

From geopolitical anomie to a syncretic metamodel of the Greater Black Sea Region – “Five Sea region”

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Abstract

The main goal of this study is to search for new effective mechanisms to assist in preventing the internationalisation of armed conflicts using conventional weapons and the creation of more weapons of mass destruction in the geostrategic region, the Greater Black Sea Region, which includes the countries of the “Five Seas” (Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Arabian Sea, and Mediterranean Sea), positive transformation of conflicts and the creation of a “Black Sea Security Community”. The methodological approach taken is based on the theory of meta-cognitive management, which implies a qualitative expansion of the dimensions for solving those problems that are unsolvable in the dimensions given today; a holistic approach focused on the multi-level and democratic participation of all participants in the process; and the method of geopolitical modelling being applied to discuss new forms and platforms for cooperation between those involved in confrontation in the Black Sea space. Innovation represents a return to the concept of syncretism in the scientific discourse for describing political and geopolitical tasks. The idea of creating a syncretic meta-model of Black Sea security is one way to improve cooperation between parties that have incompatible positions but are aware of common threats and the need to prevent them. Measures need to be taken for the countries of the Five Sea region to be fully integrated into the process and a new architecture created for the Black Sea Security Community. Scientific support is also necessary for the planning and implementation of peacekeeping processes in the Greater Black Sea Region.

Keywords:

security, Black Sea Region, metamodel, geopolitical modelling, political syncretism

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Introduction: Conceptual approaches and methodological aspects of the research

The authors of the research are also employees of public peacekeeping organisations that take part in negotiation processes at expert level, and also represent universities and think tanks in Ukraine and Georgia. They are engaged in scientific activities to search for new opportunities to strengthen peacekeeping processes and reduce the number of victims of *geopolitical anomie*. Participation in negotiation processes at expert level contributes to obtaining primary, exclusive information that can be compared and supplemented with secondary information set out in existing scientific works. The observations that take place have an open character and are part of the research, which is part of the project “Interdisciplinary comparative analysis of the complex system of the Abkhazian conflict via the innovative 4D-RAV-17 method”, supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation, Caucasus Laboratory of Geopolitical Modelling of the Caucasus International University, as well as the project “Developing methods of peace-building in the South Caucasus”, supported by Black sea Trust Fund and implemented by the Women’s Informational Centre (2021).

The article presents a critique of the reductionist approaches that dominate in practice for the description, perception, diagnosis, assessment, and understanding of conflicts and the organisation of the processes of their transformation and/or settlement. A holistic approach will make it possible to see and realise the existing problems and opportunities more systematically and take new approaches to modelling peacekeeping formats and security systems.

Problems of geopolitical anomie in the Greater Black Sea Region

The term “anomie” (French word: anomie – lack of law, organisation; derived from the Greek words: ἄ – negative particle, νόμος – law) was first introduced by Emile Durkheim and further developed by Robert Merton to describe the state of a society that is in the process of transformation, when the current social practices cause distrust and are questioned, as a result of which there is a lack of regulatory mechanisms for regulating social relations (Merton, 1968, p. 216).

Part of these relationships is the political component of the life of the society and, therefore, one can also speak of political anomie or “a sense of powerlessness, cynicism, futility, and apathy concerning the political system” (Farris, 1960, p. 53). The understanding of political anomie is also used to fix normative chaos or lawlessness. We think that this definition fully corresponds to the conditions in the considered geopolitical space of the Greater Black Sea Region, where permanent violation of the norms of international law and mass violence have taken on the character of a new “norm.”

The long-term practice has shown that the establishment of peace in a particular system depends on how much this is facilitated by the external environment – the supersystem. And if conflicts have obvious outside support, then peacekeeping processes to resolve them do not enjoy such a level of support. Moreover, they are often controlled by precisely those players who themselves provoke conflicts. These initiatives thus turn into quasi-peacekeeping processes. One of the indicators of this is the participation of obvious parties to conflicts as mediators (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2009a, p. 39). The problems of the Greater Black Sea Region represent a subsystem of the global crisis that all of

humanity is experiencing today. Existing international systems of checks collapsed and everyone found themselves in a state of geopolitical anomie and waiting for a steady condition to be established. The construction of new security systems is blocked by the low level of trust of the parties participating in a global confrontation with each other, as well as by the fact that they are not sufficiently aware of the degree of common threats.

The article focuses on the geopolitical macro-region of the “Five Sea” region. This expanded understanding of the term “Greater Black Sea Region” allows us to see, on the one hand, the problems that exist in the Black Sea countries, as well as to touch upon their links with conflicts that are more distant from this macro-region – in the four subsystems presented above. This obliges us to show concern for the creation of common approaches for building peacekeeping processes and a common security system.

The term “Greater Black Sea Region” reflects BSEC membership ([Cornell *et al.*, 2006](#); [Hamilton and Mangott, 2008](#); [Yazkova, 2012](#)) rather than actual geographic boundaries. The insufficient representation of several countries of the macroregion in it creates a high level of uncertainty and a low level of legitimacy for this international institution. The lopsided and selective representation of the Caspian, Baltic, Balkan, and Middle Eastern countries in this format is incomprehensible.

The phenomenon of favouritism is therefore fixed, which implies the patronage of satellite small countries by large countries (Russia and Turkey), “patronising” this institution. The proposed expansion may lead to the construction of a new Greater Black Sea Region architecture based on principles that deny the monopoly of individual players.

The need to create a Black Sea-centred model of the “Five Sea Region” is also determined primarily by the fact that people living in this unique geographical space are in a state of constant fear of new armed confrontations and are victims of geopolitical lawlessness. Hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded, millions of refugees and of the threat of increasing problems await. The social and moral responsibility of scientists and politicians obliges them to make a contribution to the humanitarian dimension of the problem.

The basis of the existing confrontations is the issue of access to strategically important economic resources and the establishment of control over their distribution. An important component is the extraction, production, and transit of energy resources. The fierce struggle for these resources leads to general economic losses that are not sufficiently studied and evaluated. The economic dimension involves the initiation of measures aimed at creating new rules of the game that take into account the interests of the local population, investors, manufacturers, and distributors. Taking the example of the events in Kazakhstan in January 2022, we see that the coup d'état was initiated due to a social revolt of the population, which protested the sharp twofold increase in gas prices in a country that is itself a gas exporter.

Along with economic issues, the issue of military-political security is on the agenda, in which NATO and Russia are the main players. The problem of the insolubility of existing conflicts and mass violence in the Greater Black Sea Region is associated with the dominance of reductionist approaches over holistic ones. A manifestation of reductionism is the reduction of complex systems of conflicts to primitive binary models.

Ignoring the situation in different subsystems leads to a deformation of the perception and diagnosis of conflicts, and as a result, to the adoption of ineffective decisions to resolve them. Strengthening the holistic component in political research could create new assessments and visions for the positive transformation of existing conflicts. For this purpose,

it is necessary to use the possibilities of political psychology more actively. Subjective perceptions of the picture of this or that political phenomenon form the language of description and, in particular, the modelling of these processes. Based on this, the real conflict is reflected in scientific works in the form of a derivative conflict that can be projected onto social reality. Unlike real conflict, these conflicts represent pseudo-conflicts. Therefore, settlement processes are also divided into peacekeeping and quasi-peacekeeping (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2009a, p. 35). Based on this, information-psychological conflicts and propaganda settings are formed. For example, the events in the Donbas (Ukraine) are considered by some in the prism of the civil war and internal conflict in Ukraine and they call these events a civil war; the second – in the form of an international conflict between Ukraine and Russia; others as a conflict between NATO and the CSTO. All these assumptions have the same reductionist characteristics; they seek to reduce the complex system of a given conflict to one of the components of the conflict. In contrast to those cases where we are facing individual erroneous assessments, here all parties are right in their way, but the mistake lies in the fact that they do not recognise the correctness of the opposite side, which creates another qualitatively different derivative conflict, represented by various reductionist assessments. This approach dominates in most scientific and expert works. Unresolved disagreements among scientific groups are a significant impediment. This relates to both professional conflicts and the projection of political tensions onto their societies. Moreover, it (the reductionist approach) is characterised by a totalitarian attitude – if the opinion of another scientist is different, then it can automatically be ranked among the “opposite” camp. The holistic syncretic approach that we propose solves this problem automatically. The conflict is presented as mixed, that is, containing all of the abovementioned components, as well as the relationship between them. Thus, the opposition of reductionist and holistic approaches to the description of geopolitical processes is put on the agenda. For any given reductionist political group, this holistic assessment represents a factor of irritation.

The problem of political linguistics and thinking deserves serious attention, since the deep basis of future international cooperation is the process of agreeing on terms and searching for a “common language for negotiations.” This is a fundamental and obligatory stage at the beginning of serious cooperation. This is especially true for the confrontational terminology, which underlies modern information and psychological warfare (Rusetsky, 2008, p. 36).

The political actions of the participants of the process are determined by the real or imaginary threats that they recognise or declare. Their awareness of common threats can create the basis for their cooperation and building a common security system. The fact that the participants in the process identify and understand threats emanating from each other does not mean that they cannot cooperate to reduce mutual threats and identify common threats. First of all, this concerns the threat of a new level of war with the use of weapons of mass destruction. A particular threat is posed by the prospect of the production and proliferation of nuclear weapons and the measures to curb this process.

The syncretic metamodel as an example of holistic metamodeling

Originating in Crete, the term “syncretism,” which has a historically deep political meaning suggesting cooperation and even a military-political alliance of the parties that are in confrontation, was actively used to describe interreligious contradictions, as well as in art, psychology, and philology. However, the possibilities of precisely

“political syncretism” have not been exhausted, and it can play a positive role in political science and peacekeeping practice.

In such a complex system as the “Five Sea Region,” there may be quite a few syncretic models. For example, Russian-Turkish cooperation, in which strategic adversaries join forces against Western competitors, can serve as a good example. The same cooperation of Turkey with the West (in various formats) aimed at containing Russia in the Northern Black Sea region has the same syncretic character. Also working, but less open, is the format of cooperation between Russia and the West in the matter of curbing pan-Turkish sentiments.

“Syncretic metamodel” is considered by us as a metamodel that seeks to combine existing security models created or supported by certain players. This is a holistic model that tries to combine reductionist models in itself, sometimes outwardly incompatible with each other. We can talk about the process of syncretic metamodeling of geopolitical reality as a new method and new political technology that can be used in international peacekeeping. This technology is presented in the developed Theory of Meta-cognitive Conflict Management, which focuses on the management of processes of administration. Based on the fact that processes are managed from different centres, this approach involves supporting the process of creating common platforms for cooperation and limiting threats (Rusetsky, 2020, p. 109; Süsser *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). Similar historical experience exists and requires additional research to expand opportunities. For example, during the Cold War, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) was established in Austria to encourage East-West scientific cooperation. Today, IIASA is tackling the global concerns of the twenty-first century (Raiffa, 2020).

The concept of awareness of common threats is presented in theory. Naturally, to understand them and to unite efforts in the future to prevent them, it is necessary, first of all, to identify these threats and their typology. This is especially true for those threats that can be considered common. At the same time, it is very important to assess how seriously the parties take these threats. In the context of peacekeeping, what matters in this regard is informing the general population about these threats and organising measures to influence decision-makers (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2020a, p. 87).

The theory is also focused on the practical application of the “win-win” concept in conflict resolution negotiations (Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 2011) and the replacement of the “fight for survival” setting with the “empathy and mutual support” setting (Kropotkin, 1907).

The meta-cognitive theory of conflict management considers conflict or crisis not unequivocally as a tragic scenario, but as an opportunity for strategic development. This approach was created by the founder of the General Theory of Social Conflict – Lewis Coser. It was thanks to this scientist that the concepts of “regressive” and “pluralistic” societies were introduced. Pluralistic societies, in contrast to regressive ones, consider conflict as an opportunity for development (Coser, 1956, p. 80).

The complexity of the task lies in the fact that we are dealing with a large number of participants in the process, but with the capabilities of modern technologies, it is not unsolvable. First of all, a more active integration of mathematicians, psychologists, etc. into political research is needed to expand the possibilities of science in peacekeeping. This approach, which is part of the Meta-cognitive theory of management, is presented in the monograph “Meta-political science arsenal for peacekeeping” (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2021).

Dimensions and formats of cooperation in the “Five Sea” region

The Greater Black Sea Region, especially in our expanded understanding of the “Five Sea region,” is just an assumed perspective. It is for this purpose that we propose its new structure, model, and some elements of architecture.

Martín Miguel Ángel Ballesteros (2015), an expert from the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, considers the geopolitical region as “a group of states, which, from the point of view of geopolitical studies, present a certain unity or integration, be it physical, human, economic, or political, which renders the actions in each of its parts closely related to the effects on the others” (Ballesteros, 2015, p. 3). In the case of the Greater Black Sea Region, we have a geographical model, a lot of heterogeneous unresolved economic and political conflicts, and the absence of a united Black Sea identity. Even though some experience of cooperation exists, the process of formation of the Black Sea identity is at an early stage of its development. It is the existing conflicts that led us to the idea of using a syncretic approach, which, based on historical experience, proves the possibility of cooperation and alliance of countries in a state of confrontation. From the closest historical experience, the most illustrative example is the process of creating the European Union against the backdrop of the tragedy of the Second World War.

In the context of this paper, it is worth considering the idea of “geopolitical region” as a part of global space with a specific set of characteristics, which make it distinct from other spatial and territorial systems (Gorelova and Ryabtsev, 2014, p. 24). American geographer, Saul Bernard Cohen, considered the geopolitical region as a derivative of “geographic region” and sub-system of a wider concept – “geostrategic region” being an important element of the concept for geopolitical analysis (Cohen, 2014, p. 37). The term “geostrategic region” concerning the Greater Black Sea Region is very appropriate since this region represents one of the most important zones of global confrontation today.

Vladimir Dergachev, a Ukrainian expert in geopolitics, believes that one can define the geopolitical region as an overall area formed by states “based on various criteria of neighbourhood and unity to ensure collective military and political security” or it is a “political-geographical and geo-economic multidimensional space with increased proneness to conflict fraught with serious consequences for the rest of the world” (Dergachev, 2010).

That is, to build a unified system, the existing confrontations and tragedies can be considered in the context of the development of the system. It all depends on how we deal with the current crisis. If we set the task of using this crisis to increase the well-being of the entire system, then we will get a win as a result, but if we choose the path of a permanent crisis, then individual players will benefit from this geopolitical adventure. That is why the process must be open and the interests of all players should be clear.

There are different perceptions of the Black Sea cooperation, which had (in a certain period) a tendency to expand. Before the collapse of the USSR, the situation in the Black Sea was controlled by two states – Turkey and the USSR (including Bulgaria and Romania, which were in the camp of the socialist countries). After the collapse of the USSR, new players appeared – Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine, so there were six players. Furthermore, Moldova receives symbolic access to the Black Sea and a Black Sea Seven is considered by some. In some formats, integration of new countries into the process takes place and, based on this, various types of functional and institutional types of cooperation are created within the framework of several structures, networks, programmes/projects that have

various areas of activity (environment, maritime space, energy, transport, communications, military cooperation, etc.), participating players (states, business, media, universities, municipalities) and so on. In particular, the Black Sea regional dimension is “served” by the following institutions: Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Network of Black Sea Universities (1998), Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea from Pollution (1994), EU Black Sea Synergy Program (2007), Black Sea NGO Forum 2008), The Black Sea Naval Forces Cooperation Program (2001), Sustainable Development Solutions Network Black Sea, Cross Border Cooperation Program (ENI) CBC Black Sea Basin Program), International Black Sea Club etc. Several Black Sea research centres operate in many Turkish universities in Ankara, Giresun, Trabzon. In 2008, in Tbilisi (Georgia), a model for the creation of the Black Sea Conflict Commission (BSCC) was developed, bringing together scientists from the Black Sea countries (Rusetsky, 2006), and other programmes were operating in parallel, e.g. the Black Sea Peacebuilding Network, supported by Crisis Management Initiative (CMI, 2010).

Scientific cooperation is developing within the framework of the Black Sea Universities Network, which was established in 1998 and today includes 120 universities from the BSEC countries. The network has the status of Partner of the Sectoral Dialogue of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation. It is possible to expand this network of universities, at the expense of trans-Black Sea universities. From an economic point of view, it would be very interesting to create a common educational space.

In 2014, the Geresun Initiative (Attar, 2012) was created, within the frameworks of which the Universities for Peace movement was formed, as well as the International Centre for University Diplomacy. It is important to define the special role of university communities in the cause of peace and sustainable development (Lepsky, 2020)

To enhance peacekeeping processes, according to the approaches of the Meta-Cognitive Management Theory, a high level of participation is of great importance. This is especially true for local societies divided by conflicts (Rusetsky, 2005). Among the new unrecognised quasi-states and/or occupied territories on the Black Sea area, it is necessary to single out Abkhazia and Crimea, which are located directly on the coast and are represented by 15 ports, which represents a strategic military-political and economic resource. An analysis of this issue led to the idea of creating another peacekeeping format between representatives of urban communities. In this case, the theory suggests the practical use of municipal diplomacy (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2020c).

The Black Sea and Trans-Black Sea dimensions

In our research, we propose a new model for the Greater Black Sea Coast region – the “Five Sea region,” which consists of two main parts. The first part is the Black Sea dimension of cooperation, and the second part is the Trans-Black Sea dimension of cooperation.

The Black Sea Coast cooperation can be viewed as a single system and some institutional formats were presented above, as well as through the prism of four different sub-systems – the Southern Black Sea sub-region, the Northern Black Sea sub-region, the Eastern Black Sea region, and the Western Black Sea sub-region. Each of these four has its subsystems.

Trans-Black Sea cooperation has a radial character and also consists of four main directions – Black Sea-Caspian, Black Sea-Baltic, Black Sea-Mediterranean, and Black Sea-Arabian.

Black Sea-Baltic dimension

Of particular interest is the Eastern Partnership (CoEU, 2009) (BUMAGA – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia), which was considered as an updated version of the geopolitical project “Prometheus”, which was supplemented by the second resuscitated geopolitical project “Three Seas Initiative”, which includes 12 Central European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia). Naturally, such a policy causes wariness in Russia, which does not lose hope of restoring the Soviet system of protectorate over the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Russian experts regard such projects as a mechanism to contain Russia, the creation of which is dictated by the fear of the growth of “Russian influence in the Eurasian geopolitical region” (Bityak, Yakovyuk, and Shestopal, 2017; Krasheninnikova, 2020). It is very interesting that in some works, the Greater Black Sea Region is presented precisely as the core of Eurasia (Diesen, 2017, p. 75; Minchev, 2012). That is why it plays a strategic role in all Eurasian (including pro-Russian) projects. To achieve political dominance, Russia uses “hybrid warfare tactics and the coordinated use of regular and irregular means of influence” (Åtland and Kabanenko, 2019, p. 10).

Trans-regional centres of the given direction have been established and operate in several countries. There are two centres in Ukraine – the Centre for Baltic-Black Sea Studies of Mariupol State University and the International Centre for Baltic-Black Sea Studies and Consensus Practices (Vereshchuk and Umland, 2019).

This dimension also includes several initiatives related to the Intermarium concept: The Centre for Intermarium Studies (CIS) (Institute of World Politics, Poland), Collegium Intermarium (Poland), scientific journal “Intermarium” co-founded by the Baltic Research Institute of Transformation Economic Area and the publishing house “Baltija Publishing” (Latvia).

In 2005, an attempt was initiated to establish an alliance of a different configuration of “Three seas” – the Community of Democratic Choice (Emerson, 2006), covering the region of the Baltic-Black-Caspian Seas (Founding member states: Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, and Ukraine; and Observer countries/organisations: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, United States, the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Partially, this space is covered by the structures of the Visegrad Four, as well as the Balkan-Black Sea Commission.

Arctic Security Vector determines the interest in the participation of the countries of Northern Europe and Scandinavia. For example, the Eastern Partnership project was initiated in 2008 by Sweden and Poland. CASCA (Caucasus and Scandinavia) formats are presented in various projects. In particular, the Scandinavian experience in resolving territorial disputes, in particular the Swedish-Finnish dispute over the ownership of the Åland Islands, is proposed as one of the options for resolving the Karabakh conflict. The Scandinavian countries are also represented in the Caucasus region at the level of non-governmental organisations. The most active are the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils (DRC, NRC), working in the field of providing humanitarian, social, medical, and other types of support to various categories of migrants. The Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is actively working (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2009b, pp. 103–106). In 2005, the “3 + 3 initiative” was put into practice, in the frameworks of which the Baltic states share their experience of regional cooperation with the states of the South Caucasus (Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2009b, p. 101)

Black Sea-Caspian dimension

The uniqueness of the Black Sea-Caspian space lies in the fact that it is central in the West-East system, and its central region is the Caucasus, which represents both the Black Sea and the Caspian sub-region at the same time. The capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, is considered to be the centre of the Caucasus. Unfortunately, the fact of the Caspian states participating in the Black Sea policy and the non-participation of the Black Sea countries (except Russia) in the Caspian formats is striking.

The Black Sea-Caspian region is part of the Black Sea-Far East or Black Sea-Pacific direction. From this point of view, the growth of interest of such Far Eastern countries as South Korea and Japan in this direction is very important.

This dimension includes the international regional organisation – Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development-GUAM which includes the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

The beginning of cooperation between the future members of GUAM – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova – can be considered their joint statement within the framework of the meeting of the profile committee of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on March 14, 1996, and on October 10, 1997, the process of rapprochement took shape in the form of the creation of the GUAM Consultative Forum. The project was created to promote the transport economic mega-project Europe-Caucasus-Asia, as well as to coordinate efforts to achieve independence from Russia. Despite great difficulties, the organisation continues to exist and develop at a slow pace (Belashchenko *et al.*, 2021).

Interestingly, the Public Institute for Political and Social Studies of the Black Sea-Caspian Region operates in Russia, which is named after Armenian public figure V.B. Artsruni, and in Turkey where the organisation is The Centre For the Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA). The Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus and the Silk Road Research Programme form a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Centre.

Black Sea-Mediterranean (South European) dimension

Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge Journals, London) regularly issues Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, which is the official journal of another Greek organisation, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP).

In this dimension, one of the active participants in the process is Greece, which has historical memories of Greek colonies in the Black Sea region and the systematic destruction of the settlements of the “Pontian Greeks” (Jones, 2017, p. 291).

Today, one of the most authoritative and well-known scientific centres is the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, which is an independent research structure, and in parallel acts as a “think tank” of the BSEC. Located in Athens, the centre annually organises several events, the key event of which is the International Black Sea Symposium.

The Black Sea-Mediterranean-Caspian dimension (to some extent) includes the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue, which was inaugurated in June 2006 and included the Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, Hellenic Republic, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine.

The Black Sea-Mediterranean direction at the same time represents a subsystem of the Black Sea-Atlantic vector. The importance of this direction, first of all, lies in the fact that, unlike others, through the straits of the Bosphorus – Dardanelles – Gibraltar, the Black Sea has access to the Atlantic Ocean and in this respect represents a subsystem of the Atlantic space.

Black Sea-Arabian dimension

In Western geopolitics, there is a concept of the Greater Middle East, the geography of which includes “the Arab world, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and the Caucasus – this is where the world’s largest fossil fuel reserve is and where several ambitious powers are actively seeking regional hegemony” (Garfinkle, 1999).

Instead of the term Greater Middle East, Shimon Peres introduced the concept of the New Middle East, which, according to the Israeli Prime Minister, included the above countries (Kolers, 1994). Some sources indicate that Afghanistan and Pakistan also belong to the Greater Middle East (Stewart, 2005, p. 401). And today, a special role in the New Middle East is played by Israel, which is actively cooperating with England and the United States. Arab-Israeli and Iranian-Israeli relations are of particular concern.

According to Israeli politician, historian, and political scientist Avraam Shmulevich, Israel will fill the void left by the US’s reduced presence in the Middle East. Furthermore, in his opinion, the Israeli-Arab conflict will come to nothing, and all conditions are in place for the formation of a new military-political coalition, the primary purpose of which will be to combat the shared enemy – Iran. The alliance calls for the involvement of Israel and the Arab countries with whom Israel maintains diplomatic relations. The possibility of developing Israel-Turkey relations in this area is being considered. Azerbaijan also fits into the configuration of the new union (Shmulevich, 2022).

Armenian experts consider that Israel also actively supported Azerbaijan during the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war (Melkonyan, 2021). In this conflict, for the first time, the only Islamic nuclear power in the world, Pakistan, has been active and is the only country in the world that has not recognised Armenia, which recognises Kashmir as an integral part of India. Israel has a direct and historical relationship with Crimea and, accordingly, to the Black Sea issues in general. Like other peoples, the Jews have a historical memory of the ancient Jewish Khazars who inhabited the Eastern Black Sea region. The Black Sea and, more rarely, the Sea of Azov was called Khazar (at that time, the influence of the Khazars in Crimea was very strong). Also, in the Middle Eastern languages, the Caspian Sea is called the name of Khazars. On land, the name “Khazaria” was attributed to the Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region for the longest time (in Byzantine and Italian sources until the 16th century) (Kizilov, 2010).

The interest of researchers is caused by the issue of the history of the creation of modern Jewish state formations and compact settlements in different countries of the world. Among them appears the project of “Crimean California.” On February 19, 1929, an agreement was concluded between the Joint, which officially represented the interests of the United States of America in the Soviet Union (there were no diplomatic relations with the Americans then), and the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, according to which Soviet Russia annually received from the “Joint” about one and a half million backed by gold, full-weight US dollars secured by 375 thousand hectares of Crimean land. This land was issued by shares, the buyers of which were about 200 US citizens, including such famous people as Roosevelt, Rockefeller, Hoover, Marshall, and MacArthur. That is,

the American Jewish lobby turned out to be the largest landowner of the “Crimean California” (orator.ru). This information is confirmed by Mikhail Poltoranin, who was the first prime minister in 1990–1993 and coordinated the project of declassifying the KGB archives (Poltoranin). The “Crimean project” in historiography is traditionally called an integral part of the Jewish agricultural colonisation of the 1920s and 30s, which was accompanied by projects to create a special Jewish national-territorial unit in the south of the Ukrainian SSR and the north of the Crimean ASSR (Mogarichev, 2019). However, the Jewish state – Israel was created on the lands of Palestine with the political and military support of the USSR and the USA.

Turkey also has historical claims to the Crimea, which actively supports the Crimean Tatars who suffered from Soviet repressions and mass deportation. Like Russia, it is carrying out systematic work to restore the old zones of influence in the zone of the New Middle East. Turkey is armed with the Pan-Ottoman and Pan-Turkish ideology, as well as the International Organisation of the Turkic States, which includes Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Hungary, and other countries as observers. A process of diversification and the creation of many efficiently operating specialist institutions is taking place.

Even though the Arab countries are not represented by a united front, the ideology of the “caliphate” actively seeps through extremist organisations and takes on an international pan-Islamic character. The project is presented by heterogeneous radical terrorist organisations and Islamic sects, as the “Caucasus Emirate” (Caucasus Emirate) operating during the first decade of the 21st century in the North Caucasus. As Bifolchi writes: «...While the Russian special forces were eliminating some of the most influential leaders of the Caucasus Emirate, the Islamic State started gaining popularity in the North Caucasus. In 2014 some Imarat Kavkaz leaders pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi opening the door of the region to the Islamic State, which created Vilayat Kavkaz (Caucasus Province) as a part of the ‘new Caliphate’” (Bifolchi, 2020, p. 22). It must be emphasised that the main terrorist threats come from the Black Sea-Arabian region.

The Black Sea-Arabian dimension should include the project of the Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport corridor, negotiations on the creation of which were initiated by Iran back in 2016, but which has only recently received the prospect of practical implementation. At the end of 2021, Iran reached an agreement with Azerbaijan and Georgia to conduct a test flight along this transit route by March 2022. According to the plan, goods in the southern ports of Iran will be delivered to Azerbaijan across the border with Astara, and then transported to Bulgaria and other European countries through the Black Sea ports of Georgia (Jalilov, 2021; Silk Road Briefing, 2021).

In general, the Black Sea-Arabian direction can be considered a part of the Black Sea-Indian direction, which covers a vast area, from Central and South Africa to Australia. It should be noted that India itself, in recent years, has stepped up its interests in the Black Sea countries. Unlike Pakistan, it has not yet openly become involved in armed conflicts but is trying to find political, economic, and cultural mechanisms of influence. This became notably obvious during the Karabakh war and the shift in the balance of power in the Caucasus region. As a counterweight of the formation of the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan triangle, India is attempting to strengthen the Armenia-Iran-India axis. The crux of the issue is the competition over transportation communications and routes that connect the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world. There are also Chinese interests, who have invested in the building and operation of Pakistan’s deep-water port of Gwadar, while India hopes to profit economically by transferring commodities through Iran and its deep-water port of Chabahar. There is an opinion that “the Zangezur corridor is tailored for the delivery of goods from China – India’s main geopolitical rival and trade competitor.

The policies of the Black Sea, trans-Black Sea, and extra-regional players

The geographical boundaries of the Black Sea region depend on who and when defines it as a region or develops the corresponding policy. There are two main approaches to the definition: a restrictive approach, which includes only the Black Sea coastal states, and a broader approach, which refers to the wider BSEC area or the wider Black Sea area, referring to the 12 BSEC members, namely: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine. However, the definition of the broader Black Sea region seems to be the most frequently cited. This notion first appeared in a relevant communication from the European Commission in 2007 (EU 2007) referring to all BSEC members except Albania and Serbia (since they refer to EU policy in the Western Balkans). This paper suggests that a strict geographical interpretation of the Black Sea region is neither possible nor desirable. Therefore, it is recommended to refrain from a specific definition of the Black Sea region. The geography of cooperation must comply with the principle of functional relationships ([Manoli, 2011](#)).

Other approaches to the definition of the Greater Black Sea Region also do not take into account the diversity of players. Within the framework of the forum in Varna, the work of which was aimed at assisting in the development of a 21st century European Macro-Regional Strategy (MRS) for the Black Sea region, the following vision was presented:

“The “Black Sea Region” is a geographical area encompassing the Black Sea basin and the territories of the six bordering countries – Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine (sometimes called “Black Sea Space”), considered together with four of their neighbouring countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, and Moldova. The latter countries are geographically and functionally associated with the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea for reasons of their location and national interests in taking part in the regional cooperation affecting the climate of economic prosperity, security, and stability in the wider area connecting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East” ([Pirinski and Deyanov, 2017](#)).

On the other hand, every opinion has the right to exist and the definition of the Black Sea region provided in this article allows us to realistically and pragmatically look at the situation and understand that regional security represents an integrated concept and, despite the different types of “blocking”, “monopoly”, “lobbyism”, it is necessary to define a policy for a common future in more transparent systems and conjunction.

The Black Sea-centric model presented in the article serves precisely to streamline the perception of this region and real players that have a direct impact on the transformation processes ([Brusylowska, Dubovyk, and Koval, 2020](#)).

The Black Sea regional powers, the Russian Federation and Turkey, traditionally try to prevent the penetration of external players because they perceive the entire Black Sea basin as a zone of their interests and proceed from the principle that if you do not have everything completely, then it is better to divide it into two than three or, especially four pieces. For Russia, the primary task is to restore full control over the former Soviet zone of the Black Sea. This explains the occupation of Abkhazia, Georgia (2008) and Crimea, Ukraine (2014). In this situation, it is impossible to take control of Romania and Bulgaria, which were also in the zone of control of the USSR, although these countries are members of the EU and NATO, they do not want to spoil relations with Russia and there are certainly historical reasons and motives for this.

Integration of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU influenced the change in the balance of power in the Black Sea region, which made the EU a similar regional player to Russia and Turkey. At the same time, its role may even become stronger in the case of Georgia's, Ukraine's, and Moldova's (GUM) integration into the EU.

In addition, these two countries are members of NATO. Complete expulsion of one of the three key actors – Turkey, Russia, or the EU – seems unlikely in the nearest perspective. Thus, we have the following key scenarios of the developments of events:

1. Creation of the “Black Sea Troika” (Russia – Turkey – EU).
2. Creation of the “Black Sea Four” (Russia – Turkey – EU – GUM).
3. Full control over Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova by one of the players – Russia, Turkey, or the EU. From an economic point of view, as well as from a military-political point of view, Russia has great chances here (by 2022).
4. Establishment of Russian-Turkish control over Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, through the destruction of pro-Western political elites and the division of zones of influence, just as happened in 1921.
5. Sharing of the influence in the GUM countries between the EU, Turkey, and Russia.
6. Accession of Ukraine and/or Georgia to NATO without or with the occupied territories of these countries.

This scheme considers just the Black Sea subjects, although a separate problem is the official entry into the game of such important trans-regional players as the UK, Iran, Israel, and others, as well as such important non-regional players as the USA and China.

At this stage, the United States is pursuing an active policy through the NATO bloc, which is represented in the Black Sea region by Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as through strengthening its influence and possible integration of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. The US policy is also supported by bilateral military-political strategic agreements with them.

After Brexit, the policy of the UK and EU countries cannot be viewed from the same perspective. Of particular interest is the cooperation between Ankara and London. A specialist from the Department of International Relations, Galatasaray University, Dr. Ali Faik Demir comments on the wide range of relations between the post-Brexit UK and Turkey as follows: a non-EU member U.K. can be a partner of Turkey in solving regional problems. From the perspective of the EU, the possibility of closer Turkey-U.K. ties in economic and political fields has already drawn reactions and criticism. The U.K.'s Mediterranean, Africa, Caucasus, and Middle East policies will be more important for Turkey after this point ([Yarar, 2021](#)).

Great Britain and Turkey control the movement of ships in the Black Sea-Mediterranean basin. Turkey has been supported by Great Britain more than once in wars with Russia. It is very symbolic that in the fort of Gibraltar, the British installed the Russian guns they had obtained during the Crimean campaign of 1858. Great Britain, despite a 300-year conflict with the Spaniards, continues to control this strait, and also seeks to control the Black Sea-Caspian direction through such economic projects as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, the uniqueness

of which lies in the fact that it directly connects the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas. The main pipeline operator is BP (British Petroleum), which owns the majority (30.1%) of the shares. And in all these projects, elements of Anglo-Turkish strategic cooperation are visible, which is actively supported by the United States and Israel.

In the region, China has also become active, especially in the context of the transcontinental project “One Belt, One Road,” (the “Belt & Road Initiative”) ([Pirinski and Deyanov, 2017](#), p. 10). Although relations between Turkey and China remain strained over the Uyghur issue, and between China and Russia over Syria, Libya, and the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia ([Martin, 2021](#)), China can be seen as an ally of both Turkey and Russia in the matter of limiting the Western presence in the region, and at the same time, an ally of the West in the context of limiting the Russian-Turkish monopoly. It is also possible that Russian-Chinese cooperation will be strengthened to contain the advance of NATO.

On the Russian part, researchers define these actions as defensive ones ([Kuryljov, 2020](#); [Zhiltsov, 2019](#), pp. 153, 157) while presenting their opinions on the use of the “soft force” by the opponent, as well as threats related to NATO’s progress to the borders of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, the Ukrainian leadership has very limited freedom of action, and this is not a problem of external forces, but a problem of the level of political legitimacy about its population, some parts of which have different geopolitical orientations. The Moldovan and Georgian elites, who are in power, have the same problem. These countries have two possible development paradigms. One suggests their collapse or disintegration into zones of influence controlled by different regional powers (this is the political reality of today, fixed in the main threats of the EU Black Sea Strategy document), or they face the need to create in these three countries with ideologically “divided societies” ([Lijphart, 1999](#)) governments of “National Accord” and the building of security communities at national levels.

A concept of “security community” was introduced by Karl Deutsch in his work “Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organisation in the Light of Historical Experience” back in 1957 and implied a community where there is a “real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way” ([Deutsch *et al.*, 1957](#), p. 5). The main idea of Deutsch’s work is that mutual trust and common identities are the main factors for building confidence in the peaceful development of relations between states. While developing Deutsch’s concept, Emanuel Adler E. notes that “from the perspective of pluralistic security communities, real “positive” peace does not require the transcendence of the nation-state or the elimination of existing cultural and ethnic loyalties and identities or full integration into a single state” ([Adler, 2011](#)). Henceforth, various aspects of “security community” have been analysed in the works of [Bellamy \(2004\)](#), [Tusicsny \(2007\)](#), [Valters, Rabinowitz, and Denney \(2014\)](#), and [Ditrych \(2014\)](#).

A thesis of perception of “common threats” is also clearly presented in the theory of alliance formation and common defence policy. Usually, alliances are presented as a type of international organisation or form of governance aimed at pooling the capabilities of their members to meet their interests ([Fedder, 1968](#), p. 68). In the context of one of the Black Sea conflicts, the Abkhazian crisis, the “security community” concept was first proposed by [Rusetsky and Dorokhina \(2020b\)](#) in their paper “Abkhazian crisis: from the Concept of Awareness of Common Threats to the Building of an “Abkhazian Security Community” ([Rusetsky and Dorokhina, 2020b](#), pp. 129–131). The concept was adapted

to the specific character of this conflict-related not only to the dimension of international relations. The authors of the research have classified the political components of the crisis and proposed a model of Abkhazian political crisis that includes both domestic, as well as international components of the crisis. The scientific novelty of this research paper consists in the fact that in contrast to the approach of Karl Deutsch and his followers, the process of building a security community is not limited to states, but also includes non-state actors (regional and municipal authorities, universities, business corporations, and civil society institutions, unrecognised states, de facto authorities, organisations, and political institutions, which represent the interests of refugees, as well as communities) (Rusetsky, 2004). In the given current political realities, all real players should have a seat at the bargaining table. They should not be squeezed out of the processes, otherwise, each of them may become a threat to the peace process.

A concept of awareness of the common threats system has been presented to find ways out of the crisis, which would be adequate and mutually beneficial for all participants of the process in question. A common threats system (CTS) means an aggregate of phenomena threatening the security of all participants of a process. They may be recognised or unrecognised (i.e. threats may really exist but communities may not be aware of them).

Conclusion

This article is applied in nature and does not claim to be considered *fundamental research*. It aims to achieve specific peacekeeping goals using specific scientific knowledge. In particular, it belongs to the subcategory of *exploratory research*, defining a special direction of the Black Sea-centric geopolitical research. The article presents some *developments* that require additional analysis for their further practical implementation.

The research offers an expanded understanding of the Greater Black Sea Region and a new architecture for building a common security system. The possibility of creating a syncretic metamodel that combines existing models and visions of a reductionist nature is being considered. The Black Sea dimension, as well as four radial dimensions are being considered: the Black Sea-Baltic; Black Sea-Mediterranean; Black Sea-Caspian and Black Sea-Arabian. Arctic; Atlantic; Indian and Pacific directions are also considered. The concepts of Black Sea, trans-Black Sea and extra-Black Sea players are introduced, which will help in the future process of systematisation and modelling.

All these opportunities are used to strengthen the international peacekeeping process aimed at the transition from a state of geopolitical anomie to a community of security and development.

The theory of meta-cognitive conflict management is used in the article, which forms a clear setting for the transition from reductionist thinking to holistic thinking, as well as from a state of permanent confrontation to a state of political syncretism (Rusetsky, 2021). It also suggests the need to strive from a regressive society to a pluralistic one (Coser, 1956), in which the crisis is not seen as a path to tragedy, but as an opportunity to move to a new level of development. Instead of looking for a threat in each other, the concept of awareness of common threats is proposed, and instead of the principle of “struggle for survival” – the principle of “mutual assistance.” This position is also strengthened by a win-win and common victory approach.

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