

# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO BLACK SEA REGIONAL SECURITY

## A UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 45

*Oleksandr Sushko*

*Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, Kyiv*

*December 2008*

In August 2008, the Russian Federation demonstrated the will to exercise the concept of a “multipolar world” through military action. Most regional powers are unlikely to accept this concept, which in practice is based on the idea of spheres of influence (which Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has referred to as “privileged spheres of interests”). However, none of these powers, even those who are members of the European Union and/or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, are presently able to mobilize sufficient political, economic, and military resources to overcome the pressure of a Russian Federation seeking to impose its political will.

Ukraine, as one of the regional Black Sea powers, is extremely vulnerable to these new challenges. The “multipolar world” enforced through the Georgian war poses an obvious threat to the basic interests of Ukraine. Practically, this “multipolar world” means the sum of regional “unipolarities,” based on the dominant power of “regional leaders” and accepted by others. Sovereign democratic Ukraine, as a rather weak state, is threatened by the possible success of this Russian-articulated “multipolar” model.

There are at least three competing alternatives of the new regional order in the Black Sea region:

- 1) The “multipolar world” model proposed by the Russian Federation and for which the Black Sea region serves as a “pilot project”;
- 2) The Black Sea region as a Euro-Atlantic periphery;
- 3) Pluralistic heterogeneity as a temporary consensus.

## **The End of the “1991 World Order”**

The “1991 world order” may be defined as the regional international system that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That order was based on the *de jure* recognition of borders, territorial integrity, and respect for basic principles of international law.

Despite certain deviations and conflicts that predated Soviet collapse, the basis of the peaceful Soviet “divorce” and formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was the transformation of the administrative borders between fifteen former Soviet republics into the international borders of newly independent states (NIS). Only former republics, not autonomies or other territories, enjoyed full-fledged independence and international recognition. This consensus was welcomed and legitimized by the international community.

The Russian-Georgian war, followed by Russia’s *de facto* annexation of *de jure* Georgian territory, changed the basis of the international order which emerged in the post-Soviet space in 1991. Formal consensus, a milestone of stability and security in the western NIS, no longer exists. It was destroyed by the Russian Federation in August 2008.

Currently, the NIS do not have a common approach toward even the simplest question of how many Soviet successor states exist. For Russia, there are 17 (11 CIS + Georgia + 3 Baltic states + Abkhazia + South Ossetia). For everyone else, there are still 15. There are no mutually accepted criteria for recognizing new states. There is no consensus that the United Nations Security Council is the sole legitimate body authorized to sanction the use of force abroad (despite the fact that the official Russian foreign policy concept of June 2008 still incorporates this notion).

The crucial challenge of international order in eastern Europe after August 8, 2008, is connected to the need for achieving consensus on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. What kind of consensus is possible, however? Some of the main elements of the international order Russia now offers represent a deepening conflict between Russian policies and the basic national interests of most of the neighboring NIS, including Ukraine.

## **The “Multipolar World” as a Challenge to Peace and Security: The Black Sea Region**

The concept of a “multipolar world” has become a crucial element of Russian international politics and rhetoric. As seen from inside Russia’s putative “backyard,” a multipolar world really consists of regional “unipolar worlds” where domination by a regional leader is stronger than the theoretical dominance of a global power in a semi-mythical unipolar world. Such dominance is based upon a wide range of specific “humanitarian” elements: “common history” (including control over interpretations of history), common identity, language, religious institutions, and control over information space.

Translated to Russia’s neighbors, the substance of the multipolar world is *de facto* limited sovereignty. These “backyard” states can continue to rely on their existing borders and Russia’s acceptance of them only if certain limits to their sovereignty are accepted.

In the Black Sea region, these limits include (based on recent experience):

- 1) *The securing of Russian “compatriot” humanitarian and political rights:* In the narrow sense, “compatriots” are Russian passport holders. In the broader sense, they are all those who identify themselves with the “Wider Russia” (or post-Soviet) cultural and social space. In practical terms, a friendly policy to Russian “compatriots” should include official status for the Russian language, Russian-language education, and a privileged position for the Russian Orthodox Church. National interpretations of history are acceptable only within the framework of a “common history” with Russia.
- 2) *Information policy:* openness of the national media market for Russian media and easier availability of state-controlled Russian TV channels.
- 3) *Coordination of foreign and security policy with Russia:* Countries in the region should either follow allied policy (the CIS Collective Security Treaty) or be neutral. Joining any other security alliance (such as NATO) will not be tolerated. The presence of Russian military bases in the region should be prolonged; any other permanent foreign military presence is unacceptable.
- 4) *Acknowledging Russia as the only country with the legitimate right to use force in emergency situations:* Regional peace enforcement, peace-building, and peacekeeping are the exclusive privileges of Russia. UN approval is not a necessary prerequisite for the regional use of force.
- 5) *Local irredentism as punishment:* The partition of existing states in the region is to be an outcome of non-compliance with the abovementioned points.

Irredentism is a sensitive issue for almost all the western NIS. There are “frozen conflicts” in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. In Ukraine, irredentist attitudes are mostly hidden, but they could be provoked under certain circumstances. Crimean separatism was overcome in the mid-1990s, but its roots have not disappeared and could be reactivated.

At the same time, by recognizing the independence of some irredentist regions and stimulating others, Russia creates its own domestic risks. The North Caucasus remains a region with the potential for instability and separatism. In the mid-term, regional separatism might appear in the Russian Far East and Urals. By recognizing Georgia’s breakaway regions, Russia plays a risky game.

Russia thus has an interest in preserving the “1991 world order” in order to minimize risks to its own security and stability. However, the Russian political elite has made a decision to sacrifice a certain degree of stability and break the rules in order to improve its status and position in the short-term, taking advantage of obvious weaknesses in the West. In the end, this decision may be costly, especially taking into account the global economic crisis that may undermine the Russian economic “miracle.”

The stress on multipolarity as a value to Russia is almost entirely instrumental. Moscow exploits the concept of multipolarity in order to maximize its position, status, and influence in the world. In this context, it considers the Black Sea region a “pilot project”; the new democracies in the region are fragile and vulnerable, and Western influence, despite recent EU and NATO enlargements, is limited.

## The Black Sea as the European and Euro-Atlantic Periphery

Three countries of the region, Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria, are NATO members. Two others – Ukraine and Georgia – have expressed a will to join NATO and were granted an ambitious promise of future membership at the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In December, relations between NATO and the two aspiring states of the region were upgraded to the format of Annual National Programs, which previously applied only to MAP countries. NATO now treats these countries as *de facto* candidates for full-fledged membership. In both political and technical terms, Ukraine and Georgia have sufficient tools to conduct the reforms necessary to achieve NATO standards. In the long term, both countries can become NATO members, which would mean that the Black Sea would be 90 percent transformed into an internal NATO lake.

For most regional powers, NATO is an attractive and workable long-term security solution. However, this scenario's prospects for success are not clear, at least in the short term. Lack of consensus in Ukraine, an impulsive Georgian leadership and separatist challenges, the institutional weakness of both states, internal divergences within NATO, and, above all, strong Russian opposition together pose a challenge to the rapid expansion of NATO in the Black Sea region. Therefore, NATO accession is unlikely to be the only instrument used by the West to provide greater regional stability and security.

Indeed, the EU's growing commitments in this part of Europe are another element of the regional architecture. On December 3, 2008, the European Commission launched the "Eastern Partnership" (EaP) as an outcome of a joint Polish-Swedish initiative published in June 2008. The EaP provides a specific regional umbrella for Europe's eastern "partners": it covers Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and potentially Belarus. Therefore, the focus of the EaP is concentrated around the Black Sea region.

The EaP goes beyond the existing European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in several respects:

- It explicitly presents itself as a political message of EU solidarity, unlike the previous, largely technical, ENP documents;
- It suggests that Partnership and Cooperation Agreements will be replaced by Association Agreements (following a Ukrainian model currently under negotiation);
- It suggests the establishment of a new instrument, the Comprehensive Institution-Building Program (CIB), on a bilateral track;
- It provides detailed procedures for the establishment of free trade areas and visa facilitation regimes among ENP neighbors; the former is linked to the regional dimension through a proposed Neighbourhood Economic Community;
- It also provides clear and detailed suggestions on how to deepen energy cooperation with the eastern ENP countries;
- The regional/multilateral track is considerably more political than in existing ENP documents;
- It calls for fresh funding to be allocated to the new initiatives. 350 million

euros in new aid will go toward strengthening state institutions, border control, and assistance for small companies.

Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official commentary regarding the EaP, noting that the creation of "a single space of stability, security, and prosperity at the east of the European continent based on European political, economic, and social norms and standards is a common goal of Ukraine and the European Union....Ukraine is ready to support and to use in a pragmatic way every element of the Eastern Partnership *if the new EU policy is not interpreted as an alternative to potential EU membership* (emphasis added) but on the contrary brings Ukraine closer to this goal."

The EaP may serve as a complementary tool of the EU's exercise in "soft power" in the region. It may also prove to be an instrument of engagement which does not provoke an aggressive reaction from Russia. However, the policy is not sufficient to overcome deep divergences in the region on security issues. It is also not a tool for the full-fledged integration of target countries into the EU. Under the EaP umbrella, states of the region can prepare themselves for accession to the EU only in the long-term (15-25 years).

### **Pluralistic Heterogeneity as a Mid-term Prospect**

A sustainable long-term solution to the security dilemmas that appeared, or were reactivated in the Black Sea region after August 8, 2008 are not likely to emerge soon. The real future for the short term, and even the mid-term (5-8 years), lies between the two scenarios described above.

The main actors are likely to reach some kind of local consensus on the most sensitive issues, such as the need to minimize the use of force and prevent violence, as well as to cooperate in combating terrorism, piracy, and certain soft security threats. Pluralistic heterogeneity is the most obvious term to describe the probable international sub-system in the Black Sea region over the next several years. In the long term, however, either the whole region will be covered with Western institutions or it will be divided into spheres of influence under the framework of a "multipolar world."

PONARS Eurasia publications are funded through the International Program of Carnegie Corporation of New York. The views expressed in these publications are those of the author alone; publication does not imply endorsement by PONARS Eurasia, Georgetown University, or the Carnegie Corporation.