the decision-makers in Baku. The invasion requires a new policy towards Moscow, Brussels, London, Washington, Ankara, Tel-Aviv, Beijing, and Tehran (Babayev 2022). Therefore, we can argue that this invasion will be a reset point for Azerbaijan. If the result is that Russia become very much stronger, then it is going to attack countries in the South Caucasus next (Huseynov 2022). But if Russia gets weaker it means that we will now have to become ready for decentralization and instability in the North Caucasus, leading to certain radicalization (Huseynov 2022).

The self-restrained positions of Azerbaijan and Georgia underlines the limited potential of increased cooperation among the Black Sea states. This was also reflected by the Ukrainian experts interviewed within this study, who do not see any reasonable opportunities for joint reactions from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in response to the challenges posed to the region by Russian aggression. The differences in policy priorities, opportunities and the level of interaction by Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine with other regional actors, including Russia and Turkey, were well noticed in Kyiv. "I do not see the solid ground for common activities ... All three countries have their way of defending themselves and establishing cooperation mechanisms for their defence," says Amb. Bodnar (2002). Unlike Ukraine, which after the full-scale Russian invasion has no choice other than to fight for its own existence, the current level of Russia's threats to Azerbaijan and Georgia leaves them with more options (Dubovyk 2022). Azerbaijan is building an alliance with Turkey, and Georgia tries to balance between civil society's support for Ukraine and the government's attempt to preserve economic cooperation with Russia (Bodnar 2022). Given the existing differences, Ukrainian experts believe it would be more effective to focus on deepening practical cooperation in various fields between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine rather than to establish any new institutional format for interaction (Gaber 2022).

When it comes to the assessment of roles played by regional and international actors in the Black Sea region, the foreign policy communities in Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia seem mostly to have similar views. The experts from all three countries surveyed assigned the highest scores to the Western actors (EU, NATO and individual NATO/EU states), while non-Western powers (India, China) and regional and international organisations (UN, OSCE, GUAM, BSEC), received the lowest approvals (figures 1 and 2). Specifically, the UK has seen its image boosted in the light of the Russia-Ukraine war: experts from all three countries surveyed assessed its role “in the Russia-Ukraine War and in containment of Russia's assertive regional policies” as most effective, followed by Poland, the USA and the Baltic States, while China, UN, OSCE and India received the lowest scores (figure 1). It seems that the role of individual states was defined according to their support for Ukraine and ability to influence the situation towards a victory.

Figure 1: How would you assess the role of the following actors in the Russia-Ukraine War and in containment of Russia's assertive regional policies (standardized on a scale of 0-100 (least-most effective)?



Ukrainian experts also gave UK the highest points in the second category (a possible positive role in strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region) while Georgian and Azerbaijani experts gave the highest points to the NATO and the USA, followed by the EU (figure 2). Such views overall correspond to the answers of the experts' interviews conducted within the project. The survey results from three countries were closer in the lower half of the table: China, OSCE, GUAM, BSEC and Russia were seen as having the least positive role in strengthening the Black Sea security by experts in all three countries (Figure 2).

Figure 2: How would you assess the POSSIBLE POSITIVE ROLE of the following actors in strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region (standardized on a scale of 0-100 (least-most positive)?

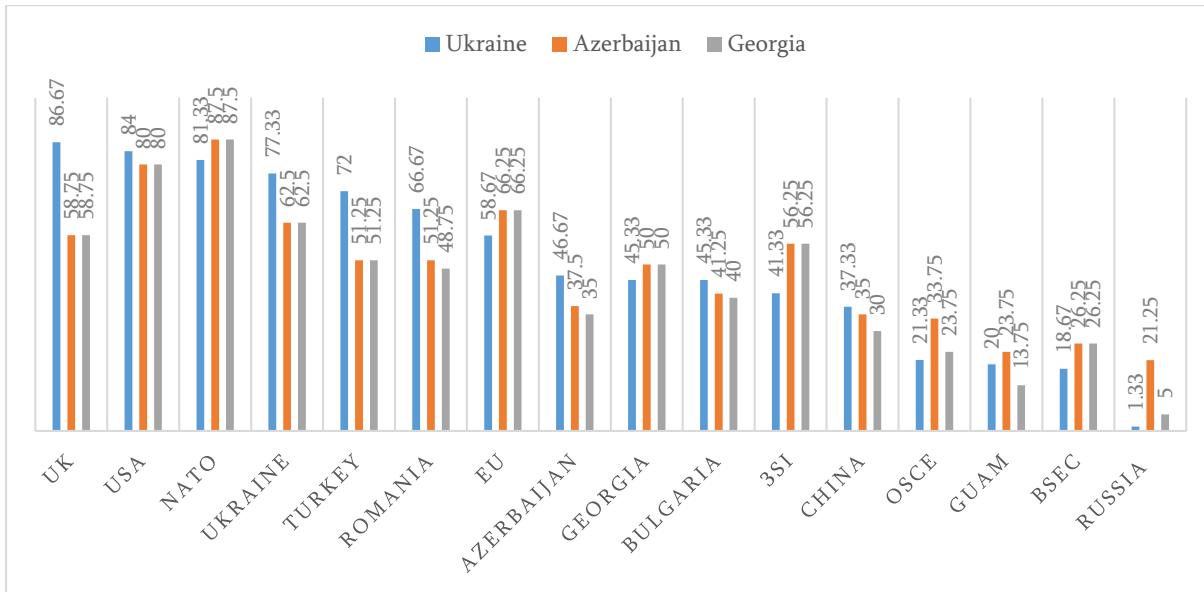
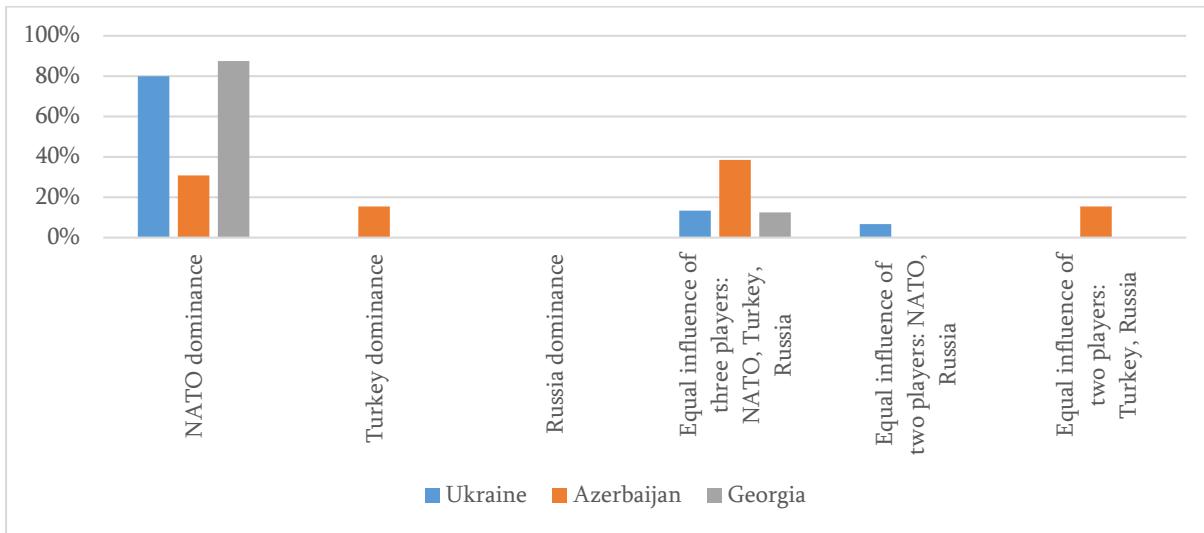


Figure 3: What balance of military power in the Black Sea could best contribute to stability and security in the region?



Perhaps Turkey is the only actor towards whom the perception among Ukrainian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani experts diverge significantly. Georgians and Ukrainians have some serious reservations about the role of Ankara in the Black Sea area, while Baku considers it as a major ally. While both Ukrainian and Georgian experts value partnership with Turkey, they view with suspicion Turkey's low profile in engagement with NATO in the Black Sea area and its

opportunistic approach towards Russia. As one Georgian respondent argued, "Turkey's Black Sea Policy has not been directed at the active involvement of NATO in the Black Sea and has been prioritising regional formats of cooperation [with involvement of Russia] to solve the problems and challenges in the Black Sea area. For instance, the 3+3 initiative was aimed at the exclusion of the West and problem-solving together with Russia (Muchaidze 2022)". This position is in line with the views of Western diplomats and experts who also consider that, under the guise of the Montreux convention, Turkey blocks NATO Black Sea initiatives, aiming "to minimise Allied presence in its backyard" (Townsend 2021). On the other hand, however, there is the understanding in Georgia that despite Turkey's continuous flirtation with Russia, it still provides minimal security guarantees to Georgia, as Ankara "is not interested in turning the Black Sea into the [Russian] sea" (Akubardia 2022). There is also a geopolitical triangle between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan which was initially formed to promote joint energy projects, but can be expanded in other areas as well, including security (Akubardia 2022). Still, Georgia remains the only country in the region which does not have a major military treaty with any regional or global player – unlike Azerbaijani-Turkey or Armenia-Russia alliances. Georgians and Ukrainians also remain sceptical about the utility of the Montreux convention. The majority of respondents surveyed in both countries said the convention was more in the interests of Turkey, and none of them said it was in the interest of NATO (figure 4). In contrast, the majority of the Azerbaijani experts surveyed think the convention serves everyone's' security interests (figure 4).

Figure 4: How does the Montreux convention effect the security of the Black Sea region nowadays?

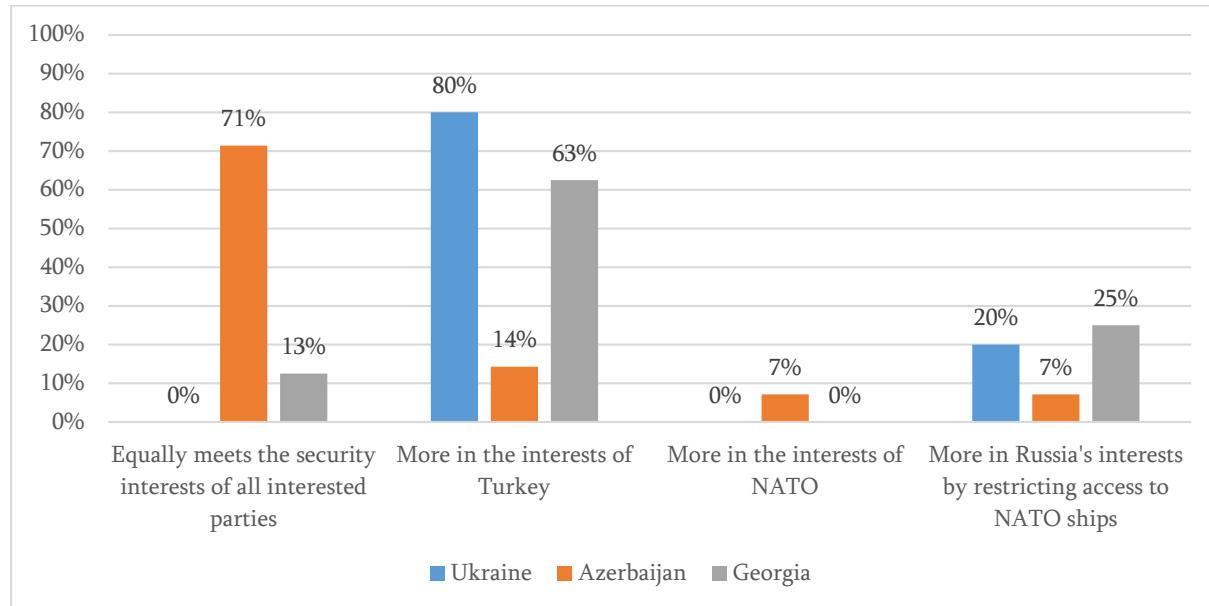
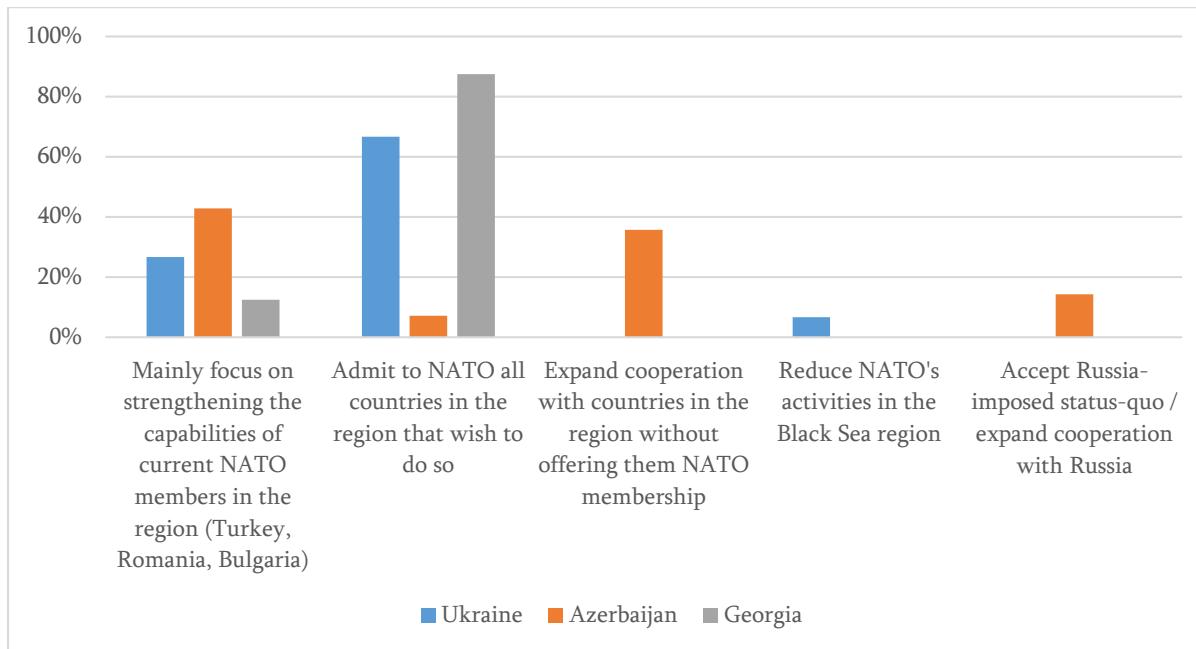


Figure 5: How can NATO allies prevent further destructive actions by Russia that are destroying security in the Black Sea region?



Post-war Black Sea Security and a new security Order in wider Europe: views from Kyiv, Baku, and Tbilisi

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

A major rethink after the Russian invasion of Ukraine also took place in other Black Sea countries, including the countries under study - Ukraine, Georgia, littoral states and Azerbaijan.

While Azerbaijan and Georgia have followed a similar path of strategic patience and accommodation towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this was very differently received by foreign policy communities and broader societies in the two countries. In the case of Azerbaijan, it seems that a balanced foreign policy coupled with a Russia-accommodating approach is a matter of broader national consensus shared by all key stakeholders - the ruling elite, the population, and the foreign policy community. Some experts from Azerbaijan surveyed underlined that the main threats for the countries of the region were how to express their negative reaction towards Russian aggression, how not to be pushed into any Russia-led coalitions, but also how not to be at risk from any negative political consequences (anonymous Interview 1, 2022). Experts also claimed that for Azerbaijan the best was to keep a neutral position, balancing any pressure from Russia, secure the stability of the country and of Azerbaijani migrants in Russia and not to forget the significant role of Russia in the peace-keeping process of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (anonymous Interview 1, 2022).

Yet, some experts from Azerbaijan interviewed also questioned to what extent Baku's balanced approach to the war in Ukraine since its start has been successful (anonymous Interview 1, 2022). While supplying Ukraine with humanitarian aid and much-needed energy resources, it did not join the sanctions on Russia. But to define whether this balancing act has so far been "effective", one needs to look at the change or continuity in Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with these countries and what it squeezed out of this calculated balancing (anonymous Interview 1, 2022). Perception matters much and the downward slope we see in Azerbaijan-Russia relations in this period shows that Moscow perceives Baku's independent moves in this regard as a challenge to its cause in Ukraine and wider neighborhood. Harsh rhetoric against Azerbaijan in the Russian media and among Russian officials indicates that Moscow sees Azerbaijan on the opposite side in the worsening zero sum game between Russia, and the West, but it hesitates to strain ties with Baku amid the looming chaos in Ukraine (Huseynov 2022).

Meanwhile, a large majority of Azerbaijani society took a pro-Ukraine approach in this crisis, associating it with the occupation of their own territories by a foreign occupant. The Russian occupation of Donbas and other territories is also seen in parallel with Russian aggression against Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. That is why society has reacted negatively to what Russia did. The support of the people can be confirmed by the numerous items of humanitarian aid sent, support for Ukraine in social media and the demonstration, during which many people gathered at the Embassy of Ukraine in Baku (JAM-News February 2022). This was a quite influential moment for Azerbaijani society, and while protesting Russian actions in Ukraine this also reflected its views on Russian actions in Karabakh.

In contrast to Azerbaijan, a similar approach of self-restraint and strategic patience pursued by the Georgian government towards Russia's aggressive actions had very different reception in Georgia and resulted in a deep political crisis. In contrast to Baku, it seems that there is no national consensus in Georgia about a balanced foreign policy - this seems to be promoted mostly by the current Georgian government but by no means shared either by the majority of the population, the broader political class or the foreign policy community (Kandelaki & Lebanidze, forthcoming). This was also confirmed by interviews conducted with Georgian experts by the authors of this study, as none of the respondents supported the government's Russia-accommodating policy. What is more, in Georgia's case, a balanced foreign policy is probably also closely related to domestic polity as ruling regimes in Georgia often struggle with harmonizing the goals of Euro-Atlantic integration and domestic reform processes, including any democratization that threatens their power base. According to one respondent, to preserve its power domestically the current Georgian government resorts to actions that are detrimental to Georgia's national interests and results in unfulfilled commitments towards democratic reforms - a necessary step for Georgia's European integration - as well as worsening relations with Georgia's strategic partners. This may result in Georgia being cut off from the West and being dragged into a post-Soviet, post-imperial space (Dzebisashvili 2022).

Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian and Georgian foreign policy communities have very similar views about the future of peace and security order in the Black Sea region. A huge majority of both Ukrainian and Georgian respondents, who took part in the expert survey within this study, support full membership as their country's final stage of relations both with the NATO and the EU (figures 6 and 7). Interviews with the Georgian experts also highlighted the interesting fact that NATO membership, as well as close partnership with the USA, is associated with security and survival, while the EU is mostly viewed not only as a source of economic and social well-being, but also as an actor which is less reliable, due to the ambivalence of some member states such as France and Germany. In the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, next to NATO and the US the UK is considered as the most important actor capable of building new peace and security mechanisms in the Black Sea region (Akubardia 2022). Interestingly, the Georgian experts not only prefer NATO membership over EU membership, they also consider it easier to achieve, while the EU accession is seen as a lengthier process (Akubardia 2022).

Figure 6: How do you see your country's final stage final stage of relations with NATO?

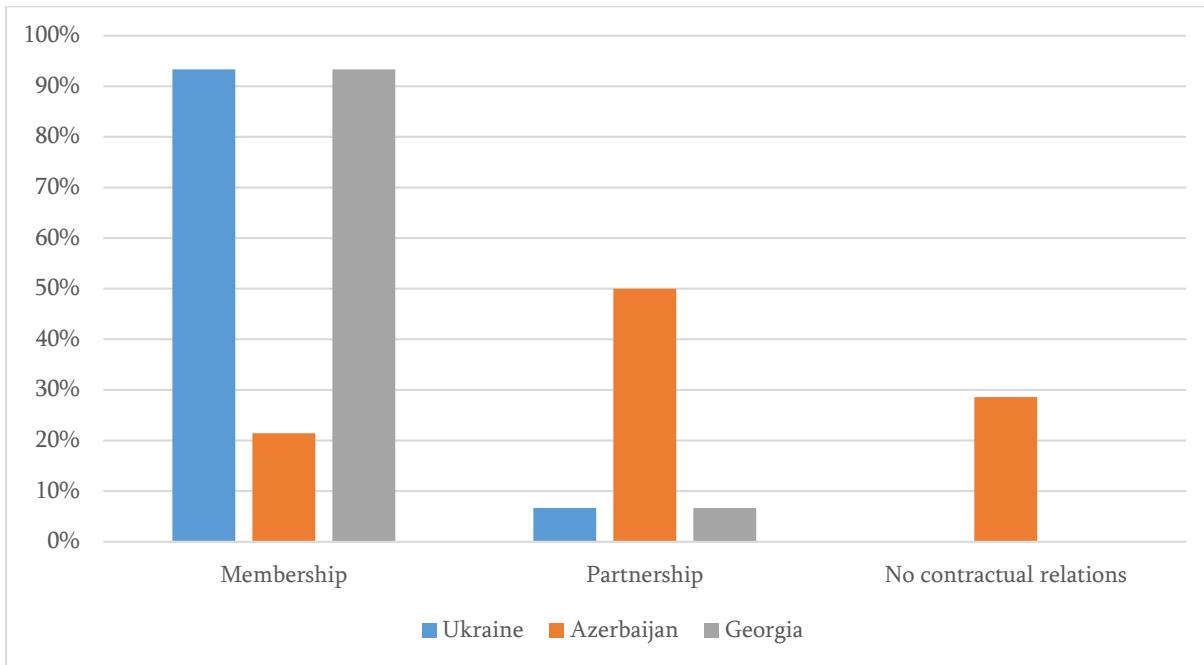
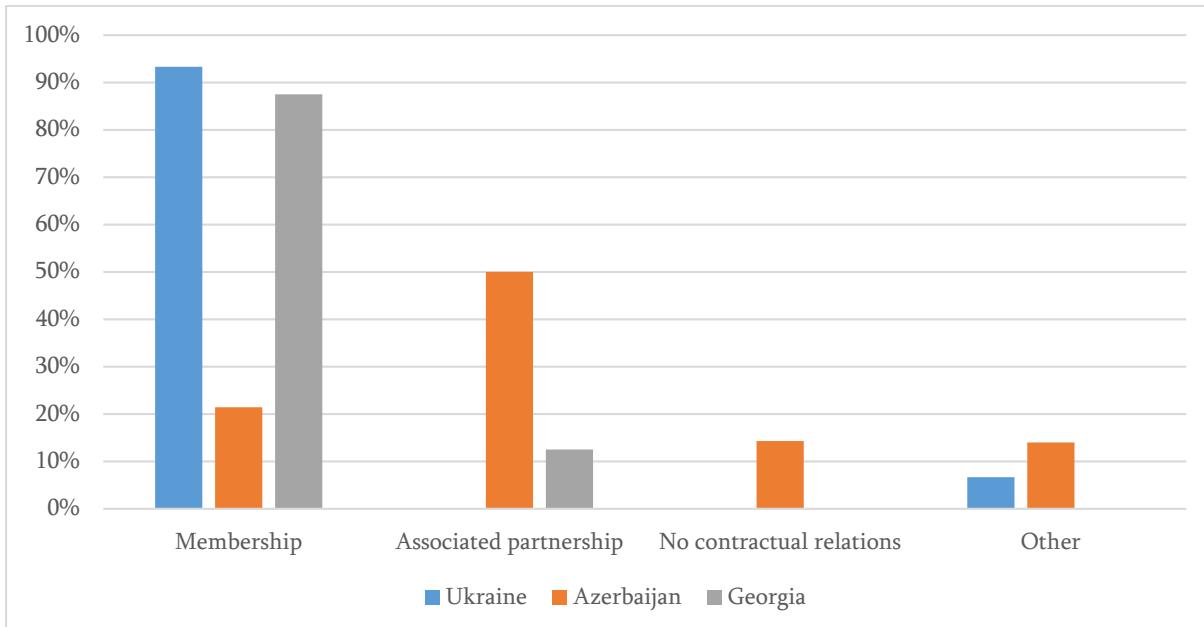


Figure 7: How do you see your country's final stage of relations with the EU?



In contrast to Georgian and Ukrainian experts, only 20% of Azerbaijani experts surveyed support their country's EU and NATO membership, with the majority being for associated partnership as a final stage of relations with these organisations (figures 6 and 7). Azerbaijani experts further agree that the country has a quite different position in the region as it has friendly relations with Russia, and it should not be forgotten that Russia is an important actor in the peace-keeping process in Nagorno-Karabakh (anonymous Interview 1, 2022). Close economic cooperation, balancing politics and neutrality towards any military blocks should be kept, in order not to face Russian aggression (anonymous Interview 1, 2022). At the same time, considering the Georgian and Ukrainian experiences, Azerbaijan should always keep a balanced political approach, further strengthen its military power and be ready to preserve its sovereignty (anonymous Interview 1 2022).

A neutral position and non-alignment to any military blocks are the best options for the country, so far. Furthermore, in terms of security, Azerbaijan should always be together with Turkey, which proved its support during the 2nd Karabakh War (Expert Interview with Azer Babayev, July 2022). Azerbaijan should consider positive opportunities created by the current situation in the region and serve as a bridge and an alternative transit route between Europe and Asia. Moreover, some Azerbaijani experts also claim that after the war ends, Russia should not be kept outside, left alone, and feeling marginalized (anonymous interview 2022). It should be incorporated in future security arrangement (Babayev 2022). Accordingly, a new security architecture, where Europe and Russia work together to create common security in Europe, is a priority focus area during the post-war period (anonymous interview 1 2022). Moreover, European perception towards the region is also very important: whether the region will be seen as a backyard of Russia, or whether a security umbrella will be need to be created to prevent Russia dominating and monopolizing in the region (Shiriyev 2022).

Finally, Azerbaijan can also benefit and contribute to the region. As the country has peace-keeping experience in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq, it can send its forces to Ukraine (anonymous interview 1, 2022). Additionally, Azerbaijan, due to its relationship of trust with both Russia and Ukraine, could form a neutral political platform for negotiations between the sides (anonymous interview 1, 2022). Moreover, Azerbaijan can provide a huge contribution in the economic field, most importantly, in energy provision to Europe (Southern Europe). With this opportunity Azerbaijan has the chance to become an important figure in the Black Sea region, which is considered to be an alternative transit corridor connecting Europe and Asia. Azerbaijan will be a key country in energy provision in Southeastern Europe, especially for Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Serbia and Albania (Shiriyev 2022). At the current stage Baku supplies gas via TANAP and TAP to Greece, Albania and Italy. There are plans to increase the amount of exported gas and start supplying to Bulgaria and further afield to other South East Countries. Moreover, there are discussion about building a green corridor for exporting Azerbaijani electricity to South East Europe - via Georgia and Black Sea to Romania and further on to Europe. So, it will be important for EU to limit Russian influence in that part of the Europe, as well as to ensure energy security to a very high degree through the Azerbaijani

contribution. Furthermore, Azerbaijan could become a transit route for European goods to China and Chinese goods to Europe. As a result, in the current situation, an "Ancient Silk Route" for transportation could be recreated in the region.

In total, according to Azerbaijani experts, the war in Ukraine will have both pros and cons for Azerbaijan's position in structural terms. On the positive side, Baku emerges as a reliable energy supplier for the EU - its geographical location increases Azerbaijan's strategic importance for energy resources (not only for the West, but also for Russia and China). This has positive side effects on its negotiating position on Karabakh. Following the sanctions on Russian railways, Azerbaijan can also emerge as a connectivity hub. The Middle Corridor with Azerbaijan as a crucial part, could take some diverted cargo from the northern route passing through Russia and Belarus. On the negative side, Azerbaijan will be part of a worsening zero sum game between Russia and the West. Till recently, Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy behaviour afforded it manoeuvring capability to avoid geopolitical pressures. Now, this strategy seems in need of a serious revision and Azerbaijan will have to engage in geopolitical multitasking (Babayev 2022).

Ukrainian and Georgian expert communities nurture more Russia-sceptic and Western-focused views of the region. As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the future geopolitical landscape will be shaped by a vision of Russia as a threat that should be contained, as Volodymyr Dubovyk (2022) notes. In this regard, the value of the collective defence within NATO will become more evident for the European countries, which will tend to be more engaged in the alliance's activities.

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

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

Both Ukrainian and Georgian respondents interviewed within this study believe that all the previous formats of cooperation in the Black Sea region, such as Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Black Sea Harmony, BLACKSEAFOR and others, proved ineffective due to Russia's destructive role. Therefore, trying to restore these formats or inventing new ones with Russian participation, would be useless. Ukrainian experts believe that no common security mechanism in the Black Sea could be effective as long as the Russian navy controls the sea (Dubovyk 2022) and until Russia becomes "a normal, an equal partner" (Korsunsky 2022). Instead, they consider that NATO should play a key role in restoring regional security. Similarly, Georgia respondents consider the previous regional Black Sea initiatives, such as BLACKSEAFOR or Black Sea Harmony, as "anachronistic" and "unfit for the current reality" (Dzebisashvili 2022). According to another expert, Black Sea littoral states need more ambitious and bolder formats than previous platforms of cooperation such as BLACKSEAFOR, which became a history after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (anonymous interview 2 2022).

Similarly, Ukrainian and Georgian experts do not have much hope of the participation of non-Western state actors, such as China and India in strengthening security in the Black Sea. Despite China's interest in stability in the region, as a part of its Belt and Road route, the maximum that Ukraine can expect from Beijing is neutrality, formal support for Ukrainian territorial integrity and "not helping Russia in its invasion" (Gaber, 2022). Georgian experts seem to be even less optimistic about China. According to one respondent, "unlike Central Asia, in the South Caucasus it is unlikely that China will balance Russia. On the contrary, China could become a promoter of Russia's interests in the South Caucasus in exchange of Russian concessions in Central Asia" (Akubardia 2022). Georgian experts also mentioned "the danger of China's economic expansion" in the region (Akubardia 2022) and its implications for Georgia's national security (anonymous Interview 2 2022).

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

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

Ukraine and its NATO partners will have to build their strategy to strengthen security in the Black Sea considering the constraints of the Montreux Convention - that is, without the possibility of a permanent presence of non-Black Sea NATO members' navies. The way out is to strengthen cooperation between Black Sea NATO members and their partners in the region. In this regard, Ukrainian experts consider promising the development of cooperation between Kyiv, Ankara, and Bucharest and the strengthening of their navies and coastal infrastructure. At the same time, experts noticed that on the issue of enhancing NATO's military presence in the Black Sea, Romania's position "resonated much better with Russia-alert Ukraine or Georgia" than with such allies as Bulgaria or Turkey (Vorotnyuk 2020). Georgian experts and policy practitioners also deplored the somewhat passive stance of the NATO Black Sea littoral states prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to one respondent, the very low level of involvement of NATO members, and specifically of the littoral member states in the Black Sea security matters, further emboldened Russia to realize the worst scenario in the region (anonymous Interview 2, 2022). Therefore, hopefully, the littoral NATO member states in the Black Sea will take regional security more seriously in the future and expand their cooperation with the non-member states (anonymous Interview 2 2022).

The need for building alternative ad-hoc alliances was also stressed by the Georgian experts. According to Giorgi Muchaidze, Georgia needs to look for new regional security configurations which could emerge among Poland, UK, Ukraine, Turkey and other Eastern European and Black Sea States (Muchaidze 2022). Teona Akubardia, too, underlined the special role of the UK, along with Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO, which could change the future dynamics in the broader Black Sea area (Akubardia 2022). According to her, the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) could even serve as a basis in line with NATO membership aspirations, where the UK could play the leading role in Europe and Georgia could also get involved in the process along the way (Akubardia 2022) Muchaidze also underlined a possibility of creation of a new belt of like-minded countries including Azerbaijan, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Baltic States, Poland, the UK, and Scandinavian countries (Muchaidze 2022). This type of setting could prove to be a more reliable security ally for the USA in the future (Muchaidze 2022). Overall, it seems that there is a certain frustration with Western Europe in the current crisis among the Georgian foreign policy community.

Along with international cooperation, Ukrainian experts also stress the role of domestic polity, particularly the necessity to develop Ukraine's own defence capabilities: "A secure environment must be based, first of all, on our own Ukrainian military force: modern, well-equipped and well-trained," notes Amb. Sergiy Korsunsky (2022). In this context, Ukraine's candidacy for EU membership is of vital importance as the post-war restoration of the economy will need EU assistance, and the level of economic development will directly affect Ukraine's capabilities to invest in security and defence. Volodymyr Dubovyk (2022) also notes that special attention should be paid to preserving democracy under the conditions of the potential significant militarisation of the country. Georgian experts agree that strengthening the country's internal capacity is also important in order to tackle external risks and threats. Experts surveyed

particularly underlined the importance of improving Georgia's democratic record and eradicating some practices of bad governance, such as crony economic structures and Georgia's inability to make best of its transit and transport potential (Dzebisashvili 2022). The role of domestic polity and domestic reforms seems to be paramount in advancing Georgia's accession into NATO and the EU. According to Teona Akubardia (2022) Georgia needs to do its homework well to be prepared for NATO (and EU) membership when the window of opportunity arrives at some point in the future.

Finally, Ukrainian and Georgian experts have similar views, also, about the potential options for Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine to contribute to strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region. The vast majority of Ukrainian (86.7%) and Georgian (80%) experts believe that all three countries should focus primarily on strengthening their cooperation with NATO (figure 9). On the other hand, 78.57% of Azerbaijani respondents' favour establishment of a military-political alliance with Turkey, and 53% prefer cooperation with NATO (figure 9). Interestingly, none of the experts from the three countries surveyed selected the option of "strengthening cooperation with Russia" (figure 9). According to the Azerbaijani experts interviewed, looking from the perspective of the three countries, the best for them was a focus on cooperation and security in the region. As was mentioned previously, the model of GUAM or the creation of any similar organization, would be a good platform for joint collaboration (Huseynov 2022). The countries should support each other, their territorial integrity and sovereignty (anonymous Interview 1, 2022).

Figure 8: In your opinion, what is the best policy option for your country to insulate and protect itself from the negative consequences of Russian assertiveness in the Eastern Partnership region?

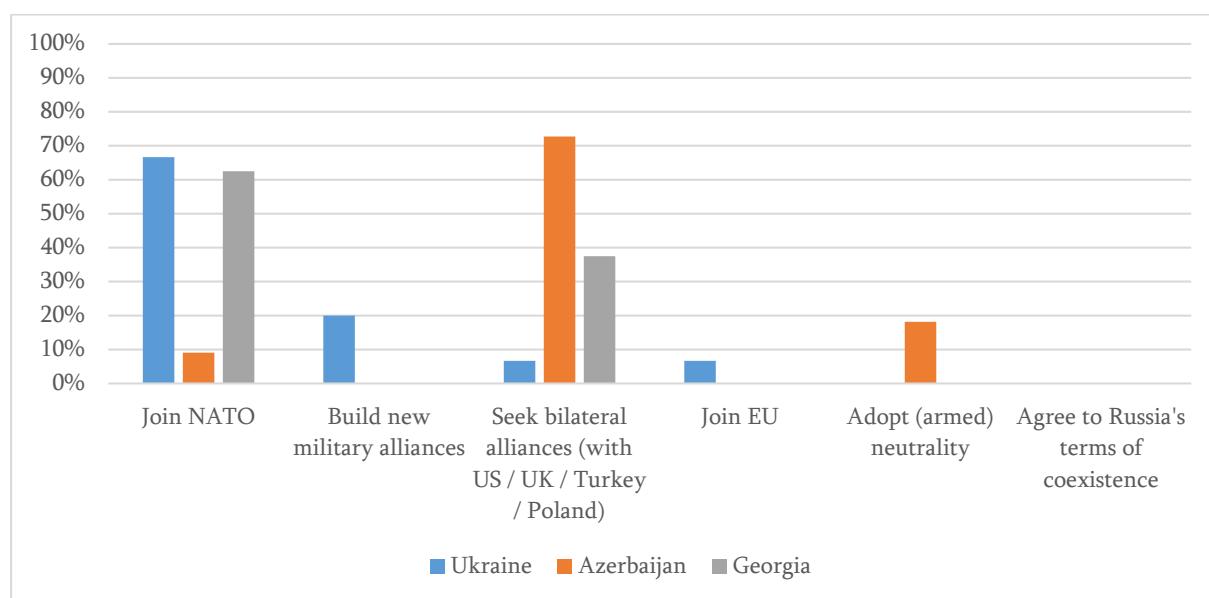
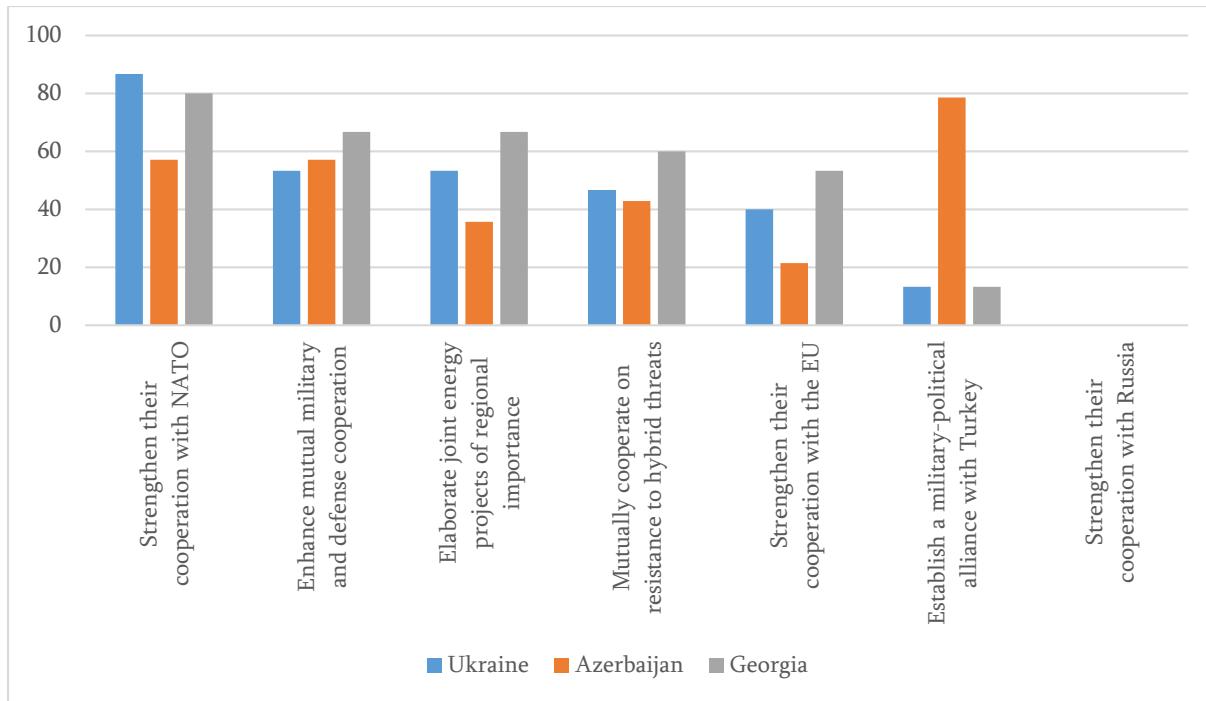


Figure 9: What Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine could do to contribute to strengthening security in the wider Black Sea region?



Conclusion & Recommendations

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a tipping point for European security. It ended a post-Cold-War era of relative peace and cooperation and started a new era of intensified geopolitical competition and power politics. While all of Europe was affected by the invasion of Ukraine, the wider Black Sea area was in the epicentre of these dramatic events. Evidence from Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine itself shows the difficult situations the countries of the region find themselves in due to the war and the challenges of the choices they face. Our survey of foreign policy expert communities from all three countries shows their desire for a long-term peace, prosperity and stability in times when external security guarantees are absent, military power is becoming key to international politics and the current European security order is being demolished. The foreign policy communities from the three countries evince similar perceptions of the threats and provide similar assessments about the roles played by regional and global actors in the Black Sea and European security. However, they have divergent views on how to ensure their own security and establish peace and prosperity in the Black Sea region. This reflects a general trend of fragmentation and partisanship among the states of the Black Sea region. Among other things, the region lacks common political and geographic identity and is negatively affected by regional rivalries and fragmentation. It is therefore necessary, for the countries of the region to overcome these differences and work together to build sustainable mechanisms of cooperation as a precondition for peaceful and prosperous development of the entire region. In the following, we provide recommendations to the governments of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as to international actors and local stakeholders, on how to improve Black Sea security and cooperation among the three countries.

Recommendations

- *to the governments of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan:*

1. Despite the war, Ukraine needs to improve its coastal defence infrastructure and continue the development of the naval forces in close cooperation with NATO and EU partners. Ensuring freedom of navigation, prevention of port blockades, and coast defence are top priorities. Such military infrastructure should, on the one hand, be able to serve as a component of NATO's collective security and, on the other hand, ensure sufficient capabilities to provide Ukraine's basic security needs independently. Georgia does not have a navy since the 2008 war, is vulnerable, and therefore needs to strengthen its naval component, otherwise this can be used against Georgia in the event of aggression.

2. As an EU candidate state, Ukraine, and potential candidate Georgia, should consider participation in EU's initiatives in the field of security and defence, as well as EU's military-technical cooperation. Georgia should attempt to widen the EU-Georgia Work Plan on Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) as well as to intensify cooperation within the European Peace Facility (EPF).

3. Ukraine should enhance maritime cooperation with Turkey and Romania, so to counter the existing challenges in the maritime domain, including Black Sea patrolling, monitoring and reconnaissance, demining, ensuring the safety of navigation and critical infrastructure protection. Georgia should also strengthen its military cooperation, particularly with Turkey, the UK and USA. Georgia should ensure close maritime cooperation with Turkey, and its Western partners, the USA and the UK, and to continue military cooperation with the Western actors in order to counter security challenges amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Georgian government should attempt to sign a special agreement with Turkey, so that Ankara does not hinder movement of the NATO military navy infrastructure in Georgia's Black Sea ports.

4. The Georgian government should ensure direct connectivity with the EU and NATO states via Black Sea.

5. Azerbaijan should continue its balanced approach, dubbed as "strategic patience". Azerbaijan was successful in the last couple of years with regard to the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict. Baku should keep this delicate balance not to irritate Moscow with anti-Russian moves and actions.

6. Yet, Baku should also pursue a policy of building regional cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine as well as other Black Sea countries. Baku should be active in giving long-term energy security to Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine via its gas pipelines TANAP and TAP. Meanwhile, the Baku-Supsa pipeline, that has been inoperative since the beginning of the war, can be utilised for transporting Kazakh oil to the Black Sea port of Poti and further on to Europe. Finally, there are heated discussions on the possibility of launching a "Green Corridor", stipulating the export of electricity from Azerbaijan to Europe via Georgia and the Black Sea. Baku should become active with such efforts in the foreseeable future.

- ***to international actors:***

1. The security of the Black Sea region is one of the key factors defining European and Euro-Atlantic security, thus more attention should be paid by international actors, including NATO and the EU. Restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine as well as of Georgia and Azerbaijan, and establishing a necessary balance of powers in the Black Sea that would prevent the existence of exclusive A2/AD zones, creating guarantees of security for all littoral states and restoration of the freedom of navigation and maritime trade, may succeed in improving economic cooperation.

2. Among the factors limiting the effectiveness of military and economic cooperation among the Black Sea countries interested in security and stability in the region is their different status in interaction with NATO and the EU. Successful addressing of Black Sea security issues requires a significant and closely coordinated build-up of integrated coastal defence infrastructure, and naval and other forces interactions by Romania and Ukraine in partnership with Bulgaria and Georgia. This could be done much more effectively if Ukraine and Georgia joined NATO and the EU. Azerbaijan and Moldova should be invited to cooperate where it is possible and mutually beneficial.
3. Repairing relations between the US and Turkey is of great importance for Black Sea security. More close cooperation between the EU and Turkey is also much needed.
4. The EU needs to pay more attention to the Black Sea area. The Union needs a new vision of how to rearrange its partnerships with its member states and associated partners in the Black Sea area as well as how to treat the Black Sea area as an important part of European security order.
5. International actors should also support Azerbaijan's efforts to restore its territorial integrity by supporting Baku. Moreover, international actors should be investing in building transportation corridors uniting Central Asia with Europe via the Caucasus. The existing Azerbaijan-Georgian corridor should be supplemented with an Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey corridor (Zangezur Corridor) to make the region more connected to Europe.

- ***to local stakeholders:***

1. In parallel with their partnership with other countries and international organisations in security, economic and other realms, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine should also focus on practical, mutually-beneficial cooperation with each other in multilateral or bilateral formats where their interests coincide. In particular, this applies to countering hybrid threats, developing energy projects and trade. As all three countries have a high level of cooperation with Turkey, so it would be logical to involve Ankara in such a partnership where possible and beneficial.
2. The three countries should review and reconsider cooperation within the GUAM format as befits the EU candidate status of Ukraine and Moldova, as well as search for new mechanisms of cooperation that may not be influenced by war.
3. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine should reconsider the possibility of joint actions and initiatives within the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe on the questions of restoring the territorial integrity of the states and the militarisation of the Black Sea region in order to strengthen their efforts.
4. For years, Georgia and Ukraine have been comrades in hardship and misfortune with a tradition of friendly and strategic relations between Tbilisi and Kyiv. Therefore, Georgia and Ukraine should attempt to restore their traditional strategic partnership. It should not be based

on personal, party-political factors, but should be institutionalized. Georgia's highest authorities, including the Prime Minister, should pay an official visit to Kyiv to relaunch their damaged partnership. It is also important to make ties between Ukrainian and Georgian civil societies stronger to speed up the reforms in the two countries.

5. Georgian and Azerbaijani governments, in coordination with Turkey and the EU, should further strengthen their traditional energy partnerships, to promote an alternative energy corridor beyond Russia's control and to reduce the EU dependency on Russian energy sources.

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Annex 1_ Interview

Respondent Profile

1. Akubardia, Teona. Parliament of Georgia, Deputy Chairwomen of the Defence and Security Committee. Personal communication: 3 June, 2022, Tbilisi, Georgia.
2. Anonymous. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Personal Communication, July 15, 2022, Azerbaijan.
3. Anonymous. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Personal communication: 20 June, 2022, Tbilisi, Georgia.
4. Babayev, Azer. ADA University, Associate Professor, Personal Communication, July 7, 2022, Azerbaijan.
5. Bodnar, Vasyl. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Turkey. Personal communication: 30 May, 2022, Turkey.
6. Dubovyk, Volodymyr. Center for International Studies at Odesa Mechnikov National University, Director. Personal communication: 24 May, 2022, Ukraine.
7. Dzebisashvili, Lasha. University of Georgia (UG), Supervisor of the Programs of IR and Politics Department. Personal communication: 13 June, 2022. Tbilisi, Georgia.
8. Gaber, Yevgeniya. Centre in Modern Turkish Studies of the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, Senior Fellow. Personal communication: 31 May, 2022, Canada.
9. Huseynov, Vasif. AIR Center, Expert, Personal communication, July 12, 2022, Azerbaijan.
10. Korsunsky, Sergiy. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Japan (previously Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Turkey). Personal communication: 27 May, 2022, Japan.
11. Muchaidze, Giorgi. Atlantic Council of Georgia, Executive Director. Personal communication: 31 May, 2022. Tbilisi, Georgia.
12. Ryzhenko, Andriy. Centre for Defence Strategies, Expert (previously Deputy Chief of Staff of the Ukrainian Naval Forces). Personal communication: 20 May, 2022, Ukraine.
13. Shirihev, Zaur. International Crisis Group, Analyst for South Caucasus. Personal communication: July 13, 2022, Azerbaijan.
14. Tsereteli, Mamuka. American Foreign Policy Council, Senior Fellow for Eurasia. Personal communication: 1 June, 2022. USA.



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