STRENGTHENING FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSTS

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УКРАЇНСЬКА ПРИЗМА

CONTENT

ENHANCING INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONAL PLATFORMS OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM.
CASES OF BELARUS AND MOLDOVA

Alexandra Kuzmich, undergraduate student at Vitautas Magnus University, co-ordinator of the 4th Working group (contacts between people) of the EaP CSF (Belarus),
Juliana Virlan, Master of Science, International Relations Specialist, Center for International Cooperation (Moldova)

Summary

The policy paper aims to enhance National Platforms influences in Belarus and Moldova.

This paper presents a short description of the Eastern Partnership structure, Civil Society Forum's mission, and an analysis of the National platforms in the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Moldova, their level of involvement in the dialogue process, and the best success stories. This document includes National Platforms and Working Groups' agenda and actions for 2020 and post-2020.

The project consists of a series of reports analyses and interviews with the representatives of civil society.

Finally, a set of recommendations for two countries were developed aimed at enhancing the influence of the respective National Platforms.

Introduction to the Eastern Partnership and Civil Society Forum's mission

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009, is based on the achievements of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). At that time, the EU was ready to establish a complex regional policy umbrella that aimed at the transformation of EaP countries and societies. After more than ten years, for many citizens of the six EaP countries, the EU still represents an example of development, geared towards societies, based on the democratic principles and the rule of law, with resilient economies and societies.

The context for the formulation of new ambitious policy objectives has become more complicated with time, because the EU had changed. It is facing Brexit and difficult relations with the United States of America in the trade domain. It is confronting a migration crisis, human rights violation, propaganda and hybrid threats.

The countries from the Eastern Partnership from their side also deal with a great number of problems. Externally, they encounter challenges coming from neighboring Russia, whose government has become more revisionist and belligerent. Daily they face propaganda, fake news, and hybrid threats. Supplementary to challenges to the governance, economic and social stability of these countries, are an ongoing conflict in the East of Ukraine and Russian efforts to separate parts of Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Georgian territory. Simultaneously, the answer to these challenges, as well as voluntary contributions of some EaP countries to EU civilian and military missions worldwide, have demonstrated that EaP countries are not only a consumer of security, but also active actors in security preservation. At the national level, most of them are governed by oligarchy elites, spoiled by corruption and slow pace of reforms.

Eastern Partnership was initiated as a part of the EU Neighbourhood policy to ensure the development of cooperation of participant countries with each other and the EU

on four main priority areas: Strengthening Institutions and Good Governance; Economic Development and Market Opportunities; Connectivity, Energy Efficiency, Environment, and Climate Change; Mobility and People to People Contacts. Supporting the comprehensive approach by the EU towards its Eastern partners is the European Neighbourhood Instrument, which is a key EU financial instrument for cooperation with the EaP countries for the period of 2014-2020.

The Eastern Partnership gained some successes over a decade. All partner countries have progressed in many areas, although on different trajectories that have not always been linear. The Eastern Partnership is not just six individual neighboring countries with different regimes and relations with the EU. It turned into a region in itself, sharing political, economic and people to people contacts.

The policy presents such results as increased people-to-people contacts with visa-free regimes in place with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, a significant increase of students studying in the EU via Erasmus+ program, youth exchanges and systematic work with young entrepreneurs. Thanks to the three Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements, the EU concluded with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the trade with the EU has been growing significantly. There is important headway on support and finance of Small and Medium Enterprises, public administration reform, connectivity, digital agenda, and transport. Many results of the current efforts will still become visible in the future.

The Eastern Partnership required a structured engagement with a broader range of civil society organizations, furthers gender equality and non-discrimination, as well as clearer and tailor-made strategic communications across all areas. As a result, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was launched in 2009. "It is the only regional civil society platform created for promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP CSF aims to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policymaking by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms. EaP CSF is a non-profit, non-government, non-partisan civil society organization."[1]

EaP CSF is the largest umbrella organization of NGOs from the Eastern Partnership region and the EU, working together with +1000 organizations.

The purpose of the Partnership Civil Society Forum is to guarantee the effective participation of civil societies of the Eastern Partnership and the EU in the process of planning, monitoring, and implementing the EaP policy. EaP CSF is a unique organization that have observer status within the official EaP Architecture.

The CSF consists of six National Platforms and five thematic Working Groups.

National Platforms are platforms of civil society organizations from a single country. These are tools facilitating achievement of the objectives of the Eastern Partnership policies in each of the EaP countries. They were established to ensure active connection of each partner - the country's civil society in the reform process. The NPs are stakeholders in the policy dialogue within their respective countries.

The representatives of the Working Groups realize their own projects, regularly participate in the EaP expert panels, and multilateral platform meetings, where they present expertise and gain valuable insight, contribute to accomplishing the main objectives of the Forum. Communication, networking and joint projects continue throughout the year within national and regional settings between the members of the Working Group.

Five Working Groups are as following:

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[1] https://eap-csf.eu/

1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability;
2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies;
3. Environment, climate change and energy security;
4. Contacts between people;
5. Social and Labour policies and social dialogue.

The participation of civil society organizations within the formulation, implementation and assessment of the multilateral policy has increased significantly, due to the constant support from the EU. The regional network of CSOs has grown more powerful and civil society organizations have been learning how to address stakeholders and demonstrate them that the long-term engagement of non-governmental actors beyond the governments benefits policy implementation and leads to more sustainable results. Civil society still faces many challenges, the inclusiveness, deliberation process and the enabling environment. However, CSOs are in the back of most of the success stories of the EaP.

National Platforms: General Characteristics, Level of Involvement in the Dialogue Process, Main Success Stories in Belarus and Moldova

National Platforms are a tool to facilitate a dialogue between the civic service organizations in each EaP country, their respective governments and the EU institutions involved. The technical issues such as the format, selection procedures and decision-making rules are left to be developed by the individual National Platform.

Meeting under the umbrella of the larger Forum, with more than 200 NGOs from the EU and partner countries, is not always conducive to making heard voices on important national issues that do not resonate with the EaP as a whole. Therefore, the National Platforms are especially valuable since they direct attention to the peculiarities of individual EaP countries and work on these issues at the national and local levels. Compared with those of the Forum, cooperation between the Working Groups at the national level is more intensive, in good part because there are almost a dozen meetings a year in the National Platforms, as opposed to the two held at the CSF level. Having the National Platforms articulate their specific concerns is also helpful for advocacy purposes.

To a varying degree, the National Platforms have issues with visibility and gaining acceptance. To raise their profile, the National Platforms could benefit from holding a large annual event similar in format to the CSF Annual Assembly. There they could present the work they did throughout the year, inviting representatives of other National Platforms as well as high-level officials from the EU and their own national governments to participate.

Acceptance of the National Platforms by governments differs across the six EaP countries. In general terms, these get more recognition by EU officials than by the EaP governments.

National Platforms vary considerably in terms of their creation, number of members and capacity.

Republic of Moldova

The non-government organizations in the Republic of Moldova have always played an important role in the process of democratization, taking consistent actions to make an idea of European integration a national priority. Some organizations recognized at the national and international levels, has often drawn the attention of international society and strategic partners to the successes and failures of Chisinau, thus trying to strengthen the democratic path.

The Moldovan law on non-government organizations (No 837 from May 17, 1996) does not limit the right to association and the number of registered NGOs is more than 11,000. However, only a few hundred of them are active.

The non-government organizations depend almost entirely on foreign financing, which was supported and encouraged by Government authorities until 2014, while lately

there has been a tendency to discredit civil society on the grounds of this very dependency, especially on the part of the national Government, even if it does not allocate enough resources to support the work of the civil society by itself. This tendency raises concerns, since the discrediting of non-government organizations has become a regional trend (Hungary, Belarus, the Russian Federation, etc.), so it has negative effects on the stability of the countries.

The Moldovan non-government sector continues to promote and defend human rights, develop and strengthen the democratic path, conduct civic education activities, protect the environment, etc. using all legal means and existing tools.

The activities of the civil society organizations and their capabilities have improved after the intensification of RM-EU relations in 2009. The Government took a number of measures to intensify dialogue and involve civil society. The European Union's policy focused on the importance of having constant and active communication with civil society, and the increase of financial assistance to the civil sector has contributed to its strengthening and facilitated dynamic civic participation.

The Association Agreement signed by the Republic of Moldova on June 27, 2014 emphasized the importance of the non-government sector.

A launch of the Eastern Partnership in 2009 and start of the Moldovan-European Union negotiations on the three major platforms - political association, economic integration and connection to the pan-European energy market, liberalization of the visa regime - meant a new regional and national (geo)political reality, in which the role of civil society in the Republic of Moldova increased. The non-governmental organizations stimulated the public debates on the benefits of European integration comparing to Eurasian integration.

As a result of establishing the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in November 2009 in Brussels, the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova decided to create a related sub-structure at the country level - Civil Society Forum of the Republic of Moldova (CSF Moldova). In March 2010, the National Platform was created within the EaP CSF, a mechanism that brings together CSOs willing to contribute to the European path of the country. Now, there are about 83 NGOs in the National Platform.

The Moldova CS Platform has 5 working groups: 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability; 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies; 3. Environment, climate change, and energy security; 4. Contacts between people; 5. Social and labour policies and social dialogue.

Moldovan National Platform played an important role in monitoring and promoting the relationship between Moldova and the European Union and also the reforms that were implemented by virtue of the documents and commitments made by Moldova as a member of the Eastern Partnership. All these activities were conducted, however, under some direct and individual projects of some member organizations of the National Platform.

For example:
1. In 2016, CNTM, a member of WG4, elaborated research "Reintegration of vulnerable youth, including those lacking parental care and youth in conflict with the law"[2].
2. On March 23, 2017, TI-Moldova and its partner IDIS Viitorul organized a press-conference with the title "The legal framework that regulates the activity of state enterprises needs substantial modifications based on corporate governance standards"[3].

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[2] https://www.cntm.md/ro/publication/studiu-%E2%80%9Enivelul-de-reintegrare-social%C4%83-tinerilor-afla%C8%9Bi-%C3%AEn-conflict-cu-legea-penal%C4%83%E2%80%9D

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KP7B5RdAbk

3. In 2017, several members of WG1: TI-Moldova, ADEPT, IDIS Viitorul and Legal Resource Centre Moldova realized the Study "State Capture: the Case of the Republic of Moldova"[4].

Due to the fact that it was developed under the Neighborhood Policy, the NP can represent a forum allowing for a European-level dialogue. This is not a forum for participation between two or more organizations. At the same time, according to civil society experts, the NP is an opportunity for Moldovan non-government organizations to develop international partnerships and to bring the internal issues on which they are focused into the limelight of European stakeholders. At the same time, the NP can be the platform for NGO reports and studies. In 2017, members of WG1 made a compilation of materials and assessments and the final report[5] about monitoring public policies in Moldova was made public at the meeting of the members of the Working Group in Brussels (June 1-2). This kind of activity represents good practice for the NP in general, because it can be more effective, especially for NP advocacy activity.

At the domestic level, the National Platform's member organizations have developed a long-standing communication with the Delegation of the European Union, the European Union Representation in Chisinau, which in turn has developed financing programs for the projects implemented especially by local small-sized organizations (good governance, economic development, etc.) and not necessarily for the framework of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership.

There is no trilateral communication mechanism between the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, the Government and the civil society. In most cases, the EU Delegation communicates separately with each stakeholder.

Some representatives of non-government organizations believe that the recommendations made by civil society on different topics and submitted both to the EU Delegation and to the Government, could certainly be submitted directly to other relevant European institutions too, if the national non-government organizations knew more about how European bureaucracy works or were better organized within National Platforms. However, the communication with national and local non-government organizations, according to NGOs representatives, is the weak point of the European Union in general and of the EU Delegation to the RM in particular. The communication and cooperation with national NGOs and Government stakeholders, which most of the times work in parallel, should be strengthened.

As regards the Eastern Partnership, a number of non-government organizations, especially the new ones, hardly understand the Eastern Partnership philosophy, and many of them give up and choose to no longer engage in the Platform or adopt a passive behavior. From a different perspective, it is quite difficult to motivate and maintain member organizations due to the fact that the Platform does not perform properly. The procedures for participation in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum are not clear and fair, fueling a lack of confidence in its format and effectiveness.

At the same time, the civil society from Republic of Moldova had the possibility to demonstrate to the European Union, the Eastern Partnership and the civil society the hard work that organizations do in order to promote European integration, facilitate reforms and democratic transformations, to fight for democracy, freedom and prosperity. In fact, it was appreciated by international society.

For example:

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[4] http://www.transparency.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/TI_Moldova_State_Capture.pdf

[5] http://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/Moldova-EaP-CSF-monitoring-report-2017.pdf

- In 2019, the EaP CSF Civil Society Award was presented to Promo-LEX Moldova at the 11th Annual Assembly that took place in Brussels. [6]
- The community of investigative journalists Rise Moldova was awarded the Pavel Sheremet 2019 award[7]. This was offered by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. It was an appreciation for journalistic investigations on oligarchy and state surveillance in Moldova.
- The EU Delegation on June 7, 2019 awarded tangible results of EU-funded initiatives by civil society organizations at national, regional and local levels that have made a lasting and positive impact on the country's democracy, economic development and social cohesion and promoted European values. Six national and local CSOs were awarded to the European Civil Society Awards Gala[8].
- The Institute for Development and Social Initiative "Viitorul" won the good governance award for the project "Innovative improvements in public procurement system. The inclusive economic growth award went to the Cahul Regional Center for Socioeconomic Development for its contribution to reducing poverty, creating jobs and to economic emancipation. The society award was conferred on the Keystone Moldova Association for defending the rights and interests of socially disadvantaged persons and persons with special needs. However, three special mentions were provided. Caritas Moldova won a mention for building confidence by developing concrete and viable solutions to problems faced by the citizens from both sides of the Nistru River. The second mention was given for promoting gender equality and the emancipation of women, owing to the Association of Police Women. The Association "Eco Răzeni" of Ialoveni district received a mention for change promotion through the best local project that contributed to the development of their community.

However, National Platform from Republic of Moldova should obtain more achievements, to undertake the necessary reforms for a European path and share its experience with other National Platforms.

Republic of Belarus

According to Belarusian official statistics there are more than 3000 public associations registered in the country, but due to methodics shortages this number doesn't include a wide range of NGOs (both registered as institutions and acting as an unregistered initiative).

The overall environment of Belarusian civil society may be characterized as follows:
- imperfect and in some cases oppressive legal environment for NGOs (e.g. criminal liability for activities on behalf of an unregistered organization (Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code), highly bureaucratized and censored mechanism of working with international funds, etc.),
- urban-rural imbalance in the activities of NGOs (dominance of Minsk and regional centers in the structure of public activity),
- strategic contradictions between organizations of the same sector or a recognized lack of a strategic vision for the development of the sector[9].

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[6] https://www.eap-csf.md/asociatia-promo-lex-a-castigat-premiul-eap-csf-civil-society-award-in-cadrul-forumului-anual-de-la-bruxelles-din-decembrie-2019/

[7] https://www.eap-csf.md/jurnalistii-moldoveni-au-luat-premiul-pavel-sheremet-in-cadrul-parteneriatului-estic/

[8] https://www.ipn.md/index.php/ro/premiile-ue-pentru-societatea-civila-din-moldova-7967_1049177.html

[9] https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/DOC/1/2018_Civil-Society-Belarus_RU.pdf

Belarusian National Platform (BNP[10]) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 and to the moment units around 80 civil society organizations and initiatives. BNP is not registered in Belarus as a national legal entity and allows participation of non-registered initiatives. The representation and activity of different sectors in the framework of the BNP is very different. Civil society development sector, business associations, youth and human rights NGOs are the most active in promotion of their agenda and use of the BNP tools.

In general, better activity is observed in those cases when organizations see in the BNP some additional mechanisms for promoting and developing their subjects of interest. Most often, such an additional resource is an opportunity to use the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as a channel of communication with the EU institutions and to enter the wider platform of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative. Moreover, these mechanisms are not always obvious and understandable for the majority of the BNP participants, and for representatives of some sectors (for example, human rights defenders) seem redundant due to the presence of their own contacts within the Eastern Partnership region and at the communication with EU institutions directly.

The BNP claims a broader role in consolidating and coordinating the efforts of the civil society in expanding its influence on political decision-making within the country, but its activities in this regard can hardly be called successful. At best, BNP manages to play a role of a communication platform for different NGOs. Issues of improving the mechanisms of BNP agenda development and member organizations cooperation and inclusion are both a prospect for the development of the platform and its main challenge.

BNP is involved in the policy-making process in a reactive manner, commenting trends and providing a review of the political situation for the EU actors. This is caused due to three main factors:

- <u>BNP is not recognized by the Belarusian government as a stakeholder</u>: even during the EaP events, BNP is often not the only one, but just one of the civil society organizations representatives, because the government insists on inclusion of other GoNGOs as participants representing the Belorussian civil society. Adverse political and other conditions for the development of the civil society within the country do not allow NGOs to fully influence any significant decisions in the country. Political transformation and liberalization of the political regime requires a more active political role of the civil society and effective non-governmental organizations. At the same time, the civil society of Belarus itself is obviously not ready to assume such a mission and responsibility.
- <u>EU policy towards Belarus, which can be characterized as condoning to agreements' violations</u>. Since 1997, when human rights violations have led to decrease in cooperation and a "policy of critical inclusion", there were a number of preconditions for starting a dialogue. However it, didn't make any impact on the situation in 2013 when the progress in democratization became one of the cooperation direction rather than precondition for cooperation. Up to 2016, Belarus was under sanctions and since then there was some progress in Belarus-EU relations. In particular, the Agreement on readmission and the Visa liberalization agreement were signed in 2019. In such conditions, the Eastern Partnership is oriented mainly on cooperation with state bodies aimed at their adaptation to the European norms while somehow ignoring the internal political context where the situation with human rights and general freedoms is not improving and a space for the civil society shrinks.
- <u>Internal BNP challenges</u>. The BNP was weaken by a number of internal discussions, which were mainly concentrated around action strategy: to be moderate

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[10] http://npbelarus.info/

and diplomatic in actions and rhetoric or to be harsh and don't even try to build communications with the Belarus government. Inability to compromise led to lack of trust to the BNP and human capacity crisis, which in the end leads to insufficient relevance of the BNP activities to the interests and needs of the Belarusian NGOs, resulting in a weak level of their participation.

Despite of the external and internal challeges, there are some success stories the BNP had over the time:

1. EU-Belarus Coordination group creation[11]

The format has started in April 2016 as an attempt to structurize EU-Belarus relations across the spectrum of bilateral cooperation, where civil society became one of the dialogue participants. In the situation where civil society is not fully recognized by the government, it received a voice in an international dialogue and an opportunity to be heard.

The positive context for the development of relations between the civil society and the EU was also an adoption in 2018 of the new Roadmap of relations between the EU and civil society in Belarus[12]. However, the general context of relations with the EU is characterized by a lack of positive dynamics in recent years.

2. Belarus have entered the Bologna process with a Roadmap of reforms[13].

Belarus first tried to enter the Bologna process in 2007, but with a general intention not to make any significant reforms, what had been openly communicated, so Belarus was rejected. In 2011, Minsk submitted a second application with deceitful information in the higher education review. In response to this, a BNP ad hoc commission on higher education created an alternative report outlining mistakes, so Belarus got rejected for the second time.

In 2015, Belarus made a third attempt to enter the Bologna process (an alternative report was also made) and that year it was successful, however, the Belarusian case became a precedent: a country got a clear list of reforms, which it had to sign as an obligation and a specific Advisory group was formed within a Bologna Follow-Up Group.

3. Human Rights Dialogue format was established on a regular basis[14].

Such a format of resolving human rights issues as establishing Human Rights Dialogue in third countries (i.e. non-EU) was developed in 2001 and proposed to Belarus in 2009, but the first meeting with Belarusian government and civil society representatives took place only in 2015 with a support from the CSF and the EU delegation. Since then, the Human Rights Dialogue became a summarizing platform for all human rights' NGOs' activities and established human rights as an important priority of Belarus-EU cooperation.

National Platforms and Working Groups agenda and actions for 2020 and post-2020

The EaP CSF Strategy for 2018-2020 is concentrated around creation of supportive environment for NGOs and their inclusion in decision-making process: to ensure full-fledged participation of civil society organizations in the process of implementation of the EaP via institutionalizing and strengthening mechanisms of dialogue - between the EU and civil society, between the national governments and the EaP civil society, and between the EU, national governments, and the EaP civil society; to improve the enabling environment

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[11] https://belsat.eu/en/news/normalization-of-relations-belarus-eu-coordination-group-to-meet-in-brussels/

[12] https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/10931/eu-country-roadmap-engagement-civil-society-2014-2017_en

[13] http://bolognaby.org/index.php/en/slider-home-ru-2/672-yerevan-ministerial-communique-belarus-roadmap-for-higher-education-reform-and-fourth-bologna-policy-forum-statement-2

[14] https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/support-eastern-partnership-stories-facts-and-figures-european

for CSOs in Eastern Partnership countries and to increase their capacity in monitoring and implementation of reforms; to strengthen the role of the EaP CSF in the EaP policy development and implementation.

The context and specific conditions with regards to bilateral relationship with the EU and civil society is different in each EaP country.

Republic of Moldova

For example, a Strategy of the National Platform in Moldova was necessary to be created, because Moldova intends to become a more active and effective stakeholder in shaping the key reforms within EU-Moldova AA/DCFTA and 20 deliverables by 2020 Agenda**.** This document reflects the goals and priorities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Strategy.

In March 2018, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the 2018-2020 Civil Society Development Strategy. The document was co-developed with representatives of civil society and entails three objectives: further enhance legal framework to support civil society development; increase financial sustainability of CSOs; promote civic activism and volunteering.

The EU Delegation in Moldova initiated a process to develop the EU Roadmap for r with Moldovan Civil Society*,* which specifies for the following objectives:

1. Strengthen a CSOs participation in the reform process in the various sectors foreseen in Moldova EU Association Agenda and Moldova's effective use of the EU assistance;
2. Promote a conducive environment for CSOs, good governance, strengthening democratic institutions - CSO participation in developing and monitoring the implementation of public policies, increasing the transparency and accountability of central and local administrations;
3. Enhance the role of Civil Society as a community development actor and service provider to the citizens.

The strategic planning was preceded by a consultation process involving each Working Group of the Platform. The consultation process aimed at identifying both common and specific challenges and needs that WGs face in their work.

According to the examination, all working groups face a common set of external and internal challenges. The external challenges deal with impediments and issues preventing the WGs and the Platform to influence policy making with regards to the AA/DCFTA agenda. These are constituted by the facts that: the advocacy efforts and policy analysis are fragmented; the platform mostly reacts to what Moldovan authorities decide and is not sufficiently focused on advocating the EU decision makers; the platform does not have sufficient recognition, legitimacy and constituency among the wider Moldovan civil society.

The internal challenges deal with issues with regards to an internal organization and set up. These are:

1. The Platform lacks a support structure for the Working Groups and facilitators.
2. Many members of the Platform are passive and lack ownership.
3. There is no consistent planning and follow-up.
4. The Platform and WGs do not have access to funds to implement joint projects and initiatives.

Some key AA/DCFTA capacities are lacking. Apart from some specialized and well-resourced members of the Platform, majority of the CSO members are not able to offer expert opinion on a range of specific issues relating to AA/DCFTA implementation. Majority of members, for example, need continuous support to better understand how specific EU directives are to be properly transposed in the national regulatory and legal framework.

Advocacy at the national level is reactive. Most of the consulted members pointed out that, most of what the Platform is doing is reacting to protest or voice disagreement

with specific decisions of the Moldovan authorities. Usually, depending on the issue, one lead CSO will draft an opinion that will be consulted and endorsed by majority of the Platform members. This itself is not a bad thing, it just prevents the Platform to be more effective in pushing for long lasting policy changes by authorities.

Advocacy efforts are fragmented. Some members are not clear about the common advocacy goals of the Working Groups they are part of. Most of the time, individual advocacy goals are substituted or considered to be advocacy goals of the WG or the Platform. Not having a common advocacy agenda reduces efficacy of any CSO Platform.

The National Platform has a weak constituency. No one expects the Platform to be all representative of the Moldovan civil society. However, the Platform can do better to become more inclusive and to reflect opinions of other parts of the civil society like: activists, rural CSOs, formal and informal professional networks, etc. After a wave of communication efforts in the pre-association period by the Platform, in the last years, the communication and awareness campaigns targeting specific groups of citizens completely stopped.

No consistent planning that results in no medium to long term funding. Because most of the efforts are reactive and there is no consistent planning and follow up, the Platform is unable to receive support for its institutional development, joint programs and initiatives.

Majority of members are not active as they can be. The general view is that most of the CSOs that apply to be members of the Platform do so in order to network and get some institutional benefits rather than contribute to a common goal.

All these problems were identified and analyzed by the member of the National Platform. In result they adopted the Theory of change, which is based on the idea of supporting the Platform to move from reactionary modus operandi to a more proactive one.

The Platform determines to become more effective at: shaping policy-making and implementation at the national level with regards to AA/DCFTA; engaging with the EU decision-makers in a more direct and consistent manner; building a national constituency so that it is more inclusive and representative of the different stakeholders impacted by the AA/DCFTA implementation.

Republic of Belarus

The Strategy of the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF for 2020 reflects the aims of the CSF Strategy and takes into account challenges the Eastern Partnership and in particular civil society in Belarus face[15]. Under the influence of a number of external factors, despite the existence of important dialogue formats between Belarus and the European Union with the participation of civil society (primarily the EU-Belarus Coordination Group and the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue), there is still a risk of exclusion of the Belarusian civil society from the dialogue between the EU and Belarus authorities. In such a situation, the BNP needs to significantly strengthen its role as a subject capable of influencing a processes of democratization in the country, Belarusian-European interaction, and the reform agenda that should bring Belarus closer to the European norms, standards, and principles in all spheres through multilateral cooperation initiatives.

The main idea of the BNP development strategy is to strengthen the trust of NGOs to the BNP and to encourage their participation through joint advocacy campaigns. Intensification of participation and solidarity of NGOs will lead to an increase in a BNP legitimacy, which is necessary to fulfill a role of a full-fledged actor in the tripartite interaction of the EU, the Belarusian state bodies and representative NGOs.

The BNP strategic goals for 2019-2021 include:

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[15] https://npbelarus.info/bnp-goals-and-values/

1. Increasing a level and development of the NGOs' participation quality in the BNP for the consolidation of positions and advocating for the interests of civil society, the development of solidarity through specific joint public campaigns and the work of thematic groups, taking into account the EaP CSF Strategy.

2. Increasing the influence of the BNP on the government and development of the Belarusian-European relations through direct or indirect negotiations, public campaigns, public hearings, using any windows of opportunities for public participation in decision-making, including independent expert reviews and monitoring.

3. Strengthening a capacity of member organizations to implement activities aimed at the democratic transformation of Belarus and its integration with the EU, including activities to improve an environment for the civil society in Belarus.

4. Development of the BNP's potential to ensure its ability to implement the previous goals, as well as its compliance with a general architecture of the EaP and the EaP CSF.

This goals met the external challenges described above: overall environment is not friendly towards civil society. But the biggest challenge BNP meets is internal and lies in contradiction between the goals of the BNP as a collective actor and goals of the organizations taking part in it.

The thematic priorities of the BNP are logically related to the thematic priorities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (5 working groups).

WG1 (Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability): improvement of NGOs activities conditions; access to information; fast response to the occurrence of certain legal situations and initiatives on the part of the state; advocacy campaigns on issues which require attention.

WG2 (Economic integration, convergence with EU policies): development of digital skills in civil society organizations of Eastern Partnership; advocacy campaign on promotion agricultural products production and export (awareness rising on according EU regulations and requirements); SME development support on national and international levels; creation, development and promotion of the business platform and business environment, the activation of the project cooperation between WG2 members; PPD development based on European technologies and best practices.

WG3 (Environment, climate change and energy security): promotion of climate neutrality in Belarus; «Smart City» and sustainable mobility; protection of eco-activists; strengthening the capacity of public participation mechanisms; promotion of strategic environmental assessment protocol.

WG4 (People-to-people contacts): volunteering (in the context of the development of Law on volunteering); social research; connection between generations; promotion and enhancement of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing; promotion of non-violent communication; work with the problem of labor discrimination; inclusive approach to EaP countries in the cultural programs and the creation of an analogue of the program "Creative Europe"; changing cultural norms and methods; conduction of cultural forum on a regular basis; digital skills and media literacy; education inclusiveness; work with shrinking space for civil society problem.

WG5 (Social and labour policies and social dialogue): social dialogue; employment and migration; social security pensions, consumer protection; youth employment; labor law reform.

As shown above, the BNP as a coordinating body is totally aware of the internal issues and external limitations, but in the most cases, BNP strategy is not reflected in the activities of its working groups. Moreover, WGs internal goals are very broad and that's obvious it would be difficult to cooperate considering also the national context and capacity of BNP members.

Also, the CSF is not considered as a platform for regional cooperation, rather a speaking point for the advocacy of national issues through the EU institutions.

Conclusions

The Eastern Partnership has changed a lot since 2009, and the EU has many ambitions regarding its Eastern neighbours. The adoption of the principled pragmatism approach, formulated in the EU's 2015 Global Strategy, has changed since Russia's annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Ukraine.

The lack of political will for reforms on the side of the EaP states has been used as an argument for more conditions imposed by EU and for the EU's increased focus on stability. But such an approach implies that the EaP states' governments are the only agents of change in the region. This carries risks: a construction of a democratic society has to be a process shared by many actors and leaving the formulation and implementation of democratic reforms to the sole responsibility of the EaP governments the same often responsible for human rights violations and cherry-picking reforms sets it up for failure.

The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020 must be created around a renewed and strengthened cooperation between the EU and democratically-minded actors in the EaP region, especially civil society, who can support the EU in the formulation, implementation, and assessment of democratic reforms. This cooperation can be productive in supporting reforms only if two required conditions are met: civil society has a space to operate and has a duty to solve problems which it is facing now and the EU and the EaP states' governments consider the civil society to be a true and equal partner.

To put shortly, the EaP might become a region with a joint agenda, which now naturally follows the common threats it faces: territorial conflicts caused or supported by Russia, social and economical challenges, weak democracy, energy insecurity, propaganda, and national identity crisis. Each of the listed above problems needs a specific strategy, developed firstly by the countries - initiated by civil society, with the facilitation and support from the EU. That is impossible with a formal approach towards the region, neither without close cooperation with civil society.

For the moment, the national EaP governments showed little interest in building multilateral relations, looking at the overall Eastern Partnership as a pathway to improve relations with the EU and - in the best case - become EU member in perspective. And all of them meet significant challenges on the pathway until the internal situation will be stabilized. However, the current discussion goes around the thought of splitting the EaP countries according to their progress on 3+3: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine vs. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus; which ruins the idea of building region with close ties and an intense cooperation in this part of Europe. Civil society here might be an actor to show an example of raising hard question, establishing regional dialogue, cooperation and well-coordinated advocacy, but yet haven't performed good enough.

Lack of interest in regional cooperation was also showed by civil society, while the issues organizations tackle with are similar in general but vary in details. Also, their capacities often don't allow to work on international level. However, it might be a civil society to facilitate the process of reshaping the EaP based on a principled and consistent EU policy and innovative approaches towards regional building. Development of advocacy strategy and messages beneficial for societies in all EaP countries might be the central for the EaP CSF activity.

Considering all mentioned above, we come up with the following **recommendations**:

To National Platforms from the Republic of Moldova and Belarus:

1. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should become an important actor in consolidating the role of civil society and their expertise.
2. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should declare and demonstrate through their actions that they are essential members in the reform process and should convince through their activities that the representatives of the civil society must

be informed by government and EU about the negotiations. They should advocate becoming a third and equal player in a policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

3. National Platforms of the EaP CSF might position themselves as consistent and trustful partners:
   - have the same working principles and values oriented towards the Eastern Partnership, share the EaP philosophy,
   - raise their capacity through education (AA, DCFTA, the EU and their bureaucracy, as well as addressing specific challenges).
4. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should put regional cooperation goals first in their agenda and set it as their aim.
5. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should be more explicit regarding the process how to get the membership of the NP. It is important in terms of positioning the platform as a key actor.
6. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should work on clarification in procedures for member organisations, organize and / or support more advocacy events for Working Groups.
7. National Platforms must advocate a systemic approach in the EU and EaP relations (creation of plans for short, middle and long-term perspectives, bearing concrete problems of society) and monitor their accomplishment. These should be established according to the principles of the EaP and include the collaboration with the EaP governments, the EU and other societal actors which should participate in making reforms.
8. National Platforms should inform the European Union about the failure to respect the rule of law, violation of human rights and principles of democracy in the Republic of Moldova and Republic of Belarus. EU should reduce financial support to the state institutions and allocation of these money to civil society. Consequently, National Platforms and the EU will become more credible actors and will raise their image and importance among Eastern Partnership citizens.
9. National Platforms should advocate the possibility to implement variable geometry of cooperation among its international partners. For example, ad hoc group's approach for cooperation in specific areas could be advocated and implemented first by civil society clusters.
10. National Platforms should present the success stories of mobilities through Erasmus + Program and should demonstrate how it facilitated creation of groups of the EU-minded youth in the EaP region.
11. National Platforms of the EaP CSF should be in close connection with mass-media. These need to gain more trust, attention from citizens, and should be more convincing and exigent.
12. National Platform of the Republic of Moldova must evaluate the activities of its members and must be sure that these are apolitical. Each National Platform should cross-check its representatives because many of them want to be a member to have personal benefits rather than achieving common goals.
13. National Platform of the Republic of Belarus should set objectives of Working Groups in close connection with priorities of the Working Groups from the EaP CSF.

To EaP Civil Society Forum

1. It is necessary to strengthen the National Platform in terms of the development of its institutional capacities and positioning in the Republic of Moldova and Republic of Belarus.

To Moldovan government:

1. Moldovan Government should develop a trilateral communication instrument between EU, Government and National Platform in order to facilitate a direct and efficient dialogue. It must exclude parallel discussion.

To Belarusian government:

1. Belarusian government should uplift legislative measures which are limiting human rights and civil society organizations' free operation.
2. Belarusian government should participate actively and openly in EU and EaP proposed formats, keep to the agreements and completely stop limiting CSO participation in such formats through censorship and GoNGO promotion.

INTEGRATION PRIORITIES OF THE YOUTH IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

Ksenia Volnistaya, postgraduate student of the Republican Institute of Higher Education (Belarus),
Igor Bandyk, student of the State University of Moldova (Moldova)

Summary

Eastern Europe is the region where geopolitical interests of the European Union and the Russian Federation, the two rivaling centers of power, meet. Both the EU and Russia have presented their political and economic projects of integration for their shared neighborhood countries, including Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. In this work, the authors look at the key foreign policy trends in these three countries with an accent on the integration priorities of the youth. Given the increasing role of the youth in civic and political processes, understanding what the young prefer will help forecast further integration steps for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

Introduction

Eastern Europe is the region where geopolitical interests of the European Union and the Russian Federation, the two rivaling centers of power, meet. Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are in a sort of epicenter of the clash between these two centers of power. Both actors have designed political and economic initiatives to lure the countries in their shared neighborhood into their orbit of influence.

The launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (2004) provided for deeper co-operation with the EU's eastern neighbors. The aim was to expand the zone of stability and security. Offered in 2008 and officially established in 2009, the Eastern Partnership program confirmed the EU's interest in the region, including in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. As a result, these countries got the opportunity of approximation and closer cooperation with the EU where European values and norms played an important role.

At the same time, this policy of the EU met active resistance from Russia, another big regional player. The emergence of the Customs Union in 2010 and the Eurasian Economic Space in 2012, then the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014 offered the region's countries an alternative model of economic integration, focused on preserving the cooperation ties that had worked in the region in the 20th century. Moreover, the Russian Federation began to actively promote the concept of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) given the common history, ethnic and religious factors, with a special accent on young people as the most active part of the population16.

Aiming at the youth as their target audience, the EU and Russia initiated many programs in education and culture for their neighbor-states. Also, Russia has been promoting the opportunities of labor migration given its large labor market and higher salaries. As the role of the youth increases in decision-making at different levels of the state, understanding its integration priorities will allow to forecast further integration steps of the three Eastern European states.

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16 It is important to keep in mind that the definition of the youth in these countries is different from that established by the UN. The UN defines the youth as people aged 15-24. In Belarus, this category is aged 14-31; 16-30 in Moldova and 18-35 in Ukraine. The youth thus constitutes a fairly high share of economically active population, including students.

This work analyses integration priorities of the youth in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine — the part of society that should strengthen and develop their states in the future. It is therefore important to show the integration priorities of the youth in Eastern European states and how their vision of geopolitics can affect the country's foreign policy vector. It is the young that have been gaining civic and political weight in the region's countries lately as they confidently take their place in this social landscape. Integration priorities of the youth in Belarus

In the early 1990s, the Republic of Belarus gained independence, as well as an unsustainable economy and many social problems with it. The solution relied to a large extent on domestic resources and the state's foreign policy. In that context, Belarus' foreign policy concept was designed on the basis of a number of factors. On one hand, it was difficult not to take into account its close contacts established over many years, including with Russia. On the other hand, it was important to take into account Belarus' geographic position in the center of Europe.

One of the key articles in Belarus' 1994 Constitution was about neutrality. However, as neutral status has grown quite relative with the development of multipolarity, the multivector policy was proclaimed as a fundamental principle in Belarus' foreign policy concept. At the same time, building allied relations with Russia became a priority vector as confirmed in the Treaty on the Creation of a Union State of Russia and Belarus signed on December 8, 1999.

20 years later, some accomplishments of this integration project can be noted — such as common education and work opportunities. However, most elements of the agreement were never implemented: the union bodies are not completed; the suggested Union State Constitution or the permanent parliament do not exist. In addition, the Russian Federation violated the principle of no borders by introducing border checkpoints in 2017. Adding a negative element is the situation in the energy sector after 2019, including the contamination of the Druzhba pipeline on the Russian side and the change of oil prices for Belarus via Russia's tax maneuver. Such developments create a negative perception of the common integration project in the media space of the two countries.
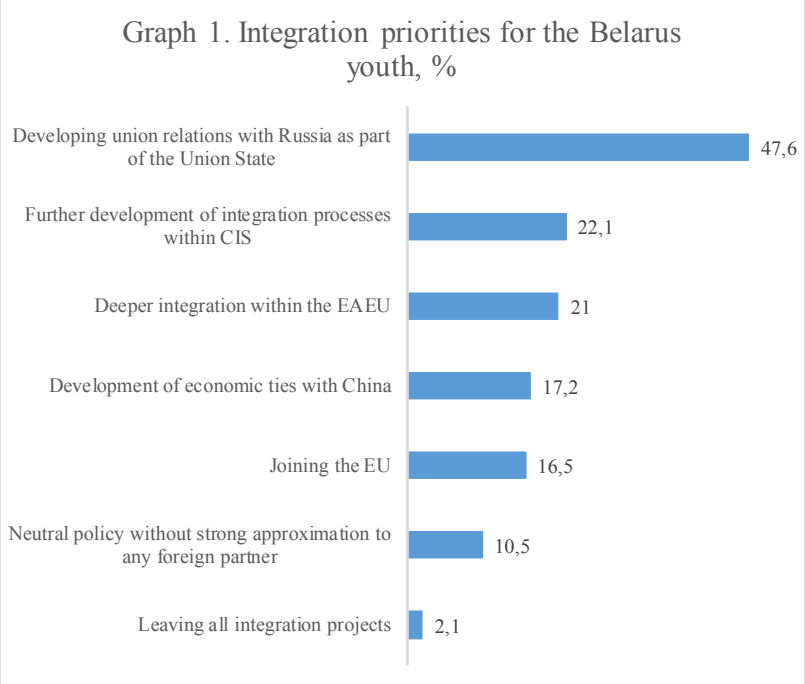
The Union State is not the only form of the Belarus-Russia integration moves. On a par with Russia, Belarus participated proactively in the establishment of the Customs Union that later transformed into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Interaction within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military political bloc, and the Community of Independent States (CIS) remains relevant.

Belarus is also one of the countries within the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. However, the relations of Minsk and Brussels are constantly volatile. To a great extent, this is because of Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko — the official Brussels considers Lukashenko's regime authoritarian and has introduced sanctions against Belarusian officials many times. Another stumbling block in the dialog with the EU is the abolition of death penalty that remains capital punishment in Belarus. This, among other things, is the reason why Belarus is not member of the Council of Europe.

While 2008 saw some thawing in the Belarus-EU relations as a result of the global economic crisis, that progress was lost shortly after the 2010 election when the opposition, disagreeing with the election results, took its supporters to the Ploshcha (Square) protests. Its relations with the EU have become calmer, without sharp tensions only after 2014 when Belarus positioned itself as a platform for solving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. This has given the two sides an opportunity to build a constructive dialog. A new stage of the thaw began. One of its greatest accomplishments is the agreement to simplify the Schengen visa regime for the citizens of Belarus signed in 2020.

Importantly, the younger and older generations do not always share the same opinion on Belarus' integration priorities. The current trend towards being apolitical — including reluctance to engage in election processes and declining turnouts — has affected Belarus-

ian youth. This leads to debates about the impact of the young on integration processes in the expert community. However, how crucial is this factor? According to a 2019 survey on priority integration references by the Sociology Institute of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences (graph 1), 47.6 per cent of Belarusian youth supported union with Russia. This opinion is not very different from that of other age groups where 60% and more, depending on their age, believe that developing relations with Russia as part of the Union State is a priority[17]. Apart from that, 22 per cent of the young chose further development within CIS, 21 per cent within the EAEU, 17.2 per cent supported the development of economic relations with China, and 16.5 per cent chose joining the EU.
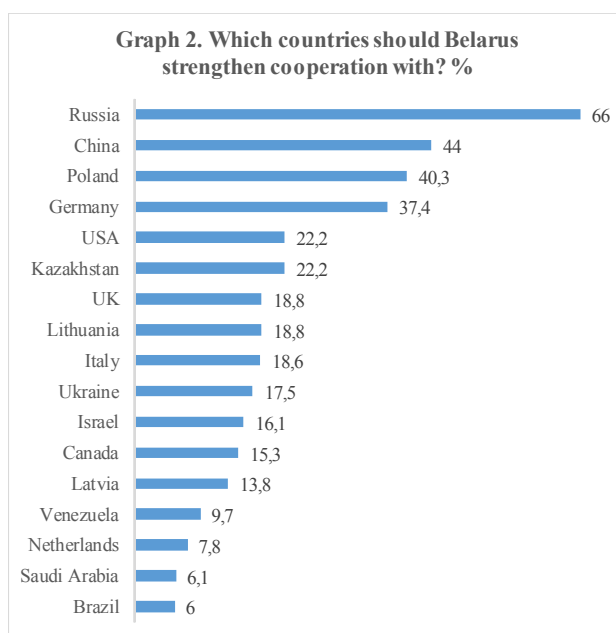

Graph 1. Integration priorities for the Belarus youth, %

Developing union relations with Russia as part of the Union State	47,6
Further development of integration processes within CIS	22,1
Deeper integration within the EAEU	21
Development of economic ties with China	17,2
Joining the EU	16,5
Neutral policy without strong approximation to any foreign partner	10,5
Leaving all integration projects	2,1

Source: Sociology Institute, Belarus Academy of Sciences https://eurasia.expert/vospriyatie-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-molodezhyu-belarusi-menyaetsya-belorusskiy-sotsiolog/?sphrase_id=18933

Overall, young people in Belarus have certain pragmatism aimed at mutually beneficial cooperation in different spheres. Whether it is China, the EU, Russia or other countries, the youth is willing to strengthen potential through any integration projects provided that they offer potential for mutually beneficial cooperation.

When it comes to the priority countries in terms of economic cooperation for the young in Belarus, 66 per cent of respondents refer to Russia, 44 per cent to China, 40 per cent to Poland, 37.4 per cent to Germany and 22.2 per cent to Kazakhstan. Countries further on the list of preferences include the US (22 per cent), UK (18.8 per cent), Lithuania (18.8 per cent) and Italy (18.6 per cent), Ukraine (17.5 per cent), Israel (16.1 per cent), Canada (15.3 per cent), Latvia (13.8 per cent) and others (see graph 2).

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[17] According to sociologists, the perception of the union with Russia is changing among the young. eurasia.expert portal. 27.11.2018. https://eurasia.expert/vospriyatie-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-molodezhyu-belarusi-menyaetsya-belorusskiy-sotsiolog/?sphrase_id=18933

Graph 2. Which countries should Belarus strengthen cooperation with? %

Country	%
Russia	66
China	44
Poland	40,3
Germany	37,4
USA	22,2
Kazakhstan	22,2
UK	18,8
Lithuania	18,8
Italy	18,6
Ukraine	17,5
Israel	16,1
Canada	15,3
Latvia	13,8
Venezuela	9,7
Netherlands	7,8
Saudi Arabia	6,1
Brazil	6

Source: Sociology Institute, Belarus Academy of Sciences, https://eurasia.expert/vospriyatie-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-molodezhyu-belarusi-menyaetsya-belorusskiy-sotsiolog/?sphrase_id=18933

The choice of Russia as the top country to strengthen economic cooperation with in the survey is not surprising as Russia is the largest market for Belarusian products. China has also been seen as a promising economic partner in recent years. Belarus actively supports the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and many bilateral projects are implemented. Located close to the Belarusian capital, the Great Stone industrial park is one of the best known projects. Poland is primarily interesting for the young in the borderline areas who want to study or work abroad. Belarusians with Polish family links can obtain Karta Polaka (Pole's Card) that opens opportunities for free education in Polish and makes it easier to get residence permit later on. In the 12 years that Karta Polaka exists, more than 131,000 Belarusians[18] have obtained one by early 2020.

The recognition of integration projects in Belarus is interesting. A survey of students in Belarusian universities[19] has shown that 64 and 65 per cent were aware of the existence of the Union State and the EAEU respectively, and over 80 per cent knew about the existence of the European Union of which Belarus is not member. This is because of a number of factors: a lack of information about the work of integration projects on one hand and effectiveness of the EU's soft power instruments aimed at the young, including cultural events, mobility programs and grants, on the other hand.

A look at the ideas that consolidate Belarus society shows little difference between the positions of the youth and other age groups. 71 per cent of the young aged under 29 said that preserving state independent of Belarus was a very important consolidating factor for them. The older generation thinks differently: while 78 per cent of respondents aged over 50 said that it was very important for them, only 67.4 per cent supported this point in the age group of 30-50 (table 1).

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18 Karta Polaka: Droga do Polski. Rzeczpospolita. 26.09.2019. https://www.rp.pl/Bialorus/309269893-Karta-Polaka-Droga-do-Polski.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.by%2Fnews

19 How Belarusian students perceive Belarus and Russia. eurasia.expert 04.07.2018. https://eurasia.expert/kak-belorusskie-studenty-vosprinimayut-belarus-i-rossiyu/?sphrase_id=15643

Table 1. Consolidating ideas for Belarusian people by age groups, %

	Under 29	30-49	Over 50
Preserving Belarus state independence	70,9	67,4	77,5
Integration with Russia	57,8	56,7	73,7
Strengthening slavic unity	56,4	58,9	68,3
Developing relations with Europe	55,6	53,6	60,4
Integration of states in the post-Soviet space	41,0	43,0	61,4

Source: Survey by the Integration Prospects Research Center and Belarusian State Economic University, http://perspectivecenter.org/publications/analytical/vospriyatie_gumanitarnoy_sostavlyayushchey_soyuzno-go_gosudarstva_v_massovom_soznanii_zhiteley_belaru/

A comparison of opinions on integration with Russia and developing relations with the EU as the two consolidating concepts shows there is barely any difference in the perception of the two: 57.6 per cent of the young support integration with Russia and 56.5 per cent support developing relations with the EU. The margin of slightly over 1 per cent is small and shows that both integration vectors are equally popular with the youth.

The current situation confirms this: Belarus diversifies its foreign policy efforts in all vectors and the population approves this. According to the 30-30-30 concept proposed by the Belarus Government, the efforts aim at equal progress — primarily in the economy — on the three groups: EAEU, EU and other countries.

Integration priorities of the youth in Moldova

Ever since Moldova proclaimed independence in 1991, important political moves for it included improving good neighborly relations with Ukraine and Romania, as well as solving the problem of Transnistria that emerged in 1992, while preserving friendly relations with the Russian Federation. Since the Russian influence on the region grew stronger with time, approximation to the EU emerged as a new vector of interest and a balancing factor for Moldova. The Moldovan authorities were interested in the European vector both for closer economic cooperation with the EU, and as a way to weaken Russia's influence in the region.

Moldova's eurointegration path started in the early 2000s and developed in the context of the unresolved Transnistria problem, as well as multiple government changes, fairly controversial domestic policy with regard to national minorities, economic instability and discrediting of the parties and platforms that promoted eurointegration ideas in the eyes of the public. In 2012, a coalition government emerged whose main accomplishment was the Moldova-EU Association Agreement that came into force in 2016. The Agreement deepens political and economic ties between Moldova and the EU and includes the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area initiative. Having signed the Association Agreement alongside two other signatory-states within the EaP, Moldova committed to continuing reforms in various sectors in line with the EU norms and practices, including fight against corruption, improvement of the state and finance governance systems, reform of the social benefits system and more.

When Igor Dodon came to power in 2016, he continued the eurointegration process while also intensifying efforts on the eurasian vector. As a result, 2017 saw the first move in Bishkek towards the restoration of top-level economic ties with Eurasian countries: Moldova's President signed a document granting Moldova observer status in the EAEU. The Government thus hoped to resume Moldova's position in one of the largest markets for its goods.

Frequent changes of Moldovan elite in domestic politics and multiple changes of government — such as the change in 2019 — was accompanied by foreign policy maneuvers that had different effects for the Moldovan citizens. This swinging of elite between two of Moldova's foreign policy poles — the EU and the EAEU — divided the population into two camps. The choice of the acceptable union is a factor of influence and control over the citizens of Moldova aimed at destabilizing their political activeness.

The latest survey on the country's integration priorities[20] by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers of Moldova from January 2020 found that 40.1 per cent supported approximation with the EAEU and 38.7 per cent — with the EU.

When asked, how the Moldova-EU relations changed over the past year following the February 24, 2019 parliamentary election, 50.7 per cent said that they improved significantly, 17.3 per cent thought they remained unchanged and 17.1 per cent believed that they improved a little. 7.9 per cent said that they deteriorated a little.

When asked about the dynamics of the Moldova-Russia relations over the past year, the respondents, too, assessed them positively, although worse than the Moldova-EU dialog. According to 39.4 per cent, the relations between Moldova and Russia improved a little; 28.5 per cent thought they improved significantly, and 19.8 per cent thought they remained unchanged. 6.1 and 1.8 per cent responded that these relations deteriorated a little or significantly. This data does not always reflect all preferences of the population because of labor migration from Moldova, especially of the young who currently live abroad.

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20 EAEU or not? Here is what the citizens have replied. Tribuna Moldovy. 16.01.2020. https://tribuna.md/ru/2020/01/16/uniunea-europeana-sau-uniunea-euroasiatica-iata-ce-spun-cetatenii/

Getting a Romanian passport has been one of the key priorities for the young Moldovans as it offers the best opportunities for moving to EU countries. A key incentive for the young seeking Romanian citizenship is the pursuit of better education in the EU, including via various mobility and grant programs, and of better work opportunities after that. This leads to a sort of buy-up of talents.

However, this is not only about the EU. Similar processes take place with Russia which has intensified education programs that allow Moldovan citizens to get higher education in Russia21.

According to a survey by the Center for Insights in Survey Research (ISR) from 2018 (table 2), 70 per cent of the Moldovan population considered the EU to be Moldova's major economic partner. Almost as many, 68 per cent, saw Russia as Moldova's major economic partner. Romania came third given close historic and economic ties between the two countries.

Table 2. Which of these countries do you see as the major economic partner, political partner and threat to Moldova? %

	Economic partner	Political partner	Threat
EU	70.0	55.0	9.0
Russia	68.0	56.0	30.0
Romania	44.0	38.0	10.0
USA	29.0	24.0	18.0
Ukraine	27.0	21.0	9.0
None of the above	1.0	6.0	24.0
Don't know or n/a	4.0	6.0	16.0

Source: Center for Insights in Survey (ISR), https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-3-29_moldova_poll_presentation.pdf

When asked about the choice of the key political partner, the respondents named Russia first, but only by 1 per cent ahead of the EU, with 56 and 55 per cent respectively. This shows the essence of the "rivalry" for the hearts and minds of Moldovan citizens between the two geopolitical centers. Notably, 30 per cent named Russia a potential threat for the country. 9 per cent saw a threat in the EU. A quarter of all respondents saw no threats to Moldova.

The divergence in views among different age groups is clearly reflected in preferences on economic union. When asked "which economic union should Moldova choose if it could join just one?" 59 per cent of Moldovans aged 18-29 chose the EU and 32 per cent favored the EAEU (table 3).

Table 3. If Moldova could join just one international economic union, which one should it choose? %

	18-29	30-49	50+
EU	59.0	47.0	34.0

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21 Moldovans can get free education in Russia. Sputnik Moldova. 05.12.2019. https://ru.sputnik.md/society/20191205/28433032/u-moldavan-est-shans-na-besplatnoe-obuchenie-v-luchshikh-vuzakh-rossii-na-magistra.html

	18-29	30-49	50+
Customs Union/EAEU	32.0	38.0	48.0
Other	4.0	6.0	9.0
Don't know or n/a	5.0	9.0	9.0

Spirce: Center for Insights in Survey (ISR), https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-3-29_moldova_poll_p-resentation.pdf

The older the respondents are, the more they support eurasian integration which the population always links to Russia. 38 per cent among the respondents aged 30-49 support integration with the EAEU, and 48 per cent among those aged over 50[22]. Thus, the youth in Moldova is more pro-European, yet it tries to pursue the opportunities provided by both geopolitical vectors.

The Association Agreement and visa-free travel with the EU have opened new economic opportunities and prospects for Moldova. However, its citizens increasingly seek to improve their well-being by obtaining Romanian passports that turn them into full-fledged "European citizens" — allowing Moldovan youth to get better education and more options for further development.

Therefore, the key ideas and interests that often determine integration preferences of the Moldovan youth include the opportunity to obtain higher education in the countries of Europe or Russia, the opportunity to emigrate to the EU countries or Russia, and the opportunity to make money in the EU countries or Russia.

Integration priorities of the youth in Ukraine

Ever since Ukraine proclaimed independence, it has been presenting itself as a European state and pushing for proactive cooperation with the countries of the West, while also having the multivector foreign policy launched by former president Leonid Kuchma. According to initial agreements, Ukraine should have become the third state in the Union State[23]. But it limited its interaction in the eurasian space to the CIS framework.

Current relations between Ukraine and the EU are developing positively and the Association Agreement signed in 2014 contributes to this greatly. The key problem with approaching potential membership in the EU is the extent to which Ukraine's economy meets the EU's requirements and norms, and its competitiveness in the global market — which Ukraine should accomplish by expanding its presence in other markets and developing beneficial cooperation with the countries that are most interested in Ukrainian goods and technology.

Before the developments of 2014-2015, Ukraine's European vector was often of a declarative nature. This included numerous attempts of those in power to revise its integration vector. After the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, integration into the European space accelerated greatly. Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU on June 27, 2014, and launched the visa-free travel regime on June 11, 2017. Just like with Moldova, the association and visa-free travel equipped Ukraine with new economic opportunities and spurred its europeanization processes overall. The population welcomed that move and approves it to this day.

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22 Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Moldova. February – March 2018. https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-3-29_moldova_poll_presentation.pdf

23 Options for building Union State with Russia and Belarus as seen by the public in the two countries. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/puti-stroitelstva-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-rossii-i-belarusi-v-predstavlenii-obschestvennosti-dvuh-stran/viewer

According to a survey by KIIS[24], far more Ukrainians support the option of joining the EU and NATO, than the EAEU. The 2019 survey revealed that 51 per cent would vote to join the EU, 40 per cent would support membership in NATO, and 23 per cent would favor joining the Customs Union (EAEU). If a referendum on these issues were to take place in February 2019 — and everyone would participate who knew their preference and intended to vote — 70 per cent would vote to join the EU versus 30 per cent against it; 56 per cent would support joining NATO versus 44 per cent against; and 36 per cent would vote to join the Customs Union versus 64 per cent against it.

When asked about Ukraine's foreign policy priority vector, 45 per cent of the polled supported joining the EU and only 14 per cent favored joining the Customs Union (EAEU). 25 per cent said that Ukraine should develop independently and stay away from any of the proposed integration projects.

Notably, geopolitical preferences of Ukrainian citizens vary by the region. While the majority in Western and Central oblasts support joining the EU and NATO, most people in Southern and Eastern Ukraine prefer non-aligned status (table 4).

Table 4. Geopolitical preferences in Ukraine by regions, %

	West	East	North/Center	South
NATO membership	65.8	23.9	52.5	14.6
Military alliance with Russia and other CIS countries	2.4	11.3	4.3	13.3
Non-aligned status	17.1	42.1	26	63.7
Other	0	0,3	0,5	0
N/a	14.7	22.4	16.7	8.4

Source: KIIS, 22.08.2019, https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=888&page=3&t=3

Importantly, the younger and older generations hold similar opinions on ways to guarantee Ukraine's security as reflected in the answers on this question. Out of the proposed options, 53.7 per cent of the young see NATO membership as the most acceptable way. 21.9 per cent of the youth supported non-aligned status. In other age groups, the NATO membership option prevails too, as 41.4 per cent of those aged 30-44 and 43.2 per cent of those aged 45-59 opt for it. The share of those supporting non-aligned status in the groups of 30-44 and 45-59 is almost identical at 38.3 and 37.9 per cent respectively. The oldest respondents aged over 60 are an exception as 30.6 per cent support NATO membership and the majority at 39.8 per cent prefers non-aligned status in this group (table 5).

Table 5. Which option for guaranteeing security would work best for Ukraine? %

	18-29	30-44	45-59	Over 60
NATO membership	53.7	41.4	43.2	30.6
Military alliance with Russia and other CIS countries	4.5	6.5	7.6	10.0
Non-aligned status	21.9	38.3	37.9	39.8
Other	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.4
N/a	19.5	13.6	11.3	19.2

Source: KIIS, 22.08.2019, https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=888&page=3&t=3

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24 Public opinion in Ukraine at 28 years of independence. Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=888&page=3&t=3

The option of military unions with Russia and CIS countries is hardly popular among the youth or other age groups. First and foremost, this is the result of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

Conclusions

The foreign policy frameworks of the three countries evolve under different scenarios. However, their geopolitical position in the region remains key. The European Union and the Russian Federation, the latter representing integration processes within the EAEU, are the key political actors, and relations with them have the biggest impact on the policy of these countries.

Integration priorities of the youth in the Republic of Belarus show that they support developing relations both with the West, and with the East as there are barely any serious contradictions between these two vectors. Overall, this reflects the state's multivector policy. This situation looks fairly well: the youth realize all benefits of integration projects, including the opportunity of free education under education programs. A closer look at facts, however, shows that many young people do not know exactly which integration projects Belarus is part of. This points to a flawed information policy: school and university programs barely offer any information on this, while the news mostly focuses on bilateral contacts of the state.

The choice of integration priorities by the Moldovan youth is based more often on its domestic political scene. In supporting integration options of their state, the young Moldovans are guided by what they find mentally closer, looking at wider opportunities and ways to accomplish them. The state is in a situation where the electorate -- which is also the core of support for the current government led by Igor Dodon and the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova -- is gradually losing weight because of the age factor. Replacing it is the young generation which is mostly of pro-European views. This fuels the debate about the generation gap about priorities. One of the few positive aspects of this situation is that this gap in preferences will hardly lead to any turbulence within the state provided that there is no serious external influence.

Having opted for the path of eurointegration, according to surveys, Ukraine has satisfied the aspirations of the majority of its citizens, especially the young generation. The factors that could hamper the European course chosen by Ukraine include the current military conflict in the East and regional differences in foreign policy preferences. Still, the majority of the youth is proactively focused on eurointegration and sees it as the most promising one.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE CYBERSECURITY STRATEGIES OF BELARUS, MOLDOVA, AND UKRAINE

Valeriu Turcanu, Public Management Student, Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance, Aix-en-Provence, France (Молдова),
Oleksandr Matviienko, freelance journalist "Ukrainian Tijden" (Ukraine),
Alisiya Ivanova, Junior Analyst at the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations (Belarus)

Introduction

The twenty-first century was marked by the fact that the threat of a direct military conflict is increasingly moving into the computer environment. The threat is carried by the electronic means which penetrate the low-protected state enterprises' and government bodies' information systems. Offensive actions targeting information can add to the critical infrastructure damage, and thus spread the attack's consequences not only to the information systems themselves but also to the population of the country. Technological development, despite the obvious advantages, can become a vulnerable aspect for the state security, and therefore the critical infrastructure cybersecurity issues must be properly studied and resolved.

According to the Global Cybersecurity Index 2018, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine are in the group of countries with a mid-level state of cybersecurity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova in the Cybersecurity Index 2018

	Belarus	Ukraine	Moldova
Global Cybersecurity Index	69	54	53

2018 Global Cybersecurity Index

A mid-level state of cybersecurity implies that legislation, norms, and terms are adopted, but the level of their implementation is not high enough to qualify these countries as a group with a high level of cybersecurity. It is worth to note that all three countries face common challenges, but their solutions are very different.

In 2014-2017, due to the lack of authorities' attention to the cybersecurity issues, Ukraine experienced several cyberattacks (the attack on Prykarpatyeoblenergo Ukrzaliznytsya in 2016 and others), which caused significant inconvenience to the residents of the state. That is why, over the past five years, they took several actions to improve the situation in the country. Moldova does not have definitions for some terms, does not maintain or publish data on cyber attacks on critical infrastructure facilities. The security sector is regulated by only a few documents adopted back in 2000, however, despite this, the level of cybersecurity in the country is quite high. Belarus, which potentially faces the same threats as Ukraine and Moldova, is following its own path and develops a cybersecurity policy, in particular, to a large extent under the auspices of the CIS and the CSTO.

To understand the differences in the legal framework, it is necessary to take into account the different approach to the definition of the critical infrastructure facilities, as well as the different responsible government bodies (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of national systems for ensuring critical infrastructure facilities' cybersecurity in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.

Ukraine	Belarus	Moldova
Scope of legislation		
Critical infrastructure facilities include enterprises, institutions, and organizations (regardless of ownership) from the energy, chemical industry, transport, information and communication technologies, electronic communications in the banking and financial sectors, in the spheres of water, gas and electricity supply, sanitation, food production, agriculture, healthcare; utilities, emergency and rescue services, strategic enterprises, potentially hazardous industries.	Critically important objects include objects of social, industrial, engineering and transport, energy, information communication and other infrastructure sectors the destruction (damage) of which can result in destabilization of the public order and the achievement of other terrorism goals and (or) entail human casualties, harm to human health or the environment, significant material damage, and disruption of living conditions.	Critical infrastructure facilities are the objects of a paramount importance in the field of public administration, information technology, electronic and postal communications, infrastructure, energy, socio-economic sphere, healthcare, cultural and educational sphere, industrial, ecological, information system of the country as a whole, infrastructure of military-defense complex, the breakdown or destruction of which may have a negative impact on the safety, security, social and economic well-being of the state, loss of basic services, danger to life, human health, and negative impact on the environment.
Responsible government bodies		
State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine, National Police, SSU, Ministry of Defense and General Staff of the Armed Forces, intelligence agencies, National Bank	Ministry of Defence, Security Council, Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus	Information and Security Service, Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, Ministry of Internal Affairs
Cyber Incident Response Center		
CERT-UA	CERT-BY	CERT-MD

The table was created as part of the study, based on the laws of the countries and available strategic documents.

The objectives of this study are to analyze the causes, methods, mechanisms, and results of the current cybersecurity policy in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The goal of the study is to try to find a way of possible cooperation between the three countries; The study seeks to draw attention to the problematic aspects of ensuring information (cyber) security of critical infrastructure facilities.

Belarus

Even though over the 29 years of the independent Republic of Belarus existence there were no cyberattacks on critical infrastructure facilities (hereinafter referred to as critical infrastructure, CI), Minsk sees the need to take measures aimed at countering relevant threats.

The approach to achieving cyber resilience is based on the creation of an individual security model for each CI with some general requirements taken into account. These requirements include:
1. effective identification and assessment of risks;
2. high readiness to prevent and localize the cyber attacks consequences;
3. external assessment of the created security systems[25].

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[25] http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=P219s0001

The main regulatory document is the 2019 Resolution "On the concept of information security of the Republic of Belarus"[26], which is secondary to the Concept of National Security[27] and is aimed at providing guidance to the practical activities of the state bodies and other organizations.

The concept of information security in Belarus originates from the geopolitical interests of the state, and is based on agreements on cooperation within the CIS and CSTO, and takes into account the main provisions of international organizations acts, including the UN General Assembly resolutions and OSCE recommendations.

The concept does not directly mention the CI security but rather focuses on the threat of manipulation of the mass consciousness and the instability of the information infrastructure. However, the concept provides a framework for taking action in the cybersecurity field and, in particular, introduces such concepts as a *cyberattack, cybersecurity, cyber incident, cyber terrorism, cyber resilience.*

The safe operation of industrial, transport, energy, telecommunications, healthcare facilities directly depends on cybersecurity. However, cybersecurity is of prime strategic importance in the military sphere. Taking this into account, the concept emphasizes that "in many national armed forces, cyber troops are created and developed, cyber operations are envisioned in doctrinal and strategic documents", and it also states that "the possibility of responding to cyberattacks as armed aggression [...] can lead to an arbitrary interpretation of the counter military actions validity".[28]

To ensure the country's cybersecurity, the Concept envision the creation of a unified monitoring system for the Belarusian segment of the Internet (SOC - Security Operation Center), as well as constant monitoring, detection, and suppression of cyberattacks.

The Concept establishes a risk-driven approach to cybersecurity (based on an assessment of risks and predicted damage) and includes a provision on the creation of a market for cyber-risk insurance services in the country. The risk-driven approach allows identifying a number of threats that are economically feasible to counter - for example, daily backups of important information. Considerable attention is also paid to the training of highly qualified personnel in the field of cybersecurity.

Taking into account that the development of information and communication technologies leads to an increase in the number of critical infrastructure facilities, they took some concretizing legislative measures taken in this area. For example, the Presidential Decree No.486/2011 "About some measures for safety of crucial objects of informatization" introduces the concept of critical infrastructure as "vital for the state failure or destruction of which can make essential negative impact on homeland security".[29] The 2018 Regulations "About ensuring the safety of crucial objects of informatization" establish the procedure for creating a security system for the KVOI (crucial object of informatization), monitoring security threats, and responding to such threats.[30] Under the Presidential Decree No.449/2019 "About enhancement of state regulation in the field of information security", some objects of the fuel and energy complex, housing and communal services, healthcare and education, as well as industrial and financial sectors, transport and communications can be included in the list of KVOI. This measure was caused by emails about false min-

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[26] http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=P219s0001

[27] http://kgb.by/ru/ukaz575/

[28] http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=P219s0001

[29] https://www.etalonline.by/document/?regnum=p31100486

[30] https://oac.gov.by/public/content/files/files/law/prikaz-oac/2018%20-%20151.pdf

ing, which were sent to the large transport and communications (a railway station, airport, Belavia airline's office), healthcare and education entities (schools, universities), as well as shopping centers in Belarus.[31]

In legislation, Belarus follows the agreements on cooperation in the field of information security signed within the CIS and the CSTO, as well as bilateral agreements, in particular, within the framework of the Union State with the Russian Federation.

In September 2019, the Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus S. Zas and his Russian counterpart N. Patrushev signed the "Plan for the implementation of the main areas of cooperation in the field of ensuring international information security for 2019-2020". The plan envisages "implementation of the necessary joint measures in the field of information security", consultation, exchange of information, analysis, assessment, and coordination of responses to emerging threats in the field of cybersecurity.[32]

Within the CSTO framework, the term "cyber" is not used as a matter of principle, but there is a broader concept of "information threat" which includes the impact of an informational and psychological nature. However, the legislation of Belarus does not apply such a model and uses the broader concept of "information security", including the category of "cybersecurity". Threats in these areas are delineated similarly.

At the same time, the CSTO recognizes the need to respond to computer incidents, and the CSTO Crisis Response Centre deals with this issue. The centre is created to coordinate the protection of KVOI, facility management systems for power generation, energy transmission, water supply, and global information systems.[33]

Despite some CSTO officials' statements about the need for closer cooperation up to the creation of a single digital space[34], it is too early to talk about such a format. Nevertheless, within the CSTO Consulting Coordination Centre framework, they already exchange information about the recorded attacks, methods of their detecting and suppressing.[35]

It should be noted that the measures taken within the CSTO framework are accompanied by the reports of cyberattacks "on Russia and the CSTO countries", allegedly carried out from "the territory of the United States and the countries of the European Union".[36] They especially emphasize the role of the Russian National Centre for Computer Incidents, which "together with its foreign partners, managed to prevent cyberattacks on more than 7 thousand facilities in Russia and the countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization".[37]

The analyst Sergei Sukhankin notes that Russia's policy illustrates its determination to ensure control over the entire information space of the CSTO.[38]

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[31] https://naviny.by/new/20191210/1575997526-lukashenko-rasshiril-spisok-kriticheski-vazhnyh-obektov

[32] https://interfax.by/news/policy/vneshnyaya_politika/1263860/

[33] https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/20062

[34] https://plusworld.ru/daily/cat-exhibitions_and_conferences/podvedeny-itogi-natsionalnogo-foruma-informatsionnoj-bezopasnosti-infoforum-2020/

[35] https://www.inform.kz/ru/predsedatel-stvo-rk-v-odkb-upor-na-bor-bu-s-terrorizmom-i-kiberbezopasnost_a3354024

[36] https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6599550

[37] https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6599550

[38] https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-pushes-own-approaches-to-cyber-security-on-rest-of-csto/

However, the CSTO cybersecurity system is in the process of developing and forming a clear plan for ensuring joint cybersecurity of the participating states.

President A. Lukashenko voiced the idea of creating a digital neighbourhood belt to ease tensions in the information sphere, meaning both cybersecurity and countering information manipulation.[39]

Thus, it can be concluded that Belarus consistently takes measures to ensure the cybersecurity of its critical infrastructure. This is proved by a large number of regulations in this area, as well as the development of the cyber-industry in general.

Within the framework of international cooperation, cybersecurity measures can be called rather nominal - they are limited to political statements within the CSTO and at the bilateral level. Even though the CSTO created institutional structures to deal with cyber threats, it is too early to judge their success.

It should be noted that within the framework of the Union State, despite the adopted plan of cooperation in the field of international information security, cybersecurity issues are not on the agenda - no relevant initiatives came from either Belarus or Russia. As in the case of the CSTO, such steps remain at the level of statements and action programs.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, the cybersecurity issue emerged on the agenda not so long ago and became real with the Russian Federation aggression. In particular, in 2015-2017, there were several attacks on the Ukrainian critical infrastructure facilities. For example, a 2015 attack on energy companies resulted in the Prykarpattyaoblenergo, Ukrenergo, and Chernigivoblenergo being affected to varying degrees by the Black Energy virus attack.

The virus, sent in an email message, hit the mentioned enterprises employees' computers and the attackers got access to the network management. The Prykarpattyaoblenergo company suffered the most: attackers cut off the power supply at 30 substations operated by the enterprise, and about 230 thousand people left without electricity as a result. The electricity supply was restored in about 3 hours. A second attack was carried out in 2016 against Ukrenergo (attack on the Pivdenna substation). The power supply was interrupted for 1 hour and 16 minutes.

In the subsequent years, there were more large-scale attacks, with PetyA virus and M.E.Doc blocking the work of the ministries, airports, as well as many non-state companies. In response to these incidents, Ukraine developed general requirements for cyber protection of critical infrastructure, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved them in June 2019.[40]

A year before, they adopted the Law No. 2163 "On the basic principles of cybersecurity in Ukraine".[41] This law considers various areas that can be subjected to cyberattacks but does not regulate issues related to the inviolability of personal data in the social networks and private information resources of Ukraine.

In Ukraine, there is a government team CERT-UA created for responding to computer emergencies, it is authorized to maintain a register of cyber incidents, provide some help in eliminating the consequences of cyberattacks, teach the cyber defence basics during educational workshops, identify attacks at an early stage, assess the state bodies protection in cyberspace, publish articles about the new frauds and on how to protect from

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[39] https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-vystupil-s-initsiativoj-formirovanija-pojasa-tsifrovogo-dobrososed-stva-360560-2019/

[40] https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/518-2019-%D0%BF

[41] https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2163-19

them, recommend on strengthening the enterprise cybersecurity efforts (although, since the recommendations are not mandatory, they are often neglected).

An important aspect of Ukraine's cybersecurity system is a public-private interaction. Thus, the system for the timely detection, prevention, and neutralization of cyber threats was created on the SSU basis. Moreover, it is envisaged to increase citizens' digital literacy and the culture of cyber-safety behaviour. For citizens, industry and business representatives, they created CERT-UA based consulting centres. Besides, a system for training and improving the competence of specialists in various fields of cybersecurity activity was created based on the SSU Center "situational centre for cybersecurity of the Security Service of Ukraine".

Its main competencies include not only personnel training and expertise but also combating cyber threats, investigating cyberattacks and eliminating their consequences, secretly checking critical infrastructure for the attack readiness, combating cyber terrorism and cybercrime.[42]

As part of the cybersecurity policy, the law envisions some new relevant government functions. In particular, the National Bank introduced the procedure, requirements, and measures to ensure cyber protection and information security in the banking system and for the subjects of funds transfer. And a cyber defence centre was created for this. Also, in the banking system, they created a register of critical information infrastructure. In addition, it provides for an assessment of the state of cyber protection and audit of information security of banks. Besides, it includes an assessment of the state of cyber protection and audit of information security of banks.

Speaking about the critical infrastructure, it is worth noting that the requirements for cybersecurity in Ukraine are close to those in the EU and the USA, as well as those that exist within NATO and NIST. These requirements include the following:

1. Owner and/or manager of a critical infrastructure facility is obliged to organize an independent audit of information security at this critical infrastructure facility following the legislation requirements to information protection and cybersecurity.
2. State bodies will gain access to the Internet through the secure access system of the State Cyber Defense Centre, through operators, telecommunications providers that have secure access nodes to global data transmission networks with established integrated information security systems that confirmed their compliance, or through their secure Internet access systems with compliant complex information security systems. (This requirement does not apply to information and telecommunication systems of foreign diplomatic institutions of Ukraine).
3. To save information resources' backup copies and for their prompt restoration, the government bodies are to use the main and backup protected data centre for preserving state electronic information resources of the State Cyber Defense Centre.[43]

In 2015, they started recertification and reform of the department for combating cybercrime Ukraine: by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine resolution as of October 13, 2015, a territorial body of the National Police was created.[44] The authority's activities are mainly focused on countering cybercrime, as well as investigating the facts of deception, phishing, piracy, carding, and other fraudulent schemes. However, during the PetyA attack, the authority's employees also took part in the elimination of its consequences.

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[42] https://ssu.gov.ua/ua/pages/330

[43] https://jurliga.ligazakon.net/ua/news/187212_viznacheno-vimogi-do-kberzakhistu-obktv-kritichno-nfrastrukturi

[44] https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/831-2015-%D0%BF

There was also a Ukrainian Cyber Alliance volunteers association: until recently, they identified some "gaps" in the state institutions' protection. This structure included the so-called "hacktivists" aimed at hacking the Russian websites, emails, personal social networks accounts to obtain information. One of its most famous operations is the hacking of V. Surkov's mail, where they found some evidence of the Russian Federation participation in the war in the Donbas region. However, recently, the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance faced certain difficulties: they were put under searches carried out in the case of allegedly unlawful identification of the "gaps", weak security of the Odesa airport and "interference" in its servers' operation. For the investigation period, the alliance stopped its activities.

Today, the Ukrainian cybersecurity specialists actively cooperate with their counterparts from the NATO and EU countries. In particular, through the NATO trust funds, they sponsored a project for creation of a centre for responding to incidents in cyberspace, some tranches were allocated for the material and technical base of cyber centres, and some cybersecurity expert consultations provided. Ukraine receives US assistance to develop centres for responding to cyber threats. Until 2024, the United States plans to allocate $38 million through the USAID Program to develop Ukraine's cybersecurity capabilities by supporting legal and regulatory reforms, training, and engaging the private sector.[45]

At the level of the NSDC secretary and the head of the National Security Bureau of Poland, they have some consultations and negotiations about the cooperation between the cyberspace defence forces and the Ukrainian cyber police. Given that the European Union is in the process of Cyber Force development, there is a room for a new round of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in this area.

Thus, the Russian hackers' attacks on critical infrastructure, as well as virus attacks, which endangered the private sector, became a kind of trigger for the cybersecurity development in Ukraine. Thanks to this, they did a lot of work to amend legislation, adopt strategic documents, and create bodies and centres for a quick response to cyber threats. The EU and NATO allies take an active part in supporting Ukraine by allocating funds to the country to ensure such centres functioning.

Moldova

The evolution of cybersecurity in Moldova can be divided into two periods: 2010–2016 and 2016–2024. The first period was connected with the Computer Emergency Response Team establishment (CERT) in 2010, envisioned by the agreement on international defence cooperation.[46] The second period is associated with the launch of the National Cybersecurity Program, adopted in 2015[47] and envisioned by the National Strategy of Information Society Development.[48] The duration of this period is determined by the recently adopted 2018 strategic document, the Information Security Strategy 2019-2024, which outlined future cybersecurity developments.[49]

National Cybersecurity Concept.

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[45] https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-technology/2889061-ssa-vydelat-ukraine-38-millionov-na-usilenie-kiberbezopas-nosti.html

[46] Government decree No. 774 of July 6 2006, "**Individual** Partnership **Action Plan for Republic Moldova – NATO**" **within the Partnership for Peace framework**

[47] Government decree No. 811 of October 29, 2015 "National CyberSecurity Program of the Republic of Moldova for 2016-2020".

[48] Government decree No. 857 of October 31, 2013 National Strategy of Information Society Development "Digital Moldova 2020 strategy"

[49] Information security strategy for 2019-2024, No. 257 of November 22, 2018.

Until 2015, numerous legislative documents were adopted, which, on the one hand, focused on solving specific tasks in this area, such as the criminalization of information perpetration and the protection of some critical infrastructures.[50] On the other hand, the documents were focused more on the conceptual aspects of the sphere, such as military and cybersecurity strategic goals.[51] However, the National Cybersecurity Program states that until 2016 "there are no studies or reports that would describe in detail the situation with cybercrime, cyber threats, cyberattacks, as well as the number of victims and economic damage." The content of the Moldova's cybersecurity concept can be understood as "a complex set of proactive and reactive measures by which cyberspace ensures confidentiality, integrity, availability, authenticity, and inviolability of electronic format information, information systems and resources, public and private services."[52]

Potential risks, initially of informational and then of cybersecurity nature, have been known to Moldovan experts and diplomats since 2000 but the government agencies' actions were not prompt and specific.[53] Due to adoption of the Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society in 2000, the first national strategic document on information society development, Electronic Moldova[54], was adopted five years later, and the National Cybersecurity Program was adopted fifteen years later.[55] However, the ratification of the Budapest Convention and the successful implementation of its provisions into national legislation became an important step forward.

At the national level, cyber threats and cyberattacks are generally found in the government websites' operations, and, in particular, in the digital government services' operations. They reveal such threats notably often during important political events, usually due to financial[56] and political goals. For example, for the February 1-28, 2019 period (elections period), they identified, registered and blocked by CERTs approximately 19,276,000 cyber threats.[57] Besides, 72 attacks, classified under national law as information crimes, were committed in 2013-2015. These attacks caused 21.588 thousand lei material damage.[58] Currently, the cybercrime dynamics is considered as "stable". Moreover, the records

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[50] The examples of such documents are the Law No. 20-XVI of February 3, 2009, "On Preventing and Combating Information Crime" and Law No. 93-XVI of April 5, 2007, on the Civil Protection and Emergency Situations Service. There can be mentioned some other documents as well, however, currently, the cybersecurity legal framework is not complete.

[51] Government decree No. 153 of July 15, 2011, approving "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova".

[52] National Cybersecurity Program for 2016-2020.

[53] Igor Munteanu ş.a., *Moldova pe calea democraţiei şi stabilităţii*, Cartier, 2006, page 27.

[54] National Strategy of Creation of Information Society "Electronic Moldova".

[55] First interest to cybersecurity issues emerged only in the 2010s, even if the obligation to "develop the global information society accompanied by concerted action to create safe and crime-free cyberspace" was envisaged by the Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society (2000).

[56] Government decree No. 811 of October 29, 2015 "National CyberSecurity Program of the Republic of Moldova for 2016-2020".

[57] Raport privind incidentele de securitate cibernetică înregistrate în perioada alegerilor parlamentare 2019, STISC, Chişinău, 2019.

[58] Registry of crimes, criminal cases, and persons who committed crimes, General Prosecutor's Office of Moldova.

say about reductions in some categories of crimes, such as child pornography distribution or computer fraud.[59]

At the international level, the neighbouring countries, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine, continue to hold their positions in a list of top 20 countries in terms of negative cybersecurity indicators. In 2015-2018, in the Global Security Index (GCI), Romania ranked 72nd, while earlier it was 13th, and Ukraine ranked 54th, while earlier it was 17th. While Ukraine is mainly a target of cyberattacks, Romania is also the source of cyberattacks and increases the potential malware or ransomware attacks risks.[60]

In Moldova, the cybersecurity level shows negative changes, which puts Moldova on the 53rd place in the world (GCI). Thus, Moldova is in the top 5 countries where users are at most risk of online infection (Kaspersky Security Bulletin, 2018). Currently, the situation is not alarming, but with the increasing discrepancy between the development of the information society and cybersecurity development, it will become dangerous. At the moment, society informatization and cybersecurity development move in opposite directions and add to the imbalance in the *development* and *protection* of infrastructures and information.

Previously, information on cyber attacks and cyber threats to critical infrastructure was not collected or published, and nowadays, there is no such data. This is due to the state authorities, which did nothing to identify and classify potential attack targets, study them, their functioning and protection, or develop measures to protect and improve "outdated and ineffective"[61] cybersecurity systems.

It should be emphasized that, since 1993, they adopted some regulatory documents regarding the safety of vital facilities, such as power facilities.[62] However, these documents, adopted, in particular, after the ratification of the international agreement, did not form a clear vision of what facilities can be considered critical infrastructure.

The definition of "*critical infrastructure*" objects was first formulated in 2017 in the *Law on Preventing and Combating Terrorism*,[63] as "an element, system or component necessary to maintain the vital functions of society such as health, safety, social and economic well-being, the destruction of which will have a significant influence at the national level". In 2018, this definition was expanded by including other sectors, such as "culture, education or the environment".[64]

The 2018 Regulation on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorism[65], is the most important document in the critical infrastructure security since it is the only document entirely devoted to these facilities' protection and regulating the separation of state powers regarding them. This document development is a result of a desire to introduce international standards, especially the European ones, into national legislation following

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[59] Raport privind activitatea Procuraturii pentru anul 2019, Procuratura generală a Republicii Moldova.

[60] Specops Software Report 2019.

[61] Raport despre executarea în semestrul II 2018 a Programului național de securitate cibernetică pentru anii 2016-2020, page 31.

[62] You can find an almost complete list in the "Ineffective Management of Critical Infrastructure - Causes of Political Crime" article, by Valentin Chiriţa, 2015, pages 234-237.

[63] Law No. 190-XVI as of July 26, 2007 "On Preventing and Combating Terrorism".

[64] Government Decree No. 701 as of July 11, 2018 Regulation on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorism.

[65] Idem.

Moldova's international obligations.[66] However, the first strategic goal, which is the identification of objects, was not achieved either during the period envisaged in the early strategic documents (2010-2014)[67], nor during the period of regional threats potential intensification (2015-2016), or after the adoption of the Regulation on the protection of critical infrastructures against terrorist attacks (2018). According to this document, the Information and Security Service of Moldova (ISS) was to develop a National Critical Infrastructure Nomenclature, based on the state bodies proposals on the critical infrastructure facilities identification. Unfortunately, according to statements by the Computer Crime and IT Section of the Prosecutor General's Office, no measures were taken to identify critical infrastructure.[68]

Two most important reasons for the delay in identifying critical infrastructure in Moldova are:

1. *Political will.* This reason is the most significant, since government bodies which are competent in public policy management (Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure), internal actions (Information and Security Service) and the protective actions development (CERT) do not have the autonomy of action and political independence from the main political actors' interests.[69] Lack of political will and subsequent inaction led to inability to achieve other strategic goals.

2. *Inappropriate distribution of institutional powers.* Responsibility for critical infrastructure security measures lies on a low institutional level (the SSI Antiterrorist Centre) which does not correspond to the importance of the protected objects. Responsibility for the cybersecurity policy development is given to MEI, which main activity is far from it. CERT, according to its head[70], "has no competence to collect and organize" information from other government agencies regarding cyber incidents. This institutional configuration imposes a serious risk to a high level of national critical infrastructure security ensuring.

Thus, despite the political documents development, new institutions establishment and the international relations build-up, Moldova's critical infrastructure security is nonfunctional. The "cybersecurity management system"[71] that the government is striving for does not allow for coordinated and effective actions in this area, since the government agencies do not communicate with each other or coordinate their actions, as well as do not take effective measures or collect and analyze the results.

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[66] To ensure the implementation of the international standards in the field of critical infrastructure protection, Moldova wants to integrate the provisions of some other countries' international agreements and practices, such as Resolution 2341 (2017), adopted by the Security Council on 13 February 2017, Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament of 6 July 2016, Council Directive 2008/114/EC of 8 December 2008, EPCIP Green Paper adopted on 17 November 2005, Government of Romania Emergency Ordinance No. 98 of 3 November 2010 or Government of Spain Royal Decree 704/2011 of 20 May 2011.

[67] Electronic Moldova (2005) and Digital Moldova 2020 (2013).

[68] The information was provided by the representative of the institution directly to the author of this document during an interview held on March 9 2020, at the General Prosecutor's Office of Moldova.

[69] The creation of CERT at the national level is an eloquent example of the political indifference since, by the National Strategy "Digital Moldova 2020", its launch was planned for 2014, then it was postponed to 2016, following the National Cybersecurity Program for 2016-2020, and finally, it was postponed to 2019-2021, by the Information Security Strategy for 2019-2024.

[70] The information was provided directly to the author of this document by the institution representative in an official response on March 5, 2020.

[71] National Cybersecurity Program for 2016-2020.

This is why the critical infrastructure protection has been facing political indifference for eight years and institutional inaction for the last two years[72], and it is blocked by a lack of the state and ineffective institutions a clear vision leading to a fragmented and short-term cybersecurity development.

Conclusions

After studying the legislative framework, as well as the existing bodies for cyber-crime combating in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine and the three states' relevant policies, it can be concluded that despite counties' similar positions in the Cybersecurity Index, they adhere to significantly different approaches to critical infrastructure cybersecurity ensuring.

Unlike legislative and executive branches' systems, as well as different practical experience in cybersecurity, are the obvious reasons for the cybersecurity methodology discrepancies. At the same time, different practical experiences are closely related to external threats. The Belarus need for cybersecurity strengthening seems to be much lower due to the absence of external threats prerequisites. Meanwhile, Ukraine's experience, 2015-2017 attacks on the Ukrainian enterprises, in particular, is closely linked to a wider range of external threats (both non-conventional and conventional) emanating from Russia. Although Moldova's experience is not associated with any obvious geopolitical events, however, it exposes information systems' vulnerability in the period of domestic political changes (such as the 2019 elections).

Belarus', Ukraine's, and Moldova's cooperation with third countries, organizations and with each other, is also closely connected with the countries' foreign policies. First of all, this is due to the different geopolitical vectors of the states. Comparison of the legislation of Ukraine and Belarus reveals radically different visions of approaches to cybersecurity defense. Ukraine develops its laws and regulations under the NATO and EU standards and their financial support. Although Moldova is not obliged to follow some specific EU projects in this area, it still strives to introduce the European standards into its national legislation. But in Belarus, legislation and policy follow the agreements with the CIS and the CSTO, that makes it harder to cooperation in this area with Ukraine and Moldova. At the same time, Ukraine and Moldova have some prerequisites for establishing closer cooperation on cybersecurity issues, and, despite the political instability of Moldova, the identical geopolitical orientation of the two states facilitates this process. However, the resource, technical, and legislative base of Moldova in the cybersecurity area is not fully formed. The progress is purely declarative and can be found exclusively in strategic concepts and documents, not in practice.

Ukraine has the richest experience in fighting against the consequences of the cyber attacks, and, therefore, Belarus and Moldova should study this experience to prevent such large-scale attacks in the future. Besides, given the difficulties Moldova has with the implementation of the critical infrastructure cybersecurity program, it should take into account the experience of Ukraine, where not only state bodies but volunteer associations also fight with cyber crimes.

On the technical side, all three countries could benefit from cooperation on cybersecurity issues, but different foreign policy orientations adjust the prospects for such cooperation.

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[72] The need to identify critical infrastructure was first mentioned in the 2010 "Individual Partnership Action Plan for Republic Moldova – NATO" within the Partnership for Peace framework. However, the first and only document dedicated to the protection of these infrastructures was created under another program, different from the two previously mentioned strategic documents, only in 2018 - the Regulation on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorism. Actions foreseen in this document are not implemented yet even in 2020.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN FOREIGN POLICY OF UKRAINE AND BELARUS

Valentina Rudka, *representative of the European Union initiative "Young European Ambassadors" (Ukraine),*
Valeria Skvortsova, *expert at the Ukrainian Independent Center for Political Research (Ukraine),*
Pavel Groshevik, *Director of the Center "Institute for German and European Studies" (Belarus)*

Summary

The key task of public diplomacy is to create an attractive image of the state by interacting with the population of another state or some of its groups to accomplish foreign policy goals. Public diplomacy includes cultural interaction between states (cultural diplomacy), country branding, the use of media platforms, expert and sports diplomacy, and other ways of communicating with foreign audiences that are not conventional diplomatic work.

Establishing and developing public diplomacy is especially relevant for Ukraine and Belarus — it is important for these two independent states to present themselves as reliable partners and proactive participants of political processes in Eastern Europe.

In Ukraine, public diplomacy gained a special role as a result of Russia's aggression, including the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas, and of the information war Russia wages to justify its actions and present them in a better light. Since 2014, Ukraine has been using public diplomacy tools more actively to promote its image as an integral and independent European state, to promote the actual information about the state of affairs in the country and to seek support from international partners. While Ukraine's public diplomacy system is still far from perfect, much has been done in it and trends are positive.

Belarus does not currently see public diplomacy as an effective foreign policy tool, so it has not established it strategically or institutionally. But expert diplomacy has lately become one of the more common manifestations of Belarus public diplomacy. Belarus is trying to maintain its image as a neutral state that is ready to offer "good offices" to other countries seeking to solve their disputes — as with Minsk serving as a platform for the Ukraine-Russia dialog.

1. The history of public diplomacy in Belarus and Ukraine

Since positive perception of a state by the international community helps it promote its national interests and establish interstate contacts, public diplomacy development is an established foreign policy objective in many states. For Ukraine and Belarus, the concept of developing public diplomacy is especially relevant as it could help them create recognizable and positive references and images.

1.1. Ukraine

Public diplomacy in Ukraine has gone through a certain establishment process. In 2006, Ukraine approved the Provision on Cultural and Information Centers in Ukraine's Foreign Diplomatic Institutions. The goal was to support international cooperation, spread information about Ukraine, maintain contacts with Ukrainians abroad, and encourage the studying of the Ukrainian language and culture.

2015 saw a breakthrough in strategic vision and institutionalization of Ukraine's public diplomacy. Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) established a structural offshoot — the Public Diplomacy Department, later renamed into Directorate, in order to promote Ukraine and its interests in the world, as well as to consistently interact with the public abroad. It includes offices for image policy, cultural diplomacy and online projects, and its functions are to develop relations with foreign entities — both the public, and various NGOs, media, expert groups — cultural, branding and communication projects for Ukraine abroad, and coordinate events by other executive bodies in these spheres. In 2015, the MFA proposed a concept of the Ukrainian Institute for a public discussion. It would represent Ukrainian culture in the world and shape a positive image for it abroad.

In 2016, the pace of public diplomacy development and implementation slowed down somewhat. Out of most strategic documents announced in 2015 to strengthen this area, just one titled Ukraine 2020 Strategy for Sustainable Development was approved. Insufficient state funding for public diplomacy remained the key problem. In 2016, MFA Open Air was launched as a new format for informal meetings and discussions on important public developments, open both for the MFA employees and for anyone wishing to attend.

In 2017, Ukraine established the Ukrainian Institute, a public institution representing Ukrainian culture in the world and shaping Ukraine's positive image abroad. Initially, the Ukrainian Institute planned to open its offices in four European capitals — Warsaw, Berlin, Paris and Rome. But the complicated process of coordination between institutions slowed down the implementation. That year, the National Security and Defense Council paid attention to public diplomacy — primarily as a strategic communications tool: public diplomacy has its due spot in the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine approved in 2017.

1.2. Belarus

Belarusian diplomacy is currently at the stage of transformation, looking to apply the modern toolkit to shape its positive image abroad. Lacking an institutionally established public diplomacy, it mainly focuses on culture. Foreign representations of Belarus' Ministry of Foreign Affairs play a special role in promoting intercultural cooperation. Their geographic expansion was a new move in implementing the state cultural policy, helping Belarus intensify the promotion of its national interests, harmonize international and interstate relations via cultural tools, strengthen the potential of Belarusian culture, and increase cooperation with Belarusians abroad. Five Belarusian centers currently operate in China, Pakistan, Poland, Russia and France. In addition to official centers, active points of Belarusian culture exist in Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Switzerland and more.

Slaviansky Bazar, an international arts festival in Vitebsk, has been a trademark element of Belarus' cultural diplomacy for decades. Its slogan, "Through art to peace and understanding," reflects Belarus' aspiration to be a platform for solving international disputes and conflicts. For over 20 years, more 55,000 participants from 68 countries have taken part in the festival. It has become a center of international cooperation, encouraging cultural dialog between different nations and countries and promoting Belarus' positive image in the world.

Other instruments supporting positive image for Belarus come from the sports diplomacy, including international sports events and athletic accomplishments. President Aleksandr Lukashenko pays special attention to sports, putting it among the priorities of Belarus' state policy. Here, China comes to mind with its ping-pong diplomacy when a US delegation came to what was then a closed country in 1971-1972, paving a way to a steep change in bilateral relations and serving as a prologue to the Chinese economic miracle.

Alongside cultural and sports diplomacy, youth diplomacy holds an interesting spot in Belarus, implemented via international activity of Belarusian youth organizations. Their growing international activeness can be seen as an instrument for communicating positive information, including the exchange of values, traditions and more. This, in turn, helps the country shape a positive image.

2. Current state of public diplomacy in Ukraine and Belarus

2.1. Public diplomacy accomplishments of Ukraine

The accomplishments of Ukrainian public diplomacy include the approval of the Ukraine Now brand and brand book and successful communication of it via various ministries and agencies. Presentation of the official Ukrainian brand in a number of countries was one of the moves to strengthen the development of Ukraine Now.

Worth noting is the activity of Ukraine's Public Diplomacy Department — now renamed into Directorate. 2017 saw a number of projects implemented abroad, including exhibitions of Ukrainian artists in Washington and New York — especially presentations of 50 Inventions Bestowed by Ukraine to the World — public lectures on modern development of Ukraine in American universities, and Weekend in the East, a festival in Paris. Domestic projects included Cultural Diplomacy Forums and the Global Ukrainians Public Diplomacy Network roundtable at the National Institute for Strategic Studies.

In 2018, Ukraine's MFA focused on communication campaigns on the most relevant and acute foreign policy issues. These included #CorrectUA and #KyivnotKiev on correct spelling of Ukrainian geographic names; #FreeUkrainianPOWs to support Ukrainian war prisoners and raise awareness about violations of humanitarian law; and #CrimeaisBleeding, #CrimeaisUkraine to support de-occupation of Crimea. According to the analysis of Ukraine's foreign policy by the Ukrainian Prism, these campaigns reached the audience of nearly 14 million people abroad.

Apart from that, Ukrainian diplomatic institutions held exhibitions of archive files for the 100th anniversary of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) and of Ukrainian diplomacy. Other historic events and modern threats, including the Holodomor, hybrid threats, violations of rights of Crimean Tatars and territorial status of Crimea, were in the spotlight too, covered by films and roundtables.

The Ukraine Reform Conference was an important international event for Ukraine. Established by the Government in 2017, the conference brings together Ukrainian and international officials, top-level businessmen, representatives of the EU, NATO and G7 countries and of civil society for annual summary of reforms in Ukraine and discussions on further priority steps and prospects. Over the past years, the conference took place in some hubs of political and civic life, including London (2017), Copenhagen (2018) and Toronto (2019). In 2020, the conference is scheduled to take place in Vilnius. The objectives of the Ukraine Reform Conference include encouraging new investment — into culture and cultural diplomacy, among others — and presentation of Ukraine as a national brand.

The Ukrainian Institute is an important public institution that implements Ukrainian public diplomacy. Its key accomplishments include … Challenges include slow opening of offices abroad and funding.

Ukrainian literature holds a special place in Ukraine, hence the Ukrainian Book Institute operating since 2016. Its key objective is to create and support international cultural ties between people and institutions, cultural interaction of Ukrainians with the world. The Ukrainian Book Institute works on raising recognition of Ukraine abroad, promotes the Ukrainian language and culture, and supports publishing in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian MFA has established cooperation with the UAART foundation whose priorities include international cross-cultural projects, development of creative industries and an extensive dialog with art communities in Europe and the world. NGOs, including Ukraine Crisis Media Center, Razom for Ukraine, Promote Ukraine and Foreign Policy Council "Prism Ukraine," seriously contribute to the development of Ukraine's public diplomacy.

Ukrainian representative offices abroad have intensified their twiplomacy using Twitter, Facebook and other social media for diplomatic purposes. This phenomenon created a favorable environment for reaching a wide audience in the digital space. Many Ukrainian foreign policy offices, including of the MFA, now have accounts on social media, communicating about their work, events and activities to promote Ukraine. These accounts allow them to communicate informally with Ukrainian citizens, as well as people in other countries.

Statements by Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's new Foreign Affairs Minister, point to positive trends in public diplomacy development: he has listed that and promotion of Ukraine's brand abroad among his priorities.

2.2. Public diplomacy accomplishments of Belarus

Some extent of uncertainty in foreign policy stops Belarus from shaping a clear vector of its public diplomacy. Public diplomacy tools, among other things, accompany active integration processes as a union state with Russia and CIS member. At the same time, Belarus is part of European projects that engage its civil society and youth organizations.

The use of expert diplomacy as a foreign policy asset is limited in Belarus. The country has many young experts in economics, political studies and sociology who have close ties with civil society and the international expert community, and participate in many events abroad. One of the most effective tools of Belarus' expert diplomacy is the Minsk Dialogue Foreign Policy Council that started in 2015 as a non-government forum on international relations and security in Europe. Its mission is to provide an open and quality discussion and research platform without geopolitical divisions. Regular conferences of the Minsk Dialogue have gathered in Minsk the leading experts from the EU, Russia, Eastern European states and USA, as well as diplomats and representatives of international organizations. Top officials have participated in these conferences. Most discussions within the Minsk Dialogue are closed to the press, encouraging a more open exchange. Diplomats are invited as observers to strengthen the practical focus of discussions. Based on the conference results, working documents are prepared with the key takeaways and recommendations — they are widely distributed among government and non-government stakeholders and used for further research.

The bilateral expert Forum of Regions of Ukraine and Belarus in 2019 is another successful case of expert diplomacy. Attended by both countries' leaders, it was aimed at developing economic, investment and cultural cooperation at the regional level.

Youth diplomacy plays a special role, represented by youth and student organizations, as well as few institutions that present new platforms and opportunities for international cooperation for the young people in humanitarian and other spheres of public life. This is confirmed through the work of youth NGOs, such as Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), the League of Voluntary Work of the Youth, Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs (BelAU) and others.

It would be wrong to say that Belarus has no cases of using public diplomacy instruments and resources. The analysis of Ukraine's experience and the evaluation of the modern state of public diplomacy institutions in Belarus points to the need to seriously increase its potential in the state's foreign policy interests and for the promotion of its na-

tional interests abroad. Obviously, this requires the development and implementation of a range of measures, including practical and theoretical innovations and strategies.

2.3. Public diplomacy in Ukraine-Belarus relations

Ukraine and Belarus enjoy good neighborly relations, but the states are quite different in their domestic and foreign policy. Public diplomacy plays a role in building relations between the two countries.

In recent years, the Forum of Regions of Ukraine and Belarus has become a platform for interaction between the states, helping strengthen and intensify cooperation between the regions of the two countries and drawing on their economic, scientific, educational and cultural potential. The Forum of Regions has taken place twice since it was launched in 2018: in Gomel, Belarus, on October 25-26, 2018, and in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, on October 3-4, 2019. The third Forum is to take place in October 2020 in Grodno, Belarus. It is attended by government representatives, including heads of states, and representatives of the business community. The growing trade between the two countries points to the effectiveness of this platform for interaction. After the second Forum, contracts were signed worth over US $500mn. And the Forum focuses on discovering the countries at the level of oblasts, thus showing the diversity and richness of the regions and bringing them closer together.

Cultural dialog plays a special role in public diplomacy. The states have developed the Program of Cooperation in Culture between Culture Ministries of Belarus and Ukraine for 2017-2021. Both countries regularly hold joint events, including exhibitions, concerts and literature events with elements of Ukrainian and Belarusian cultures. Diasporas are actively engaged. The Ukrainian language is taught at the Belarusian State University (Slavic (Ukrainian) Philology Department). Belarus has libraries with Ukrainian literature sections in six oblasts and the overall book fund holds nearly 5,000 books. The Ukrainian diaspora in Belarus has its website and Facebook account and publishes the *Ukrainian in Belarus* newspaper. In Ukraine, Uladzimir Karatkievich Center of the Belarusian Language and Culture works at the Philology Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University. Its PhD students teach Belarusian as an optional subject at the primary section of Zarifa Aliyeva Irpin Specialized Linguistic School.

An example of cultural cooperation is the Days of Ukrainian Culture in Belarus, a major cultural event between the two countries in 2018. Also, Belarus has initiated cultural events in Ukraine. In 2017, literature and documentary exhibitions celebrating the 135th anniversary of the Belarusian poet Yanka Kupala took place in Kyiv, Odesa, Mykolayiv, Lviv and Kaniv. In January-February 2018, Belarusian theater project TriTformaT from KinoAkter, the Minsk theater studio, toured Ukraine. Belarusian performers and music bands regularly play at international festivals in Ukraine, including O-FEST and Karpatsky prostir (Carpathian Space).

Belarusian and Ukrainian students take part in exchange programs between universities in Belarus and Ukraine and in joint education projects led by the state or NGOs. For example, 13 organizations from Ukraine and Belarus took part in the project Regional Voices: Civic Education for Adults to Expand the Rights and Opportunities of Local Communities in Ukraine and Belarus.

3. Modern challenges in the development of public diplomacy for Ukraine and Belarus

3.1. Ukraine

Ukraine's public diplomacy in its modern state follows a positive trend. However, it faces a range of challenges and issues that remain unresolved:

- Ukraine lacks a long-term public diplomacy strategy and determined foreign policy priorities. The experience of countries with effective public diplomacy, such as Germany or the Netherlands, shows that having a step-by-step strategy leads to more productive results than chaotic activities. A clear vision of ways to use public diplomacy becomes an auxiliary tool in cooperation with specific countries that represent the international community and in pursuing national interests;

- Ukraine does not develop its tourism potential sufficiently by exploiting the Ukraine Now brand more intensely. Objectively, Ukraine has abundant resource and infrastructure prerequisites for transforming international tourism into a factor of socio-economic development and for building up its attractiveness as a country;

- Ukraine has underdeveloped special institutions. The availability of special institutions that distribute information about the country's cultural life and history is an integral element of foreign policy in a number of countries. We have seen positive results of these institutions — from Poland's Adam Mickiewisz Institute and the UK's British Council to Germany's Goethe-Institut or China's Confucius Institute. The Ukrainian Institute is a good attempt to launch similar institutions, but it is still far behind European and Asian cultural entities — which is mostly contingent on the funding and the strategic vision of its role.

3.2. Belarus

Belarus' activities to promote its attractiveness are not strategic and shape a fairly neutral image for the country. This position makes it difficult to create a more unique image for the state to further promote it abroad. The current challenges in developing Belarusian public diplomacy are as follows:

Belarus lacks institutionalized public diplomacy. It is necessary to institutionalize this vector via legislation and establish a special authorized agency to design the general concept for the development and further implementation of public diplomacy;

- Just like Ukraine, it lacks a public diplomacy strategy;

- Civil society is underdeveloped and the state has little interaction with NGOs. The sustainability of Belarus' civil society is fairly low compared to the neighbor-states. This is because of the specifics of governance and oppression of civic rights and freedoms in Belarus. The youth — that tends to gravitate towards the West — remains the most proactive wing;

- Belarus lacks research expertise on public diplomacy development. This topic is little researched in Belarus and is mostly narrowed down to interaction with Russia. Even if the latter is a strategic partner for Belarus, this does not limit other cooperation options;

- Modern technology and information channels are not used enough. This hampers the promotion of Belarus' positive image;

- Belarus has no brand of its own. It is currently using the emblem of the National Tourism Agency as its brand, but this emblem does not appear anywhere other than on the official website of this agency. There is no fully designed concept of the brand.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendations for Ukraine

1. Create one- and five-year public diplomacy strategy defining the key areas, geographic priorities and tools.
2. Increase funding for public diplomacy development.
3. Engage NGOs and civil society in foreign policy design and implementation by developing expert diplomacy.
4. Strengthen the role of cultural institutions — culture departments of embassies.

5. Create an online platform in several languages with information on Ukraine and various aspects of its life, including tourism, economy, art, modern technology and business, to promote Ukraine.

Recommendations for Belarus

1. Create a special structural section at the Belarusian MFA in charge of public policy development.
2. Intensify the use of new technology and e-diplomacy, increase the presence of the MFA on social media.
3. Highlight unique markers in the image of Belarus that would help create a unique state brand by engaging PR experts and creative agencies under approval of a special committee with representatives of government bodies.
4. Strengthen the role of the Belarusian language in the state as a marker of sovereignty and uniqueness of the Belarusian nation.
5. Apply Ukraine's expertise in engaging diaspora to promote a positive image for Belarus abroad and to lobby for its interests.
6. Strengthen contacts with Ukraine via public diplomacy, including through more joint events engaging common citizens, more active engagement in cultural events, and promotion of the modern rather than just the traditional culture of both countries.

RUSSIA AND THE REGIONAL ORDER IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: DYNAMICS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

Vladislav Skopyuk, *student of the Belarusian State University (Belarus)*,
Nicolae Arnaut, *Expert, Eastern Partnership (Moldova)*

Abstract

2018-2019 appeared to be the years of political changes across countries in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, mainly in Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In Ukraine, a new charismatic leader without any political experience Volodymyr Zelenskyi was able to reach a victory in the presidential election, against the former president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. In the case of Republic of Moldova, all important external actors (U.S., EU and Russia) found out a common compromise decision against oligarchic system represented by Vladimir Plahotniuc, supporting a controversial alliance between the pro-European ACUM political alliance and pro-Russian Socialist Party of President Igor Dodon Part. Concurrently, after 10 years of cold relations and diplomatic hostilities relations between Belarus and U.S. Belarus has altered its foreign policy vision to a more balanced approach between Russian-driven integration initiatives and U.S. support initiatives. The present analysis inquires how the current Russia's revisionist position faces with pro-European foreign policy priorities of Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and a more balanced foreign policy vision of Belarus in the context of elections in the mentioned countries.

Keywords: Federalisation, Eastern Partnership, Russia, EU, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine

Introduction

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 led to a new type of confrontation across Europe, with Euro-Atlantic framework of cooperation on the one hand and Russia's driven Eurasian Union on the other hand, both gravitating around Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. The mentioned countries, all former parts of the Soviet Union, are continuing their transition process. Their geopolitical position between Russia and the West is often hindering their social and economic developments.

Moldova

Since independence, Republic of Moldova in its foreign policy orientations has been long balancing between Romania and Russia given political, economic, linguistic and historical strings. Such vacillating behavior still plays a major role in the country's developments. From the beginning, the relations between Moldova and Russia were quite tense taking into account Russia's agression in Transnistria territory escalated into a military conflict that started in March 1992. The continuous unstable relation between Moldova and Transnistria problem escalated again on the bilateral agenda in 2003 when a proposal aimed at a final settlement of relations between Moldova and Transnistria. The president of Republic of Moldova Vladimir Voronin renounced the signing of the Kozak Memorandum, the plan, presented in mid-November 2003 by Russia, which was a detailed proposal for a united asymmetric federal Moldavian state. The uncertainty coupled with instability and tension in the relations could be easily traced in 2006 when Russia introduced an embargo

on wines from the Republic of Moldova and further in 2013-2014 when all fruit and meat supplies from the Republic of Moldova were banned from being imported to Russia. Moldova's presidential elections in November 2016 resulted in a victory for pro-Russian candidate Igor Dodon and the next period would be determined by the position of President Igor Dodon. Igor Dodon clearly expressed his desire to create closer relations with Russia from the very beginning thus he promised to reopen the Russian market for Moldovan agricultural products, create facilities for working Moldovan migrants and lead the country to federalization as a model for the reintegration of Transnistria.

Moldova – from local oligarchs to Putin's agenda

The new governing coalition formed by the pro-European block "ACUM" and the Socialist party came to power in June 2019. This coalition represented a high level of cooperation and compromise between Moldova's pro-European and pro-Russian political forces, which united against Vladimir Plahotniuc a powerful oligarch and political figure, for his role in a massive bank theft, and actually the Government seek his extradition from the United States.. As expected, the marriage between the pro-European political alliance 'ACUM' and pro-Russian Socialist Party lasted only 5 months, during which the presidential institution lead by Igor Dodon and executive institution lead by Maia Sandu had antagonistic positions and promoted different agendas.

On the one hand, the then Prime minister of the country, Maia Sandu (representative of the pro-European block), has visited Brussels, Bucharest and Kyiv to cement trust with Moldova's neighbors and partners, and also to restore the financial support from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. On the other hand, President Igor Dodon (representative of the Socialist Party) since his inauguration in 2016 has visited Moscow in order to cement trust with Russia.

How was expected as a result of an unprecedented alliance between the pro-European block "ACUM" and the Socialist party, the European agenda of Moldova was reconfigured in order to boost the dialogue with Russia and to assure the foreign policy balancing.[73] Among others, this happened also due to the permissiveness acts of the ACUM block, that was more involved in the destruction of the oligarchic system through state institution restructuration's and reforms while the presidential institution was focused just on promotion of Russian agenda. Ever since November 2019 President Dodon has directly promoted Russia's agenda, which included the membership request for the Eurasian Development Bank and the idea of federalisation of Moldova.. All these was fueled by the latest Igor Dodon's statements offered to Euronews where he declared that "Europe can only be stronger if it forges closer ties with Russia" and expresses his belief 'in a big Europe, from Lisbon to Vladivostok"[74].

Kozak Plan-2 of Moldova's federalisation or a new Putin's imperialistic interest?

The Transnistrian problem being deadlocked since 2003 when the president Vladimir Voronin renounced the signing of the Kozak Memorandum of Federalisation of the Republic of Moldova, has again appeared on Russia's agenda. In Russia's new attempt of federalisation Igor Dodon has declared himself a supporter of the Russian solution to the Transnistrian dispute. Consequently, Moscow started to consolidate this idea after Maria

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[73] Deutsche Welle, Moldova parties form government, despite court rulings, Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/moldova-parties-form-government-despite-court-rulings/a-49116723, (consulted on 14.02.2020).

[74] Orlando Crowcroft & Lauren Chadwick, Europe can only be stronger with Russia,' claims Moldova's president Euronews,14.02.2020, Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/14/europe-can-only-be-stronger-with-russia-claims-moldova-s-president, (consulted on 15.02.2020).

Sandu's Government was brought down and a new government led by Ion Chicu, fully controlled by Dodon, was appointed.

According to Vlad Kulminski, Director of the Institute for Strategic Initiatives, President Igor Dodon brings serious damage to the Republic of Moldova in the format of the Transnistrian settlement process with a basic plan for resolving the conflict in his vision called "Federal Moldova".[75] This term includes a supranational structure that is neither the Republic of Moldova, nor Gagauzia, nor the Transnistrian region, but is the third state, something new including three subjects of federalisation, and that promotes only the interest of Russia.[76]

Negotiations over Russian gas and loan as an electoral promise

In the context of improving relations between Republic of Moldova and Russia by boosting economic cooperation and investments, in late 2019 Prime Minister Chicu returned from Moscow with the promise that Russia would reduce the price for gas for Moldova and allocate a 300 million dollar credit to Moldova. Additionally, Russian government promised to increase amount of Moldovan products entering the Russian market, to apply import duties and to simplify access to the Russian market.

Despite some warming in the political dialogue, the 2013 embargo Russia imposed to Moldova still has its effect. The share of Moldovan exports to Russia that had previously constituted around 50%, dropped to 10% only, rating Russia as the fourth country in the top export destinations of Moldova.[77] The export to the EU, on the contrary, has increased after Moldova signed the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). Today 70% of Moldova's exports go to the EU markets, with Romania being the top destination.[78] Although the trade balance between Russia and Moldova has reached a low limit, Russia continues to be interested in the strategic objectives of the Republic of Moldova.

Presidential election in Moldova: balancing act between Russia and the EU

The presidential election planned for autumn of 2020 seem to be decisive for the

perspective of Moldova's European future. On the one hand, the pro-European coalition with a possible victory in the presidential elections would trigger the early parliamentary elections in 2021 and insure the Association Agreement program implementation. Concurrently, a new possible victory for Dodon would compromises the European course of the Republic of Moldova. The Moldova's current relations with the European Union are rather complicated due the pro-Russian agenda promoted by presidential institution lead by Igor Dodon and parliamentary majority formed by Democratic Party and Socialist Party, favorable to Russia interests. The Socialist Party is likely to have some advantages in the coming presidential elections taking into account its control over the administrative, financial and media resources. In addition, but also taking advantage of the situation created by the some internal conflicts between the and Truth Platform Party (DA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) that before parliamentary elections on 24 February 2019 formed the block

[75] Iurii Botnarenco Vlad Kulminski: Igor Dodon a adus daune serioase R. Moldova în reglementarea transnistreană, Adevarul, 18.02.2020, Available at: https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/vladislav-kulminski-igor-dodon-adus-daune-serioase-moldovei-reglementarea-transnistreana-1_5e4b91da5163ec4271327881/index.html, (consulted on 18.02.2020).

[76] Ibid.

[77] Madalin Necsutu, *Russia Tightens Quotas on Imports From Moldova,* October 24, 2019, Available at: https://balkan-insight.com/2019/10/24/russia-tightens-quotas-on-imports-from-moldova/, (consulted on 17.02.2020).

[78] *Ibid.*

NOW and now they are decided to participate separately in presidential elections. Furthermore, by breaking the Democratic Party into two parliamentary factions – Democratic Party and "Pro –Moldova" party – in February 19, 2020 with the direct participation of the Socialist Party. The fall elections would most probably turn to the battleground not only between the candidates but also between the pro-Russian and the pro-European orientations of the country for the nearest future. According to the February poll conducted by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers, 48.6% of respondents were going to support Igor Dodon during the coming elections whereas 22.2% respondent said that they would vote for Maia Sandu [79]. For Republic of Moldova, the vote is often perceived as 'geopolitical' choice and often shows the polarization of the population.

Conclusions and recommendations for Moldova

The political changes in Moldova from a "state capture " with all state institutions controlled by local oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc to a pro-reforms government lead by Maia Sandu was an short time illusion of democracy. Just five months while the pro-European Government tried to make reforms, the president Igor Dodon started to consolidate his position in the context of presidential elections and European agenda of Moldova has been reconfigured in order to boost the dialogue with Russia. A victory of pro-European forces during the fall elections would most probably enhance Republic of Moldova's European integration Political and economic association of Moldova with the European Union gives a framework for modernization and solving the existing problems in the society.

Recommendations

- To launch a communication campaign to promote the AA and the DCFTA among Moldova's society to increase resilience to Russia's disinformation against NATO and the EU.
- To use best practices of the European integration from the Western Balkan countries (e.g. the absorption capacity of European legislation).
- To develop confidence-building programmes aiming at increasing trust between people living on both sides of the Nistru River including Transnistria and Gagauzia by supporting joint activities in economic development and entrepreneurship, media local content development and cultural and historical heritage.
- To diminish Moldova's dependency on Russia's credits.
- To increase the export quota to Russia via open discussion and negotiations.

Belarus

Belarus and Russia have had ebbs and flows in their economic and political relations since Belarus became independent. A. Lukashenko's attempts to balance between the West and Russia were not always successful, because the purely pragmatic approach of Belarusian president was obvious to both sides. Desire to receive preferential loans, energy resources at reduced prices, desire to unimpeded access to the main export market for Belarus – everything this increased Belarus ' dependence on Russia. Now relations between the two countries have deteriorated significantly, and it will be very interesting to observe their development in the near future, keeping in mind presidential elections in Belarus and global economic recession due to the pandemic consequences.

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[79] Radio Europa Libera, *Igor Dodon și Maia Sandu sunt, în continuare, favoriții cursei prezidențiale,* 19.02.2020, Available at: https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/igor-dodon-%C8%99i-maia-sandu-sunt-%C3%AEn-continuare-favori%C8%9Bii-cursei-prezien%C8%9Biale/30443598.html, (consulted on 19.02.2020).

Will Belarus be able to reduce its dependence from Russian in the energy sphere?

In general, the history of relations between the two countries in the energy sector can be described as a cyclical process with a negative trend that periods of easing of supply conditions are replaced by periods of tightening, but each subsequent peak is lower than the previous one. From 2007 Belarus and Russia had warming and worsening periods in energy sector negotiations, but each time Belarus is losing its positions. Buying gas in Russia for 15% of global price in 2007 turned into paying higher prices than European countries pay in 2020.

Price-wise, Russian oil is economically attractive for Belarus since its cost is 17% lower than the average world price. In addition, Russia offers much more beneficial conditions of oil supply for Belarus taking into account the difficulties Russian oil "Urals" faced while reaching the European market and competence with the oil from Saudi Arabia.

However, Belarus has an opportunity to diversify the supply of oil (for instance, from Latvia seaport in Klaipeda as well as from Odessa-Brody pipeline). Considering prognoses of significant financial losses as a result of Russian oil maneuver, Belarus will lose more than 6 bn $ till year 2024.

Mike Pompeo's speech where he mentioned that USA is ready for 100% oil supplies to Belarus helped to strengthen the negotiations position of Belarus with Russia. According to Luksahenko's actions Belarus doesn't have an aim to significantly decrease energy dependence from Russia, instead seeking to close a budget gap created by so called "tax maneuver". Belarus will hardly stop negotiations with Russia in the nearest perspective given that Belarus does not have any strong argument in these negotiations.

Can Russian pressure turn Belarus closer to EU side?

The Belarus-EU relations within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework is literally unique because Belarus is a part of such Russia driven structures as Eurasian Economic Union, CIS, and Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Moreover, the economy of Belarus is largely dependent on Russian energy resources. More than 89% of Belarussian external debt belongs to Russia, and Russia imports more than 40% of Belarussian goods. Russian support is one of few things that helps the authoritarian regime to survive, that is why it is of a great significance for Belarus to diversify foreign policy directions and to improve the relations with the EU to balance Russia's geopolitical ambitions towards Belarus.

Russia's influence on Belarus economic and political milieu has raised significant challenges for the EU's transformative power. Regardless of this, the EU has developed frameworks to more efficiently foster modernization in the country, including those available within the EaP. Through the "more for more" principle the EU offered financial, technical, and political assistance to Belarus, support for civil society and enhancement of the democratic standards according to the EU soft-power approach. In January 2020 Belarus and EU signed a readmission and visa-facilitation agreement. In 2019 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) invested record amount of practically 400 mln $ in Belarus. The European Investment Bank only began working with the country in 2017 but already has a portfolio of $600 million.

Development of closer ties with the EU and more active engagement in the EU cooperation framework could allow Belarus to possible soften the dependence on Russia in the long-term perspective. In 2016, Belarus placed export diversification among the key objectives of its economic security strategy, aiming to have at least 30% exports going to the EAEU, the EU and the rest of the world.

Union State: myth or a matter of time?

While the scenario of the complete loss of Belarusian sovereignty seems to be unreal, there is still a risk that Belarus could be pushed to sign unfavorable agreements considering Belarus' economic and political dependence on Russia. Integration negotiations with Russia caused street protests with over 1,000 people gathered in streets of Minsk on the day the two presidents Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin met in Sochi in December 7, 2019. The main reason for protests was 31st roadmap of State Union, that coordinated of in-depth integration with the creation of supranational bodies. The protests could continue, should the concrete integration documents be signed. The idea of integration is unpopular among Belarusians, with only 16.5 per cent of the population supporting the establishment of the Union State. The pace of the Union State negotiations appears to have been decelerated. During the meeting in February 7th, the two presidents again failed to agree upon new energy contracts. According to Belarussian officials, new negotiations are on any integration roadmaps are not envisaged for the near future. V. Putin has likely needed to put the negotiations on a pause and to focus instead on the ways to prolong his stay in Kremlin for another presidential term.

In turn, the US has also has intensified its relations with Belarus, probably out of concern that Kremlin's integration push would question the country's position as a 'buffer zone' on NATO's eastern flank. In 2019, Washington and Minsk announced plans to exchange ambassadors for the first time in 10 years, and the first-ever visit of US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, followed in February 2020. Pompeo sent a symbolic message of support for Belarus's sovereignty and signaled a willingness to step up economic co-operation, including the possibility of American oil supplies – an offer that may be of interest to Belarus if Russia starts charging market prices. The US is in principle keen to boost its development assistance and eventually lift US sanctions on Belarusian petrochemical companies, if Minsk progresses on democracy and human rights, which it is currently far from doing.

Current economic risks for Belarus

The economic impact of COVID-19, alongside with a budget gap, may lead to heavy consequences, including the increase of Belarus' external debt. In case the situation with pandemics goes out of control and no sufficient financial help is received from the international actors, Belarus might face the recession or even default. Gold reserves are decreasing (1,5 bn decrease USD in January-June 2020), with no exports of petroleum products Belarussian ruble will lose its value (and it is already loosing now). Therefore, how Belarus cover its 3.9 bn USD debt in 2020. No wonder Belarus started negotiations with IMF on emergency financial support with amount up to 900 mln $. The situation is getting even more complicated given the forthcoming elections in Belarus.

Against this backdrop, recommendations of the international organizations and economic experts and think tanks from Belarus, otherwise the whole future of the current regime will be even under a bigger strain.

Conclusions and recommendations for Belarus:

1. To implement structural reforms in accordance with recommendations of the World Bank, including large privatization of SOEs, decreasing of support to public sector, new supporting program for unemployed. To attract foreign investors via restructuring of the economy and creating more attractive investment climate.

2. To implement the export 30/30/30 program that will help to decrease dependence on Russia.

3. To start negotiations on Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU.

4. To decrease dependence from Russia in energy sector via diversification of energy suppliers during a considerable drop in world oil prices.

5. To enhance development of civil society and NGO sector in the Belarusian society and their role in decision-making.

Ukraine

The 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine were remarked by an unexpected victory of a new charismatic leader without any political experience, Volodymyr Zelenskiy who managed to reach an important success. Undoubtedly, whose victory was due to the lack of public confidence in the old political class. In the same time the message-oriented towards expectations people who care about ending the war in the Donbas region, fighting corruption all this against the background amid rising prices and falling living standards. Certainly that Ukraine has provided an exercise in democracy, only that the path to resolve the conflict in Donbas and the implied reforms do not provide the expected results. The government have chosen path of small steps in resolving the military conflict and reforms implementation. The reforms in Ukraine were slowed by a monopolization of executive and legislative power by Volodymyr Zelenskiy which secured a comfortable parliamentary majority. The role of the parliamentary opposition has been reduced, and public participation in decision-making is being replaced by aggressive communication through social media in order to maintain popularity.

The concept of "federalisation" – a new integrationist paradigm of Russia?

Engaged in a military conflict, launched by Russia in the eastern regions of Ukraine, today Ukraine represents a guaranty line in the EaP area in the way of Putin's revisionist policy. Macron's latest statements rejecting the idea that the Eastern Partnership could be a gateway to the EU membership seem to give Russia a boost in the revisionist policy.[80] According to Kataryna Wolczuk and Hanna Sheles 'the most important fact concerning Putin's plans for Ukraine might be is the appointment of Dmitry Kozak as the main curator of the Ukraine (Donbas and Crimea territory), a strategist who prepared the federalisation of Moldova in 2003 and the governing alliance PSRM and block "ACUM" in Moldova in June 2019.[81] Under these circumstances, Kozak could try already by having the Moldovan example to offer a similar format for Ukraine, betting on a team of the new Ukrainian president in politics that pursues rapid successes without calculating long-term risks.

Local elections in Ukraine – consolidation or monopolization of Zelenskyi power?

For Ukraine 2020 will be a complicated year followed after a certain political turbulence with a radical change of political class. Currently, the political situation in the country remains unpredictable given the weak state institutions and not substantial results of Zelenskyi team. Ukraine's local elections will be held in the autumn of 2020 and could be considered as a test of political credibility after decentralization process is completed and the Electoral Code is adopted. According to the poll from December 2019, 62% of Ukraini-

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[80] RadioLiberty, *France: Eastern Partnership Doesn't Mean EU Membership,* January 27, 2020, Rikard Jozwiak, Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/france-eastern-partnership-doesn-t-mean-eu-membership/30400380.html, (consulted on 19.02.2020).

[81] Kataryna Wolczuk, Hanna Shelest, *Could Zelenskyy's Strategy for Donbas Lead Ukraine Into a Kremlin Trap?,* Chatham House, 14.02.2019, Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/could-zelenskyy-s-strategy-donbas-lead-ukraine-kremlin-trap?utm_source=Chatham%20House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11313411_Publication%20alert%20Hanna%20Shelest%20Kateryna%20Wolczuk%20EC%2020200214&dm_i=1S3M,6QHHF,RS4VM6,QWL09,1, (consulted on 19.02.2020).

ans are satisfied with the president's actions.[82] The situation might be changed in conditions when citizens expectations are linked to tangible results around the conflict in the East of Ukraine, enhancement of Ukraine's neighboring relations and economic growth. A very high support for Volodymyr Zelenskyi during the 2019 elections questions whether he will be able to keep his popularity taking into account that his "Servant of the People" experiences internal conflicts.[83] The local elections will show how stable and credible the position of Volodymyr Zelenskyi party is.

Returning Crimea and Donbas: any progress with Volodymyr Zelenskyi ?

Now, almost a year after Volodymyr Zelenskyi was elected, there is no obvious progress in terms of Crimea and Donbas. The Normandy summit in December 2019 has not resulted in any practical outcome since, the ceasefire regime has not been reached and there are still many prisoners who have not returned home. However according to Mykola Kapitonenko after Normandy summit several important steps have been taken to strengthen confidence in relations between Kiev and Moscow in order to assure the "peace", in the region.[84] Thus, these two countries exchanged prisoners in september under the formula "35 for 35", considering as a small dose of trust in relations between these two countries.[85] Despite better discussions with the Russian side, the issues of the eastern conflict remain current in the context of ensuring control of the eastern border but also in the context of local elections in Ukraine, very important for unblocking the situation in eastern Ukraine but very complicated from a political point of view.

Economic situation: on the verge of default?

The economic situation in Ukraine is worsening because of COVID-19 pandemics. According to Zelenskyy' statements, without financial support of the IMF Ukrainian economy may collapse. For receiving money from the IMF, Ukraine had to adopt two laws (both were adopted during emergency session)The difficulties in the economic situation coupled with constant governmental changes could be used by Russia for aggravation of the conflict., Keeping in mind that the pandemics hit Russia hard too and that Russia is interested in withdrawal of sanctions, if Ukraine will be able to avoid default it's possible to make a prediction that the situation in Eastern Ukraine (at least during next several months) will remain the same and hopefully won't deteriorate.

Conclusions and recommendations for Ukraine

The EU's support is of a great significance for the political and economic stability of Ukraine in 2020. After Brexit and the other challenges faced by the European community, the European Union will likely be more focused on reviewing its internal policies. However, Ukraine has to continue the European path, focusing on harmonizing and fulfilling the Association Agreement with the EU. In relations with Russia, any step towards resolving the

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[82] Соціологічною групою «Рейтинг, *Суспільно-політичні настрої населення (13-17 грудня 2019),* Available at http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/obschestvenno-politicheskie_nastroeniya_naseleniya_13-17_dekabrya_2019.html?fbclid=IwAR0eRZI3VagZlahibg76ftK1Qmms-QskXzQ2UndoZk2X0WSftbf2waCKzwVM, (consulted on 19.02.2020).

[83] Kyiv Post, *Conflict inside Zelensky's party: Lawmakers accused of bribery to take polygraph,* Oct. 23, 2019, Artur Korniienko, Available at: https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/conflict-inside-zelenskys-party-lawmakers-accused-of-bribery-to-take-polygraph.html?cn-reloaded=1, (consulted on 20.02.2020).

[84] Institut fur Sicherheit, *Ukrainian Political Trends in 2020,* 6. Januar y 2020, Mykola KAPITONENKO, Available at: https://www.institutfuersicherheit.at/ukrainian-political-trends-in-2020/

[85] *Ibid.*

conflict in Eastern Ukraine would be difficult to achieve having several fundamental problems: control of border, local elections, withdrawal of forces, and amnesty.

Recommendations

- To proceed with the comprehensive reforms and to diminish influence of oligarchs in the country.
- To make parliamentary decision making process more inclusive, including opposition that will allow to avoid monopolist nature of the state governance and foster stability to reforms process.
- To keep national interest approach in the negotiations on Donbas instead of compromising.
- To launch a communication campaign to better disseminate the information on the positive role and efficiency of the AA and DCFTA that will be instrumental to foster positive perceptions of the EU and NATO in Ukraine and will tackle disinformation messages spread by Russia.
- To enhance good neighbouring relations with neighbors, mainly with Poland, Romania, Hungary and Moldova.

General conclusions and recommendations

Undoubtedly, the political changes in EaP gave a new impulse of political and economic perspectives of these countries, which are still looking for a balance in terms of foreign policy balance and democratic values. The presidential elections in Belarus and Moldova, local election in Ukraine are going to be a challenge in the conditions of increasing Russian interference in internal affair but also the stagnation or degradation of democratic values in these three EaP countries. According to the Freedom House Report for 2020 the Eastern Partnership countries experience rather stagnation than a progress. In the report, Ukraine and Moldova were reported as partly free, with limited political rights and civil liberties, both being dominated by a politicized justice and severe oligarchic influence, whereas Belarus was characterized as not free, with limited political and civil rights due to Lukashenko's authoritarian system.[86] Obviously the "anti-oligarchic spring" failed in the Eastern Partnership countries where the youngest government in the history of Ukraine dissolved against the backdrop and pressure imposed by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Acknowledging at the same time that achieving positive results in about 7 months in all areas it is practically impossible the cause being the endemic problems - the remuneration of the miners, the border smuggling, accumulated in the almost three decades of independence.

However, the end of the war in Donbas and the reintegration or reconnection with the territories occupied and annexed by Russia remain as a top priority for Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Concurrently, the fall of the pro-European government led by Maia Sandu in Moldova has allowed President Igor Dodon to create a new conjuncture alliance with the Democratic Party (PDM), previously associated with the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. In this context Igor Dodon's priority is to ensure political stability and effective governance at least until the presidential elections in the fall of 2020. The political instability in these countries, the fluctuating governments denote high-risk political developments in Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. Maintaining power through the populism promoted before elections prevails over the implementation of the strategic reforms necessary to ensure good governance and public welfare in all three countries.

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[86] Freedom House report, *Countries and Territories,* Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores, (consulted on 12.03.2020).

Recommendations

- To more actively counter the politicized justice and political corruption.
- To develop a common governments plan of measures to reduce the influence of Russia in the EaP format.
- To introduce legislative initiatives on a favorable investment climate for the Western countries (including protection of foreign investors), to continue adaptation of legislation to the EU standards and norms, including the transition to IFRS standards, to create well-designed special economic zones in accordance with UNCTAD' recommendations.
- To deepen cooperation with the international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as well as with European investment banks (e.g. EBRD and EIB) to improve crucial infrastructure and support job creation.
- To support "independent" media projects with "alternative content", oriented to anti-Russia propaganda
- To create common informing projects for Moldavian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian NGOs in the field of countering Russian fake news and interference in internal affair.
- To engage the pro-West diaspora of these countries in promotion of the European values through social media platforms or initiatives.

BLACK SEA REGION: THREATS AND FOREIGN POLICY OF ITS COUNTRIES

Ihor Kostitsyn, *Analyst in Transparency International Ukraine (Ukraine),*
Daniela Rusu, *Student of the Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences of the Moldavian State University (Moldova),*
Vladyslav Litvin, *Main specialist in Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (Ukraine)*

Key words: Black Sea region, foreign policy, national security, regional policy, balance of power.

Introduction

Security conditions in the Black Sea region are changing quickly. The environment includes protracted conflicts and a serious buildup of conventional armed forces.

The international relations literature define a threat as a situation, in which one subject has the capability or the intention to inflict a negative consequent to a subject.[87] What threatens security on the national and regional levels is related to environmental pollution, human rights, mass migration, micro nationalism, ethnic conflicts, economic problems, illicit drug, weapon, and human trafficking - goes beyond military sphere and is a matter of serious concern.

Being in constant change, the security environment in the Black Sea region is affected by the state of armed conflicts, geopolitical and economic interests of main actors, and the post-soviet and post-communist transitional profile of some states that, consequently, raise a level of security threats. Geopolitical interests of main regional actors and their willingness to express influence within the Black Sea basin also, may influence the escalation of these threats. The main concern of countries of this region is an establishment of unstable security conditions by the post-imperialist intentions from the side of regional actors, destabilization national security of small countries, which may lead to interstate crisis and interstate conflicts.

This article focuses on foreign policy of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, and on the current security threats in the Black Sea region. The authors conclude the article with a series of recommendations that could be useful in solving regional issues.

Romanian and Bulgarian policies in the Black Sea and threats they are facing

The positioning of Romania in the eastern flank of NATO and the EU, and in the point of interference of zones with a high level of the security risk (Eastern Neighbourhood, Middle East, and North Africa)[88], highlight the fact that security concerns overcome the responsibility of one single state. Bucharest recognizes many potential threats to its security, both direct and indirect, which have been growing in recent years. The continuous existence of frozen conflicts in the extended Black Sea and the possible emergence of new conflicts in the vicinity of Romania may generate negative effects at the regional level. Romania is committed to deal with this, as a member of NATO and the EU. As a NATO member, it is recognized as having strategic significance within the Black Sea and NATO discussions, even more actively after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, and sup-

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[87] Rosseau D., Garcia-Retamero R. American Foreign Policy and the Politics of fear. Threat inflation since 9/11, P.56

[88] National defence Strategy of Romania for 2015-2019, P. 12

ports NATO's aim to increase military spending and strengthen military cooperation, co-ordination, and interoperability.[89] Bucharest also shares the EU values and support democratization of weaker regional actors.

The Bulgarian unclear position towards military security within the Black Sea region make its neighbors see it as a possible factor of the destabilization. This comes with potential security issues for the whole Black Sea region. However, being a NATO and EU member state, it is committed to deal with the existing challenges, and therefore supporting the increase of military spending and enhancing military cooperation within NATO.

Nevertheless, Bulgaria has limited means to modernize its largely outdated weapons or even to maintain troops' level. On the other side, the statistical data shows an increase of military expenditure for Bulgaria in 2019, where almost USD 2127 mln[90] were spent on the advance payment of 8 US F-16 Block 70 aircraft. It is estimated that in 2020, amount spent on security will register a reduction form 3.53 billion leva in 2019 to 1, 94 billion in 2020.[91] This can be explained partly by continuous disagreement within the coalition governments on spending priorities and by a lack of government funds. Moreover, Bulgaria continue to maintain generally friendly relations with Russia and does not perceive it as being among the major threats to its security.

From one perspective, Romania and Bulgaria are members of the same organizations, the EU and NATO. In an ideal scenario, their positions regarding areas of cooperation should coincide and mutual support for security sector initiatives shared. In reality, Bulgaria does not have a clear vision of its defense policy within the Black Sea basin and strives to abstain from participation in the joint initiatives, such as the Black Sea fleet proposed by Romania. Sofia fears that increasing militarization of the Black Sea region can have a negative impact on the Bulgarian economy and tourism industry.[92] In such a way, Bulgaria is inclined to a stand-alone defense strategy, but Romania is actively involved in the frameworks of multilateral regional cooperation initiatives.

Both countries are members of the EU and have favorable conditions for economic development, due to their membership. On a bilateral basis, the EU has a serious impact on financing and assisting for projects concerning maritime transport, security, and environmental protection. It comes with the European Neighborhood policy for the East European Countries, and Romania and Bulgaria as the EU members being valuable regional actors.

Policy of Bulgaria for the Black Sea is to act as an intermediary between the EU, NATO, and Russia because of the strategic partnership in the field of energy security with the Russian Federation, and the existence of the potential to deepen cooperation in this field. In this way, their aim is to develop infrastructure and to become an important point of connection between European countries and new markets in the Black Sea (Caucasian Region, the Middle East, and Central Asia).[93]

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[89] Wezeman S., Kuimova Al. Romania and Black Sea Security, In: SIPRI Background Paper, 2018, P.3

[90] Military expenditure by Country, SIPRI, 2020 https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20in%20constant%20%282018%29%20USD.pdf (accessed on 08.07.2020)

[91] https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/10/31/bulgarian-cabinet-approves-draft-2020-budget/ (accessed on 08.07.2020)

[92] Bulgaria and Black Sea Security, SIPRI, 2018
https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/bp_1812_black_sea_bulgaria_1.pdf (accessed on 08.07.2020)

[93] National Security concept of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2019, P. 6.
https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/National-Security-Concept-1.pdf (accessed on 08.07.2020)

Here is to mention that there are two pipelines called Turkstream that run about 930 km across the Black Sea, from Russia to Turkey. The first is to supply Turkey, while the second one will carry gas to customers in Europe through Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary. The 474-kilometer Bulgarian stretch of the pipeline is highly expected to be ready by the end of 2020.[94] Thus, Bulgaria attaches particular importance to the economic cooperation within the BSEC framework as the only intergovernmental organization in the Black Sea region aiming to achieve sustainable development, as a result of the investments that represent an integral part of the policy for integrated regional development.

The Romanian BSEC chairmanship in 2020, aims at ensuring that intergovernmental economic cooperation will increase the relevance of the Organization for its member states, further enhancing the project-oriented approach, promoting sectoral cooperation in transport and connectivity, environment, climate changes, and healthy sustainable competitive relations. The Black Sea region is a valuable space for interstate cooperation, but a limited usage of regional structural tools, will cumber the sustainable development. Romania dispersed its policy in the Black Sea region from the perspective of a regional actor and its BSEC representation determined the priorities, for the regional development in 2020.

The expansion of transnational cooperation highlights an important outcome of the cooperation between Bulgaria and Romania. This outcome is the elaboration of the joint strategy for special development of the littoral and marine territories of the Black Sea in the context of the EU integrated maritime policy for the region. The necessity of security and sustainable development paths shall be a key priority for the policy development and relationship cohesion of the countries in Black Sea.

Recommendations

- Promotion of multimodal shipping, in order to search for optimal transportation solutions that will reduce the use of relatively expensive and environmentally unfriendly road transportation. This will happen at the expense of the efficient combination of different modalities where short sea shipping (the maritime transport of goods over relatively short distances) may provide a balanced framework for fair competition among seaports.
- The BSEC member states, to continue working together for identifying regional maritime priorities and actions that will be further included in the Common Maritime Agenda.
- The 2020 Romanian Chairmanship in BSEC will give a good opportunity to act in order to meet Romanian objectives for the Black Sea sustainable development and regional cooperation, and cohesion. For better cooperation, the regional actors should organize regional projects with the participation of all countries in the region, so as to enhance the linkage between them and show substantive progress in implementation of regional goals.
- Romania and Bulgaria can come with an initiative to establish a multi-level security dialogue, within the region, on issues of civil protection, organized crime, national security, cultural dialogue.

Turkey's policy in the Black Sea and the threats it faces

Turkey presents itself as a regional leader that attempts to maneuver between NATO and Russia in order to protect its national interests in the Black Sea region. According to Turkey's former Foreign Affairs Minister Davutoğlu, Ankara is in search of a "strate-

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94 https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-gas/bulgaria-expects-to-finish-russian-gas-pipeline-on-time/76150496 (accessed on 08.07.2020)

gic depth" of its geopolitical position[95]. A radical change in the balance of power in the Black Sea region following the developments of 2008 and 2014 pushed for a revision of the conventional approach.

1. *Maintaining status quo established by the Montreux Convention*. The regime of the straits established in 1936 remains in force and allows Turkey to preserve its privileged status. Turkey sticks to the Convention thoroughly, both during the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, and during Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014, despite the fact that the Russian authorities were concerned about the presence of the US vessels in the Black Sea beyond the normal timeframe.[96] In this regard, it would be interesting to see the impact of the construction of the Istanbul Canal that, according to Erdogan, will be used beyond the Montreux Convention framework and strengthen Ankara's standing in the balancing between Moscow and Washington.[97]

2. *Protecting its interests as a result of Russia's military presence in the region*. In 2016, President Erdogan highlighted to NATO that the Black Sea had turned into a "Russian lake" and that "history will not forgive us if we don't take action".[98] Russia in Crimea implements a harsh policy towards Crimean Tatars who ask Ankara for sanctions. But Turkey prefers to provide humanitarian assistance without interfering in political processes. While Ankara has recognized Russia's actions in Ukraine as illegal, it has stayed away from tough formulations or sanctions.

In addition, the military operation in Syria created a platform for Russia's advancement towards the "warm seas." Turkey has found itself de facto surrounded with the Russian military infrastructure from the North, East and South-West.[99] Instead of fighting ISIS, Russia intentionally acted to harm Turkey's interests from day one, striking the units of pro-Turkish forces and the Free Syrian Army that fight against the Assad regime, while also supporting Kurdish forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party.[100]

According to President Erdogan, Turkey needs to expand its influence via military bases in the Black Sea region and beyond in order to moderate Russia's appetite.[101] Today, Turkey has 8 bases in four seas and straits while building another one in Trabzon -- these actions fit into Turkey's concept of development as a sea power. Stronger military presence of Ankara in Syria in the context of Erdogan's growing authority inside the country and in the Muslim world, a favorable geographic position and control over sea, trade and energy routes, military technology accomplishments and powerful Armed Forces demonstrate the country's intention to become a regional leader by 2023.

[95] Exclusive interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, ex-Prime Minister of Turkey [Online source] - Accessed via https://365info.kz/2019/01/esklyuzivnoe-intervyu-s-eks-premerom-turtsii-ahmetom-davutoglu

[96] Valeria Zanina, You Can't See the Bosphorus from the Kremlin («Из Кремля Босфор не виден») [Online source] - Accessed via https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1083

[97] Ali Tuygan, The Montreux Convention: Russia's Perspective, EDAM, 28 January 2020- URL: https://edam.org.tr/en/the-montreux-convention-russias-perspective/

[98] Joshua Kucera, Erdogan, In Plea To NATO, Says Black Sea Has Become "Russian Lake", «Eurasinet», 28 May 2016- URL: https://eurasianet.org/erdogan-plea-nato-says-black-sea-has-become-russian-lake

[99] Boris Toukas, Turkey Has No Allies in the Black Sea, Only Interests, CSIS, 13 February 2018- URL: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/180215BlackSea_map_final_1.jpg?adpmku7TAlcJqq5xQQY-wj.t80CFYI9cY

[100] People's self-defense units, Kurdistan Workers' Party [Online source]-Accessed via https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Отряды_народной_самообороны https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Рабочая_партия_Курдистана

[101] Timur Akhmetov, Basic set: Turkey builds up military presence in the Black Sea. Why Ankara needs a new military base in Trabzon and does it threaten Russia's interests? (Тимур Ахметов, «Базовая сборка: Турция наращивает военное присутствие на Черном море.Зачем Анкаре новая военная база в Трабзоне и угрожает ли она интересам России), 18 December 2018 [Online source]-Accessed via https://iz.ru/824476/timur-akhmetov/bazovaia-sborka-turtciia-narashchivaet-voennoe-prisutstvie-na-chernom-more

3. *Militarization of Crimea – deployment of A2/AD systems*. Despite the superior quality of Turkey's ships and submarines, Russia has seriously stronger firepower.[102] After the occupation of Crimea, the Russian General Staff of the Armed Forces has revised the importance of the sea component and significantly strengthened its strategic position in the region.

Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, commented on this: "Fighting capacity of the Russian navy was exhausted several years ago, it was in harsh contrast with the Turkish navy. Some even said that Turkey fully owned the Black Sea. Now, everything is different."[103] In addition to the deployment of nuclear weapons that can carry missiles to the Turkish coast, the violation of the Russian airspace, the Russian Navy can expand to the level of the Turkish Navy, while the extensive spread and use of radioelectronic warfare will strengthen Russia's capacity to project its sea and military power far beyond the Black Sea basin. The key goal of Russia's nuclear triad in the Black Sea is to hamper NATO's defense of its members and provision of military assistance to its partners in the region.[104]

4. *Adjusting to the Black Sea policy of NATO allies without alienating Russia*. Romania's initiative to establish the Black Sea fleet in 2016 did not find support from Ankara and Sofia. The reasons included Bulgaria's reluctance to provoke Russia.[105]

At the same time, Ankara sticks to its political stance and is not accepting Washington's proposal on the permanent presence of military ships from non-Black Sea countries[106], thus preventing the "flag change" operation for NATO allies in the Black Sea[107]. Mutual ultimatums over sanctions for Turkey's purchase of Russian air-defense systems and the closing of NATO bases in Incirlik and Kurecik, the factor of Fethullah Gülen and the Kurdish issue have intensified a fairly moderate dialog between Ankara and Moscow. However, this hardly points to a long-lasting alliance as their positions on Ukraine -- including on Russia's aggression, Crimean Tatars and the role of Turkey in the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine -- are different.

Notably, Turkey has revised its approach to the policy of NATO expansion as shown in Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's statements at the Davos summit in January 2020 where he backed NATO membership for Georgia and criticized the reluctance of Western allies to open the door for Ukraine and Georgia to avoid provoking Russia.[108]

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[102] Comparative Analysis of the Armed Forces of Russia and Turkey (Сравнительный анализ вооруженных сил России и Турции), Center for Strategic Assessment and Forecasts, 12 November 2017 [Online source]-Accessed via http://csef.ru/ru/oborona-i-bezopasnost/340/sravnitelnyj-analiz-vooruzhennyh-sil-rossii-i-turczii-8104

[103] Russia Claims "Mastery" Over Turkey in Black Sea, «Eurasianet», 25 September 2016-URL: https://eurasianet.org/russia-claims-mastery-over-turkey-black-sea

[104] Russia Shows its Military Might in the Black Sea and Beyond, Atlantic Council, 6 November 2018-URL: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-shows-its-military-might-in-the-black-sea-and-beyond/ Russia Shows its Military Might in the Black Sea and Beyond, Atlantic Council, 6 November 2018-URL: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-shows-its-military-might-in-the-black-sea-and-beyond/

[105] The brief life of the idea for the creation of NATO black sea fleet, New Europe 8 January 2017-URL: https://www.neweurope.eu/article/brief-life-idea-creation-nato-black-sea-fleet/

[106] Turkey opposed permanent NATO presence in the Black Sea, rebuffed Romanian proposal, Nordic Monitor, 16 January 2020-URL: https://www.nordicmonitor.com/2020/01/turkey-opposed-permanent-nato-presence-in-the-black-sea-rebuffed-romania/

[107] NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next?– NATO Defense College, Rome – No. 141 – November 2017

[108] Emil Avdaliani, Turkey to Seek Larger Role in the Black Sea and the South Caucasus, Modern Diplomacy,2 April 2020-URL:https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/04/02/turkey-to-seek-larger-role-in-the-black-sea-and-the-south-caucasus/

Recommendations

– Turkey's pragmatic cooperation with the West is most likely inevitable, regardless of how different their views on democratic values are. Relations with the EU and the US will only be sustainable if Ankara at least abstains from the hostile-cycle approach to them while consistently demanding solidarity gestures from Western allies.

– Turkey's efforts to maintain operational compatibility with NATO and continue cooperation in military projects, as well as the pending bid for its future air- and missile-defense architecture (T-LORAMIDS) are of great importance. The US and the EU could support the Turkish initiative aimed at stabilization in the region provided that it coordinates such efforts with its allies.

– It would be reasonable for Turkey to deepen cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia by engaging them in the Turkish-Romanian-Polish security dialogue that could become a new driving power in the region, and it could act as a "curator" for Georgia.

– Shaping a positive perception of Turkey-Bulgaria connections with their "special nature" in all spheres, and increasing their regional relevance as NATO members regardless of disagreements should be important elements of Turkey's strategy for developing relations with Bulgaria.

– Only then will Turkey be able to speak with Russia on equal terms and use its "special relations" positively, as an asset, to stabilize the region. Its geographic position remains a strategic advantage that contributes to its multivector foreign policy.

Georgia's policy in the Black Sea and the threats it faces

In 2011, **Georgia** approved its new National Security Concept designed with consideration of the hostilities in August 2008. Russia's aggressive foreign policy and the occupation of Georgia's territory are indicated as the key national security risks alongside conflicts in other Caucasus countries, international terrorism and cyber threats. The Concept says that Georgia can build good neighbor relations with Russia if Russia takes the path of democratic transformations based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and begins deoccupation of the Georgian territory. The Concept highlights further development of relations with strategic partners, including Ukraine and Turkey, the US and Azerbaijan. Georgia's key foreign policy priority is NATO and EU membership.

The National Military Strategy passed in 2014 based on the national security concept marks Georgia's great interest in national and regional stability in interaction with the Black Sea and Caucasus countries, as well as NATO members. The Strategic Defense Review from 2017 specifies that the comprehensive military and political integration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Russia, militarization of the "republics", Russia's growing potential in NATO's southern flank and its Navy in the Black Sea weaken the West's approach to the Caucasus region, undermining its capacity to resist Russia.

The 2017-2020 Communication Strategy says that Russia's soft power aimed at undermining Georgia's public institutions, discrediting its euro-atlantic integration and strengthening pro-Russian and anti-Western forces is the main challenge for Georgia. In this context, the key principle is "total defense" that requires rational distribution of resources, creation of civil defense systems, development of the respective infrastructure, creation of effective reserves, and a system of mobilization, definition and synchronization of tasks in the context of interstate cooperation with NATO partners.

Georgia's national security system is developing and institutionalizing rapidly. Elaboration of the national legislation, creation of structures and the buildup of potential develop in parallel. While none of these processes has been completed so far, Georgia already

has a workable security system that can respond to the changing security environment and adjust within the framework of its capabilities to effectively respond to old and emerging security challenges.

Recommendations

- Black Sea security challenges cannot be solved without Tbilisi. Georgia's geographic position, its aspiration on defense initiatives and the proven commitment to Western and Transatlantic values make it an important pillar for the emerging strategies of cooperation with NATO.
- Successful implementation of the Substantial NATO - Georgia Package (2014) and the inclusion of Georgia's Coast Guard into the structure of the Standing NATO Maritime Group Two allows Georgia to increase interoperability with NATO partners and develop maritime infrastructure to strengthen the Black Sea security.

Russia's foreign policy in the Black Sea and the threats it faces

Russia has been competing with the key countries in the region for the military-political influence in the Black Sea since the time of the Russian Empire when it built the foundation of its Navy. This helps it to trade and maintain control over the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a new stage and challenge for Russia's interests in the Black Sea. Following the collapse, former Soviet republics focused on solving political and economic situations domestically, while the Black Sea region countries were additionally forced to resolve the status and the division of the Black Sea Fleet among themselves.

In May 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed three agreements on the details of the Black Sea Fleet division, the status and the terms of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stay in Ukraine's territory, and on mutual settlements. Russia ended up with a fleet of enormous fighting capacity that could carry nuclear weapons, and with most of the personnel. This allows it to preserve political influence in the region.

Russia's foreign policy is built on ensuring security and strengthening sovereignty. Russia views Turkey as the only possible power in the region, so it tries to maintain partnership and mutually beneficial relations with Ankara.

The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation says that the Black Sea region is regulated by the principles of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Charter[109]. Notably, the current format of relations with the Black Sea countries is unstable and fragile as it is based on economic pragmatism: Russia implements energy projects with Turkey and Bulgaria (Blue Stream, TurkStream). A special focus is on cooperation with organizations of different political-economic influence and scale where Russia sees itself among the world's leading countries -- from CIS, SCO, EAEU and BRICS to the Council of Europe, NATO and the UN.

The Black Sea region has strategic significance for Russia's foreign policy, therefore the Kremlin takes a number of actions to preserve its influence and leadership. Russia helps establish good neighbor relations with the neighbor countries, eliminate and prevent current sources of tension and conflicts in their territories[110]. According to this reasoning, Ukraine is one of those states. The 2015 Russian Presidential Decree on the Strategy of Homeland Security of the Russian Federation interprets the developments of 2014 in

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[109] Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation [Online source]. – 2016. – Accessed via http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451.

[110] Ibid. It. 3.

Ukraine as a US- and EU-supported anti-constitutional coup that turned Ukraine into a "source in instability… by the Russian borders"[111].

Using flexible network diplomacy[112], Russia is trying to regulate and reinforce its position in the Black Sea region -- for example, by building a navy base in Novorossiys, a project launched in 2005. During his visit to the base in 2010, President Putin spoke about the allocation of RUR 92bn to the construction[113]. The work lasted 15 years, but the Novorossiysk Base never replaced the Crimean naval base given the duration and the costs of the construction. As a result, a new way to reinforce influence in the region was found.

In spring 2014, the Referendum on the Status of Crimea, illegal and unrecognized by the UN, took place, followed by Russia's annexation. Russia thus solved the issue of previous agreements with Ukraine on the stay of its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, restricted Ukraine's access to the sea, and obtained additional leverage for pressure on Ukraine and the Black Sea countries.

In 2015, the new Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation was presented where the Black Sea Fleet holds the key position and is part of the Atlantic regional section[114], i.e. it gives Russia "southern" access to the World Ocean. Militarization of the Crimean Peninsula aggravated the situation and changed the balance of power in the region. Russia now controls the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea, while Turkey controls the southern coast. Romania and Bulgaria control the western coast to a lesser extent. Consequently, the Crimean Federal District created illegally in 2014 is a military bastion, not an average Federation entity.

Confrontation with NATO is another way to influence and pressure the region's countries. Russia-NATO relations were always tense despite intensified cooperation in the early 1990s under the Partnership for Peace program. But ideological and political discrepancies continued to affect the nature of these relations. The Kremlin sees the expansion of NATO and its approachment to Russia's borders and borderline regions aggressively. Russia prevented Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations to join NATO at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. Any assistance in euro-atlantic integration from NATO countries alarms Moscow, so it tries to force the Black Sea countries to stay in its orbit. The Russia-Georgia war in 2008 and the Russia-Ukraine war from 2014 till present offer illustrative examples.

Recommendations

- Russia should stop militarizing Crimea. Further militarization of Crimea only aggravates the region's position. According to containment theory, the West will take mirror actions to maintain the balance of power. When the situation gets out of control and directly threatens the security of European countries is a matter of time.
- Russia needs allies in the Black Sea region, so it is in its interests to keep mutually beneficial relations with Turkey. This will allow it to maintain intense foreign trade and access to the Middle East from the Black Sea.

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[111] Decree of the President of the Russian Federation [Online source]. – 2015. – Accessed via http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391

[112] Network diplomacy is a type of diplomacy that involves flexible forms participation in multilateral entities to effectively seek solutions in common tasks. Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation [Online source]. – 2016. – Accessed via http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451.

[113] [Online source]. – 2010. – Accessed via https://www.vedomosti.ru/realty/news/2010/05/07/baza_chf_v_novorossijske_obojdetsya_v_92_mlrd_rublej_soobschil_putin

[114] Ibid. It. 51-56

−   Russia will be forced to go for a dialog with Ukraine if it wants to solve many social and economic problems in Crimea -- such as water supply given its depleting reservoirs. The construction and reconstruction of the Mizhhirne (Mezhgornoye) Reservoir near Simferopol is an expensive project. According to the Russian authorities, its cost matches that of the Crimean Bridge[115]. However, Russia is unlikely to listen to the opinion of the Ukrainian side.

Ukraine's foreign policy in the Black Sea and the threats it faces

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened new development opportunities for Ukraine. But it failed to solve problems and issues of the past that the post-Soviet countries faced. Many factors affected the nature of relations between the authorities in Crimea and Ukraine, including the placement of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea as a politically sensitive issue, and closer cultural links with Russia rather than Ukraine among the Russian-speaking population. Economically, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was not a developed region between 1991 and 2014 and was always subsidized from the Ukrainian budget. Tourism was one of its key sources of revenues and the share of Russian tourists prevailed.

After the annexation in 2014, Ukraine faced a huge number of new problems. These include general destabilization, military provocations, violations in the territorial sea, blockade of ports in Mariupol and Berdiansk, the loss of the Southern Naval Base in Novoozerne, naval infrastructure, heavy industry, internal migration and economic downturn (the loss of Crimea is evaluated at 3.7% of GDP[116]).

The 2015 national security strategy says that Russia's actions are aimed at destroying the Ukrainian State and taking over its territory[117]. Therefore, Ukraine is directly interested in reviving its military and naval potential to defend itself from occupation[118].

Despite this, the Black Sea was never conceptualized in Ukraine's foreign policy as a separate topic between 2014 and 2017. For example, Ukraine presided at the BSEC in 2017 and declared that it was interested in implementing economic transportation projects in the Black Sea region. However, no significant changes have taken place since.

Ukraine tried to take specific steps in 2018 to reinforce its presence in the region because it faced yet another escalation of the conflict in the Donbas and the construction of the Crimean Bridge. It developed a three-stage strategy to develop its Navy by 2035 and approved it in November 2018.

The legal environment changed too. In 2018, the Verkhovna Rada considered a draft law to abolish the Treaty Between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait[119]. This will contribute to legal clarity and, according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, will give Ukraine an opportunity to establish the territorial sea regime.

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[115] How the problem of water supply is solved in Crimea [Online source]. – 2019. – Accessed via https://ru.krymr.com/a/milliardy-v-vodu-kak-v-krymu-reshaut-problemu-vodosnabzhenia/30230973.html

[116] Kremlin Aggression in Ukraine: The Price Tag [Online source] – Accessed via https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Kremlin_Aggression_web_040218_revised.pdf

[117] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Decree of the President of Ukraine [Online source] – Accessed via https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/287/2015#n29

[118] Decree of the President of Ukraine On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated September 2, 2015, On the New Version of the Military Doctrine of Ukraine [Online source] – Accessed via https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/555/2015.

[119] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Treaty Between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. [Online source] – Accessed via https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_205

Ukraine's fifth President Poroshenko signed the decree enacting the National Security and Defense Council decision on the termination of Ukraine's participation in the work of the CIS statutory bodies. Following the incident in the Kerch Strait in November 2018, martial law was imposed in ten oblasts of Ukraine. Additionally, the Law of Ukraine on State Policy to Ensure State Sovereignty of Ukraine in the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts[120] recognizing Russia as aggressor-state. In 2019, the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty was terminated.

Ukraine engages in different fora in the context of ensuring its security and enhancing the level of the Navy:

- In 2018, representatives of military intelligence services were invited to the Black Sea Intelligence Forum to discuss the situation and the strategy to counter Russia.
- Ukraine participates in annual naval drills in the Black Sea, including Sea Breeze with the US, Sea Shield with NATO, and Riverine as part of bilateral drills with Romania in the Danube.
- Ukraine participates in exercises in third countries: Platinum Eagle, a joint exercise, takes place at the Babadag military training facility near the Black Sea in Romania.
- In 2020, Ukraine presided over the Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Cooperation Forum established to improve the interaction of border services in the Black Sea countries.

It is important to understand that Ukraine needs exercises and consultations with international partners. From the perspective of national interests, however, Ukraine is primarily interested in the active and regular presence of NATO in the Black Sea region.

Recommendations

- Ukraine is in acute need of modernizing its Navy and defense funding. It should focus on the mobile and less costly production of the mosquito fleet. It has already done some groundwork on the basis of Gurza artillery boats.
- Ukraine should focus on conceptualizing the Black Sea region as part of the National Security Strategy.
- Ukraine should enhance communications and interaction with organizations within the Black Sea region, including the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank and the Three Seas Initiative as observers.

Conclusions

This policy paper strives to present the information regarding policies of the Black Sea regional actors and what threats they are facing. In this way, the authors describe the policies of Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Georgia regarding the concerns of each of the countries, their positions, interests, issues, and roles in the region.

Romania and Bulgaria have an interesting role in the region because their membership in the European Union and NATO make them act like intermediaries between the Black Sea countries and the mentioned organizations. There are expenses of the states for ensuring security, that demonstrate their concern and make them either to cooperate or to develop a stand-alone strategy, like did Bulgaria concerning military security development. The 2020 Romanian chairmanship in the BSEC give some directions in order to

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[120] Law of Ukraine on State Policy to Ensure State Sovereignty of Ukraine in the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts [Online source] – Accessed via https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2268-19.

meet a good level of cooperation within the region, especially in economic cooperation and transportation.

The key problem for Turkey in today's dynamic Black Sea security environment is keeping the balance between two extremes: the opening of the region to expanded NATO presence that brings a threat to Ankara's national interests and regional stability, and giving Moscow a free hand in turning the Black Sea into a "Russian lake".

The key vector of Georgia's defense policy has not changed since 2008. In terms of seeking political and financial support, Georgia remains permanently ready and interested in developing cooperation with NATO and its partner-states. Its defense documents define Russia's aggression as a serious threat to its security, hence the strategic significance of the Black Sea region.

The Russian Federation sees the Black Sea region as directly and strategically important for its national interests. So the Kremlin is taking a range of actions to preserve its influence and leadership in the region. Russia solved the issue of previous agreements with Ukraine on the stay of its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol by illegally annexing Crimea in 2014. This changed the balance of power in the Black Sea region. By including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation as the Crimean Federal District, Russia turned it into a military bastion as an element of containment against NATO countries.

Ukraine faced huge challenges after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in the Donbas. As a result, Ukraine is trying to strengthen its presence in the Black Sea region by conceptualizing the region in its National Security Strategy and its Navy Development Strategy by 2035 with a special focus on international negotiations on countering Russia's aggression in the Black Sea and on military and naval drills in the region. Importantly, Ukraine is interested in the active presence of NATO in the Black Sea region as this could be a serious containment factor against the Russian Federation.