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International Political and Security Potential of Ukraine within the Baltic–Black Sea Region and Ukraine’s Participation in Regional Military-Political Cooperation and Integration Processes

1. Introduction

The topicality of the study is determined by the importance of Ukraine’s integration with the Baltic–Black Sea region in order to deter the Russian threat. This could be accomplished through the unification of military forces and the development of a common political course to counteracting Russian expansion. The role of Ukraine in the activities of these associations is especially important, as the Ukrainian state can act as a deterrent against the expansion of the geopolitical influence of the Russia on European states.

The aim of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the military-political potential of Ukraine and other members of the Baltic–Black Sea Union (BBSU) in the context of their integration into the geopolitical union.

This goal implies the following research tasks:

- to find out the historical preconditions of Ukraine’s cooperation with the countries of the Baltic–Black Sea region;

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- to analyze the military and political potential of Ukraine and other members of the Baltic–Black Sea Union;
- to substantiate the importance of the creation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union in order to guarantee the security of the European territorial space.

Many Ukrainian scholars are discussing the problems of national, regional and international security. Such analysts as Alexander Kramar, Edward Lucas and Andreas Umland are focusing on hypothetical strategies and alternative ways of resisting ongoing military aggression from Russia. Existing studies of the problem of Baltic–Black Sea cooperation and related integration processes were conducted by Fatma Beyoglu, Nver Mkhitarian, Elena Alekseeva and Ihor Lipkan. However, these works were devoted to political and economic issues in this region. The theoretical basis for a political analysis of regional security in the Baltic–Black Sea region has been informed by Ukrainian and foreign political scientists Ruslan Greenberg, Vladimir Dergachev, Volodymyr Manzhol, Yuriy Matvievsky, Gregory Perepelytsia, Maryna Strezhneva, Tetyana Tatarenko, as well as the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the independent Ukraine Anatoliy Zlenko.

2. The preconditions for creation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union

Geopolitical attempts to unite the Baltic–Black Sea region began before the end of the First World War. During the Cold War, some of the Baltic–Black Sea region countries were part of the USSR, with others being Soviet satellites. In the post-bipolar period, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, NATO and EU enlargement to the East has strengthened the West's position in Central and Eastern Europe. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have become an outpost of the West *vis-à-vis* Russia.

The aggravation of the political situation in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in the Donbas showed that the national security and defense was in critical condition, and that Ukraine could not by itself secure its sovereignty and territorial integrity. All this was the impetus for consolidating Ukraine's strategic course for EU and NATO membership in the country's Constitution on February 7, 2019.

However, this is a long-term priority, calling for ways and partners who, based on common interests, will be able to unite with Ukraine in a military-political alliance. And the Baltic–Black Sea Union could be such an alternative to NATO. Although the idea of this regional integration project is not new, its implementation still needs to be institutionalized. In order to speed up this process, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of this integration and focus on the benefits that the BBSU can bring to the security of both the Baltic–Black Sea region and the European Union as a whole.

Ukraine's geostrategic importance is explained by its territorial location: Ukraine can control access to the European Union and play the role of a defensive fortress against Russian expansion. Zbigniew Brzezinski, under the influence of Bismarck's ideas, claimed that without Ukraine Russia cannot restore or remain an empire². This Ukraine's geopolitical and historical context and military potential would allow the country to join the circle of geostrategic players, among which Ukraine occupies an important position between Russia and the West.

Russia's desire to restore its imperial power through the conquest of Ukraine was also foreseen by British researcher Gelford Mackinder. In his article "Geographical Axis of History" he emphasizes that in the geographical space of Eurasia or «Hartland», Russia occupies a strategically advantageous position³; however, to restore an empire, Russia needs control over Central and Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine. Returning to historical retrospect, Russia was a weak peripheral state at the time when Ukraine was part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Ukraine was a powerful bastion that secured the position of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was only after the conquest of Ukraine that Russia suddenly became an empire with a favorable position in the international arena.

² Z. Brzezinski (2010), *Velikaya shahmatnaya doska: Gospodstvo Ameriki i ee geostrategicheskie imperativy* [The Great Chessboard: American Dominance and its Geostrategic Imperatives]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya (in Russian).

³ H.D. Mackinder (2005), *Heohrafichna vis istorii* [Geographical axis of history]. *Nezalezhnyi kulturolohiichniy chasopys «YI»*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n39texts/mackinder.htm>.

However, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political map of the world has changed, and Ukraine gained independence. Russia's dissatisfaction with this situation and its imperial syndrome led to Russian aggression in 2014, thus threatening not only Ukraine's sovereignty but also the entire Western European world. After all, such a violation of international law by Russia is clear evidence that no international agreements or norms can stand in the way of Russian interests. This highlights the importance of returning to the Baltic–Black Sea axis in European geopolitics.

After gaining independence, Ukraine's foreign policy efforts have been aimed at becoming a member of the Council of Europe, and later – of the EU and NATO. Development of Ukraine's defense capabilities has also been a policy priority. Thus, the 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty attached to Ukraine the status of a non-nuclear⁴ state. The 1994 Memorandum of Security Guarantees was signed in Budapest. Through the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine has effectively acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons³, with Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom being guarantors of Ukraine's security.

However, the political events of 2014 forced Ukraine to change the vector, pay more attention to national security and defense, and do not count on protection from other states. Ukraine has depended heavily on the imposition and maintenance of sanctions against Russia by the United States and the European Union, as well as on the effectiveness of the mediation of France and Germany in the Normandy format. However, it may seem lately that Western European countries are not very interested in defending Ukraine's position. There are grounded fears of gradual disintegration of the EU sanctions regime against Russia, apathy toward the Ukrainian issue is growing while further tightening of the anti-Russia sanctions evokes less and less enthusiasm among EU member states.

⁴ Memorandum pro harantii bezpeky u zviazku z pryednanniam Ukrainy do Dohovoru pro nerozpovsiudzhennia yadernoi zbroi [Memorandum on security guarantees in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons]. (Zakonodavstvo Ukrainy, 1994). Retrieved from: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158.

The escalation of Ukraine's military conflict with Russia prompted the European Parliament to adopt a resolution on February 16, 2017, following a report by Guy Verhofstadt entitled "Possible Evolutions and Adjustments to the Current Institutional Structure of the European Union" calling on the European Council to develop a common defense policy may lead to the formation of the European Defense Union⁵. Given the difficulty of gaining EU and NATO membership in the short term, as well as the tendency to gradually reduce the solidarity of EU member states with Ukraine, Ukraine should look for a new format of relations with the EU and NATO or individual member states of these associations in the military-political sphere. A return to the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Union may result in strengthened the security and defense not only of Ukraine but also of neighboring countries, which may also be exposed to the Russian threat in the future. Development of strategic relations between Ukraine, Poland, Turkey, the Baltic States, Belarus, Central and South-Eastern Europe, the Transcaucasian region may contribute to the formation of regional stability and security structures from the Baltic and Black Seas to the Balkans⁶. Close cooperation on security policy with the countries of Central Europe and the Baltic-Black Sea region could become for Ukraine a transitional stage of integration into a united Europe⁷. The formation of a strategic triangle Poland-Ukraine-Turkey, with the possible participation of other geopolitically important countries could serve as the basis for regional stability of the Baltic-Black Sea region and Central Europe as a whole⁸.

⁵ Defence: MEPs push for more EU cooperation to better protect Europe. (European Parliament, 2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20161117IPR51547/defence-meps-push-formore-eu-cooperation-to-better-protect-europe>.

⁶ O. Soskin (1996), Rol Ukrainy u stvorenni novoi heoekonomichnoi systemy u Tsentralnii Yevropi [The role of Ukraine in creating a new geoeconomic system in Central Europe]. Ekonomichniy chasopys. Retrieved from: <http://soskin.info/news/9.html>.

⁷ O. Soskin (2006), Baltiia-Chornomoria-Kasprii: kontury antymonopolnoho alian-su [Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian: outlines of the antitrust alliance]. Retrieved from: <http://soskin.info/news/2131.html>.

⁸ Ukraina 2000 i dali: heopolitychni priorytety ta stsensarii rozvytku [Ukraine 2000 and beyond: geopolitical priorities and development scenarios]. (Natsionalnyi instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen, 1999). Retrieved from: <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n18texts/rnbu.htm>.

3. Support of the Baltic–Black Sea Union by other countries

The Baltic–Black Sea Union is for an especial interest to Poland, where it has received the support of Presidents Lyokh Valencia with the idea of the Black Sea–Baltic Axis NATO-bis, Lyokh Kaczynski and Andrzej Duda. They have argued that Poland should no longer be a buffer zone, and should be the eastern wing of NATO. The main idea is that the countries of Eastern Europe, located between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas, in order to preserve their independence and identity should be integrated as much as possible into union, so as not to be absorbed by the post-industrial West or a chauvinistic Russia.

Poland's support for the project may, first of all, be due to its concern about Angela Merkel's statement: "Our common task should be the return of Germany to the leadership of Europe"⁹. Thus, Poland has given priority to union with Ukraine in order to resist Germany. In particular, Poland has provided military assistance to Ukraine within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and acted as Ukraine's advocate in European forums. Poland understands potential threat from Russia, so it is interested in cooperation with Ukraine and joining a military and political alliance based on common interests.

Polish relations with Belarus could develop in the same direction as with Ukraine, but their full implementation should be expected after the elimination of the pro-Russian regime in Belarus. Poland is ready and eager to play an active role in Belarus' integration process with BBSU. However, the institutionalization of the Baltic–Black Sea Union is constrained by the fact that this project is not the main vector of Poland's foreign policy. The idea of the Union is supported mainly by Polish nationalists, on condition of the leading role for Poland. This option may be acceptable for Ukraine, given the greater economic development of Poland, but the Baltic countries, especially Lithuania, will not agree to unite on such terms.

⁹ V.G. Baranovskij (2010), *Mir 2020: Rossijskaya i centralno-vostochnoevropejskaya perspektivy* [World 2020: Russian and Central East European Perspectives]. Moscow: IMEMO RAN (in Russian).

In paragraph 36 of 2008 Declaration of the Bucharest Summit there was reaffirmed the importance of preserving the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security: «We reaffirm the continued importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security. In this regard, we support progress in consolidating regional ownership through the effective use of existing initiatives and mechanisms. The Alliance will continue to support, as appropriate, these efforts, guided by regional priorities based on transparency, complementarity and comprehensiveness, with a view to developing dialogue and cooperation between the Black Sea countries and with the Alliance»¹⁰.

Supporters of the Baltic–Black Sea Alliance also include former Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas and Prime Minister Kazimira Prunskene, and one of the leaders of the Belarusian National Front Zenon Pozniak, who proposed creating the Baltic–Black Sea Union as a buffer international entity without military bases of NATO and Russia.¹¹ In 2010, the “Belarusian Development Group”, on behalf of President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, prepared a report entitled “Belarus 2018: to regional leadership based on sovereign development of the country”, which justified the need to create a zone of economic and political cooperation among countries of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the Baltic–Black Sea Union has been sharply criticized by the Belarusian leadership and society as an anti-Russian alliance.

On December 5, 2014, in Kyiv, the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Belarusian Freedom Party held a press conference on the topic: “Creation of the Alliance of Baltic–Black Sea Nations”.¹² Following the press conference, an official memorandum was signed by representatives from Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Georgia. The chairman

¹⁰ Deklaratsiia Bukharestskoho samitu [Declaration of the Bucharest Summit]. (NATO, 2008). Retrieved from: https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natolive/official_texts_8443.html.

¹¹ L. Rassoha (2006), Balto-chernomorskoe partnerstvo: perspektivy est [Baltic–Black Sea partnership: there are prospects]. Ukraina i svit sohodni, 9th ed.

¹² U Kyievi stvoryly Alians Balto-Chornomorskykh natsii dlia borotby z ahresiieiu Rosii [An Alliance of Baltic and Black Sea Nations was formed in Kyiv to combat Russian aggression]. (Radio Svoboda, 2014). Retrieved from: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26727502.html>.

of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists Stepan Bratsyun noted that the main goal of the Alliance is “to unite efforts to protect against an aggressive imperial Russia and strengthen contacts between politicians and the public in the Baltic and Black Sea regions in order to restore regional security. “The creation of the Alliance was officially announced at the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Baltic–Black Sea Region: Socio-Political Current Affairs”¹³, which took place on November 21, 2014, in the Ukrainian House and was timed to celebrate Freedom and Dignity Day of Ukraine and the 71st anniversary of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations.

On May 25, 2015, the Alliance signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Georgian United National Movement, the NGO “Apriori”, the Kazakh Opposition, and the Anti-Dictatorial Front. One of the objectives of such cooperation was to hold actions “Abkhazia is Georgia”, “Ossetia is Georgia”, and “Crimea is Ukraine”, as well as to create the Center of Georgian reformers who should promote reforms in Ukraine¹⁴. Thus, the Baltic–Black Sea Union has always been relevant during crises and wars, i.e. the current activation of this geopolitical project in the light of Russia’s aggressive policy towards Ukraine and Russia’s disregard for international law.

However, German experts, such as Andreas Umland, are skeptical about such union, as it would turn Poland into a regional leader, and thus limit Germany’s influence in the EU and the Eastern European region¹⁵.

¹³ Memorandum politychnykh ta hromadskykh orhanizatsii Aliansu Balto-Chornomorskykh Natsii (ABChN) [Memorandum of Political and Public Organizations of the Alliance of Baltic and Black Sea Nations (ABBSN)] (Ukrainskyi pohliad, 2014). Retrieved from: <http://ukrpohliad.org/komentari/memorandum-polity-chny-h-ta-gromads-ky-h-organizatsij-al-yansu-balto-chornomors-ky-h-natsij-abchn.html>.

¹⁴ Gruzino-ukrainskaya organizaciya budet nazvana v chest pogibshogo v Ukraine gruzinskogo dobrovolca [Georgian-Ukrainian organization will be named in honor of the Georgian volunteer who died in Ukraine]. (Gruziya onlajn, 2015). Retrieved from: <https://www.apsny.ge/2015/mil/1430870128.php>.

¹⁵ A. Umland (2016), Die Idee des Intermariums: Ein mittelosteuropäischer Pakt gegen russischen Neoimperialismus [The idea of the Intermarium: a Central Eastern European pact against Russian neo-imperialism]. Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen. Retrieved from: <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/die-idee-des-intermariums-ein-mittelosteuropaischer-pakt-gegen-russischen-neoimperialismus/>.

The Baltic–Black Sea Union is actively supported by some US analysts, including George Friedman, chairman of Stratfor, an influential global intelligence and strategic forecasting company. In his book, *The Next Decade*, published by Stratfor, Friedman forecasted for the events in Ukraine¹⁶, and concluded that the United States should not allow Russia to strengthen its position and spread its influence throughout the European peninsula. America must move from a policy of containment of the Soviet era to a new concept, which Friedman called the Intermarium¹⁷. In essence, the Intermarium project is the current basis for the creation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union, which could limit Russian hegemonic ambition. After the Soviet Union has disintegrated and Russia's neighbors ceased to be its satellites, a new geopolitical alliance is needed that will expand its borders toward Russia and secure Europe and America from Russian domination.

George Friedman explains that it is the countries along the geographical arc from Estonia to Azerbaijan that should become the co-founders of the Baltic–Black Sea Union because of their common interest in preserving internal stability and guaranteeing national security. After all, Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine have shown that Russia seeks to restore its influence in Europe, regaining the title of an empire.

Therefore, according to George Friedman, the Baltics, Moldova and the Caucasus may be vulnerable to Russian geopolitical gambling. These countries might share in the potential benefits that the Baltic–Black Sea Union likely to produce. The Baltic countries tend to see such an alliance not as an offensive military force, but primarily as a check on Russia's expansion.

¹⁶ Fridman Dzh. (2010), Geopoliticheskoe puteshestvie Doktora Fridmana. Ukraina [The geopolitical journey of Dr. Friedman. Ukraine]. Khvylya. Retrieved from: <https://hvylya.net/reports/c28-2011-02-04-12-28-49/6-18.html>.

¹⁷ G Friedman (2014), From Estonia to Azerbaijan: American Strategy After Ukraine. Stratfor. Retrieved from: https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/estonia-azerbaijanamericanstrategyafterukraine?utm_campaign=20140325&utm_content=readmore&utm_medium=email&utm_source=freelist-f&utm_term=Gweekly.

4. Military forces of the Baltic–Black Sea Union and its allies

The Baltic countries need modern military equipment, in particular, air defense, anti-tank and mobile infantry, and the United States can supply it. America's readiness to support the Baltic–Black Sea Union is explained by the fact that, in recent decades, Moscow and Berlin have worked hard to create the Eurasian Moscow–Berlin–Paris axis and the grand economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok. If China also joins this axis, American leadership (first economic and then political) will be severely challenged. Therefore, it is clear that pushing the Baltic–Black Sea Arc would allow the United States to strengthen its position in the region and use various levers of pressure against domination of Russia and China to be used as needed.

Chinese military is the world's third most powerful, following only the United States and Russia. In 2019, the military budget of China amounted to \$177 billion, which is 3.8 times more than that of Russia (46 billion dollars). The United States, however, remains the leader in military spending, which amounted to \$716 billion, in 2019.

At first glance, China seems to be in the lead by the amount of equipment and the number of people in service, because it has overtaken world competitors in 5 of 9 military categories. However, it should be borne in mind that some Chinese weapon systems are significantly outdated. Presently, there are 2,035,000 active-duty personnel in the Chinese army, 1,348,000 – in the United States army and 1,013,626 in Russian army. Chinese artillery systems include 13,420 units, while the United States artillery has 6,894, and Russian – 5,293 units. The United States clearly remains the leader by the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles – 400. It is followed by Russia with 313 missiles, and China with its 70 missiles. The United States also leads by the number of nuclear submarines equipped with ballistic missiles (14 units); Russia is not far behind with its 13 units, followed by China – with 4 nuclear submarines¹⁸.

¹⁸ V. Kashin (2019), *Vsya kitajskaya rat: iz chego sostoit armiya podnebesnoj i komu stoit ee opasatsya* [The whole Chinese army: what the celestial army consists of and who should be afraid of it]. Kommersant. Retrieved from: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4012699>.

If we compare the United States and Russia, the former still occupies a leading position in almost all categories in terms of armaments and quantity of people in armies, except for the number of battle tanks – there are 3,090 units in Russia, and 2,381 units in the United States. If we compare the military forces of NATO and Russia, the Alliance is seven times ahead of Russia by the number of troops: 1,750,000 versus 130,000¹⁹. The number of NATO aircraft is more than 692,000 against 148,000 in Russia. The United States navy operates more than 598,000 vessels, compared with 130,000 vessels in the Russian navy. The above statistics show that the United States with its arsenal could be a desirable partner for the Baltic–Black Sea Union. Since nowadays the United States continues to compete for world domination with Russia, it would be interested in realization of the BBSU – especially because the United States and countries of the Baltic Black Sea region have common interest – to suppress Russian influence.

As for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, according to the Global Firepower Index 2020, Ukraine ranks 27th among the 138 most powerful armies in the world. The Global Firepower Index takes into account the state's human resources, the current capacity of its ground, naval and air forces, the country's logistics for troop movements, the availability of fuel resources, financial capabilities and annual defense spending, taking into account the length of borders. Among all non-NATO European countries, Ukraine's position is the best. Ukraine's ranking has been on the rise as a result of a military campaign in Eastern Ukraine²⁰, because during this time the Armed Forces of Ukraine increased by 75% (before the war there were 140 thousand people in the army, currently there are 250 thousand).

The Global Firepower Index 2020 also estimates the Ukrainian army reserve force at 1 million, which makes its 8th – in the world. From this perspective, Ukraine is even ahead of the United States, with 860,000 reservists. Only Vietnam (5 million), South Korea (3 million 100 thou-

¹⁹ NATO proty Rosii: u koho sylnishe armiia [NATO against Russia: who has a stronger army]. (TSN, 2015). Retrieved from: <https://tsn.ua/svit/nato-proti-rosiyi-u-kogo-silnisha-armiya-infografika-543354.html>.

²⁰ Military Strength Ranking 2020 (Global FirePower, 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

sands), India (2 million 100 thousands), Russia (2 million), Taiwan (1 million 657 thousands), Brazil (1 million 340 thousands), and Cuba (1 million 160 thousands) have larger military reserve²¹.

If we take into account the military forces of countries that are potential members of the Baltic–Black Sea Union, only Poland is ahead of Ukraine. According to the Global Firepower Index 2020, Poland ranks 21st, with all others ranking much lower than Ukraine: Lithuania ranks 83rd, Latvia – 102nd, Estonia – 119th, Hungary – 54th, Romania – 39th, Belarus – 53rd, Georgia – 89th, Slovakia – 58th, and Bulgaria – 62nd. Therefore, it might make sense of Ukraine and Poland were to assume leading positions in the future Baltic–Black Sea Union, as their military potential is the greatest. The other countries might be instead more interested in a union that would guarantee their security and sovereignty.

It should be noted that the Baltic–Black Sea Union would not aim to replace NATO or the EU completely. The project aims instead to minimize the threats that the BBSU member states may face. As Western Europe shows little initiative in the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the Baltic–Black Sea Union must create leverage to address the security issue of Russian aggression. In order for the potential union to function more effectively, states interested in the BBSU membership need to start thinking about military standards and how to increase their capacity accordingly. The Baltic–Black Sea Union, first of all, could count on the United States help, because the latter is not interested in Russia gaining world domination. The United States, with its ground-based missiles, surface-to-surface ballistic or cruise missiles, anti-ship missiles, advanced aircraft, surface ships and submarines, as well as forces and means of gaining air superiority and dominance at sea, advanced means of communication and surveillance, as well as its cyber warfare capabilities, would be a strong military partner for the Baltic–Black Sea Union.

All post-Soviet so-called “frozen” conflicts are concentrated in the Black Sea region. For NATO, this is a challenge, as all these conflicts can significantly destabilize the region. In the EU’s global strategy adopted in 2016, protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region are also identified as

²¹ Reserve Military Manpower. (Global FirePower, 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/active-reserve-military-manpower.asp>.

a challenge to the “European security system”²². At the Warsaw Summit, NATO leaders stated that the stability of NATO’s neighbours means stability for the Alliance, and that in the face of a growing instability in the global security environment, NATO seeks to make a greater contribution to the international efforts to promote stability and security outside its territory²³.

NATO firmly adheres to its position of non-recognition of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, which was reiterated during the NATO visit to Kyiv in July 2017. In addition to political support, NATO is greatly expanding its practical assistance. In particular, the Alliance has promoted Ukraine’s defense and security sector reform, as well as facilitated capacity-building through the Comprehensive Assistance Package agreed at the Warsaw Summit 2016. The airspace security project in the region aims to increase Ukraine’s ability to deal with air incidents. NATO is also contributing to the development of the Ukrainian Naval Academy, which was relocated to Odesa after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea.

All these NATO activities show that the United States, unlike Western Europe, takes the situation in the Black Sea region seriously and pursues measures to counter Russian expansion. The United States can therefore become a partner instrumental to the successful implementation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union. The United States is trying to contribute Russia lose its global leadership, which is why the United States is interested in building an alliance encompassing the countries of the Baltic–Black Sea region. In return, BBSU member states can receive strong military support.

5. Conclusions

In the current international relations, Ukraine should be most interested in the implementation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union. At present, Ukraine is geopolitically oriented towards the European Union and NATO with

²² Business Process Reengineering – Ford’s Accounts Payable Case Study. Retrieved from: <https://bprford.wordpress.com/2014/03/12/business-process-reengineering-fords-accounts-payable-case-study/>.

²³ NATO: The Enduring Alliance 2016, Retrieved from: http://www.krzysztof-miszczak.pl/files/262649006/lib/FWPN_publication_on_NATO.pdf.

a hope that this will lead to the improvement of the country's national security resources and the restoration of its territorial integrity. Moreover, during 2020, Ukraine plans to continue bringing the Armed Forces of Ukraine in line with NATO standards. At the same time, the European Union and the United States do not consider Ukraine's integration into the NATO or the EU as a short term possibility but rather assign Ukraine the role of a buffer zone on the border with Russia²⁴. That is why Ukraine should re-focus on the implementation of projects that are more feasible in the short term including the creation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union. Potential members of this geopolitical entity may be more interested in uniting with Ukraine against a common threat in the face of Russia. These countries are in close territorial proximity to Russia and are more vulnerable to Russian influence than Western and Central European countries.

Thus, the main impetus for the development and implementation of a geopolitical project in the Baltic–Black Sea region may ensue from the fear of a growing Russian influence in the Eurasian geopolitical space. Hence, the main strategic priority is a consolidated comprehensive deterrence in order to prevent expansion of its political power, information and propaganda. The formation of a political and military union between Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, and possibly Moldova and Romania under the *de facto* patronage of the United States, may have as its goal of collective opposition to Russia and its aggression.

In addition, Western European countries need to articulate and present more actively the benefits they could receive from the potential Baltic–Black Sea Union. Such a geopolitical union, if it happens, would guarantee the security of Western European countries through a protective barrier against Russian power and aggression. It should be emphasized that the further development and full functioning of the interstate military-political Baltic–Black Sea union will be possible only if the confrontation between the collective West and Russia persists in Europe.

²⁴ A.G. Golcov (2016), Regionalnyj geopoliticheskij proekt «Mezhdumore»: perspektivy realizacii [Regional geopolitical project «Intermarium»: implementation prospects]. *Sravnitelnaya politika*, 7th ed., pp. 95–107.

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Summary

The article presents the Baltic–Black Sea region in the military-political dimension, as well as explores the potential benefits of this cooperation for European security. The study offers some important insights into the historical preconditions for the formation of the Union according to the Baltic–Black Sea Arc. This paper attempts to show the importance of international political and security potential of Ukraine and its influence on the formation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union. The Baltic–Black Sea Union is seen as an effective counterweight to Russia's expansion into the West, whereby Ukraine could serve as a guarantor of European stability. The article analyzes opinions of international experts on the implementation of the Baltic–Black Sea Union, as well as compares the military power of potential members of the union with the military forces of advanced countries. This study provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of the benefits for Union members and European countries and how the United States can help implement the idea of project. The analysis emphasizes the functions of the Baltic–Black Sea Union, potential NATO assistance and how the Union will ensure the stability of its forces in Europe. It is

summarized why the countries of the Baltic–Black Sea arc can act as a guarantor of protection against Russian aggression.

Keywords: Baltic–Black Sea Union, Intermarium, geopolitical processes, international cooperation, external security, European stability, Russian expansion, military power