

## COMMENT IEP 2/2022

### CONFLICT IN UKRAINE – A MARITIME ASPECT

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Due to the attack of the military of the Russian Federation on the sovereign Ukrainian state, the current security situation remains extremely dynamic. It affects practically the whole world, pushing hydrocarbon prices to record levels. At the same time, trying to predict further developments is a highly complicated matter. It is difficult at this point to talk about the final shape of the post-war order, which, according to many experts, will result from the need to revise existing economic relations with Russia. While the scenario of military confrontation, as the highest form of escalation (a potential trump card in Putin's game), was taken into account by many analysts (already a few years ago, there were calculations that within the next few years, Putin must make a move in the form of triggering a war), the authors of such alternatives themselves did not believe it possible to actually launch a full-scale invasion of an independent state by regular forces, which would last for weeks. The move, described by some commentators as a move for internal purposes, took a form, it seems, far removed from Moscow's original assumptions. The conflict has triggered an avalanche of profound actions potentially penetrating both the foundations of Putin's Russia, based on maximizing profits from the sale of energy resources, and the principles of their reception by importers. Undoubtedly, it was mainly the EU countries, and in the context of building independence and strengthening the resilience of its member states, also NATO, that faced the dilemma of a complete reversal of their policies on trade (export) and dependence (in some cases exceeding 90%) on supplies of hydrocarbons from Russia. For many states, it became clear that further cooperation

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with the Russian Federation, which uses the supply of energy resources as an element of pressure and finances the development and modernization of its military potential with the help of huge revenues from their sale, in the current format, will simply no longer be possible or socially acceptable. The Russian Federation has bluntly demonstrated that in pursuit of its neo-imperial strategic goals, it can use means unacceptable to the international community, including violations of international law and moral and even ethical standards. At the same time, the Kremlin is sending signals expressing surprise at the attitude of the European countries, emphasizing the timely fulfillment by Russia of all contracts related to the supply of oil and gas from its territory. The first indications of a change in the current approach of European Union member states at the strategic level appeared with the #REPowerEU decision adopted by the European Commission in the first days of March 2022. It can be presumed that the final effect of such actions should include, if not completely cutting off energy supplies from the Russian Federation (or a creation that will emerge, for example, as a result of changes whose effects we are not able to predict now), then bringing the volume of supplies of energy carriers to a level safe from the point of view of using hydrocarbons as a means of exerting pressure. Another important aspect is the need to make the price market-based for all European consumers (favorability bonus). These issues require extraordinary efforts from many member states to build receiving infrastructure in the form of sea terminals or the development of land transmission lines responsible for redistributing raw materials deep into the continent in a multinational approach (including reversion). Acquiring new sources and directions of supply will be possible in the case of Europe, to a large extent, thanks to the coastal location of most member states. The Ukrainian-Russian conflict has shown all European politicians that only a united policy towards the aggressor country will make it possible to develop effective tools to influence Russia adequately. Russia, in turn, has always been interested in disrupting unity and developing bilateral relations, bypassing European structures.

In the case of the Republic of Poland, obtaining natural gas, oil, and coal will require new directions of supply. In recent years, the Republic of Poland has made great efforts to diversify the supply of raw materials of strategic importance for national security. Critical investments related to their acquisition and technical possibilities of

direct reception were possible thanks to the country's access to the sea. Flagship projects, such as the construction and expansion of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, implementation of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline project, which opens access to natural gas sources located under the Norwegian continental shelf, or the announced construction of a floating regasification terminal (FSRU)<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Baltic Sea production carried out by Lotos Petrobaltic and record-breaking crude oil transshipments in Naftoport in Gdańsk, are all elements of the adopted architecture for building national energy security policy. Investments in gas infrastructure (receiving, storage, and transmission infrastructure, both maritime and land-based) will contribute to the increased importance of Poland as a potential gas hub. Having appropriate capabilities at its disposal, the Republic of Poland may support the energy security of its neighboring countries, including Ukraine. To the above should be added the highly dynamic development of the offshore wind energy industry, which is to become one of the pillars of the Polish energy mix, as well as enable, through the management of energy surpluses, the development of a hydrogen economy (based on so-called green hydrogen). The importance of the coastal area is also increased by announcing the location of the first nuclear power plant in the coastal belt (issues of protection from the sea direction). These projects are, of course, complemented by massive investments in energy security carried out on land. The presented elements clearly indicate that sea basins are the main arteries through which raw materials of strategic importance for the state's security will be brought on board ships or through undersea gas pipelines. This increases the importance of ensuring maritime security of the state in the broadest sense of the term, which enables the realization of interests in areas of vital importance to the state. In the context of energy, these areas, in addition to those indicated in the Strategic Concept for the Maritime Security of the Republic of Poland (the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the waters of the Arctic), are often located in geographically distant parts of the world (for example, the coast of the U.S., the Persian Gulf, Australia, Africa, and South America — in the context of coal supplies).

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<sup>2</sup> Floating Storage Regasification Unit

One of the issues that should become an agenda for future considerations will be the need to develop a common approach of European countries and NATO members to the issue of the security of energy supplies by sea. This idea is a chance for Poland to join or perhaps become one of the countries that initiate such actions and raise the importance of the Republic of Poland in the international arena. In the emerging situation, it is also worth thinking about the fulfillment, with concrete projects, of the provisions of state policy concerning the Arctic waters (yes, the Republic of Poland has the assumptions of such policy, which, however, has not seen any active actions of economic importance).

### **Some remarks on the actions of the fleets in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict**

Despite the lack of reports on any spectacular actions of the Russian fleet during the aggression against Ukraine, we should not overlook its importance in the overall operation, especially since, in many respects, the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea remain bodies of water with certain similarities, not only geographically. The combat tasks of the elements of the Russian Navy engaged in the war with Ukraine are aimed at establishing a naval blockade to cut off Ukrainian forces from supplies and humanitarian aid and to stifle the country's economic potential. This is achieved by cutting off the port infrastructure and carrying out missile attacks on land targets using Kalibr sets with 3M14 cruise missiles designed to hit land targets (the cities of Sumy, Mariupol, Poltava). Another goal of the fleet is to make the Sea of Azov an internal Russian basin by displacing land forces from the coastal areas between Crimea and Donbas and fighting the few Ukrainian naval forces in both basins. With the combined landing capabilities of several fleets, the Russian Black Sea fleet is still on standby to conduct an amphibious operation and put a contingent of several thousand soldiers and heavy equipment ashore. The maneuvering of landing teams in a strong escort of surface units undoubtedly ties up some of the Ukrainian forces remaining in readiness to repel a possible amphibious operation (or combined operation). This prevents the reinforcement of other sections of the front. The Russian fleet, after declaring an "anti-terrorist operation" and closing the northwestern part of the Black Sea to navigation, also seized several commercial vessels sailing under the Ukrainian flag (the ships

“Afina,” “Pryncesa Nikol,” “Sapfir”). Several hundred vessels were simultaneously trapped in the basins and ports of both seas. Also, losses among commercial ships with foreign flags were recorded. These actions clearly show the achievement, firstly, of a complete naval blockade of Ukraine and secondly, the creation of a permanent threat of conducting an amphibious operation with the forces of a reinforced brigade. The Russian Navy (surface and submarine forces) has also been performing striking actions which are a form of projecting maritime potential from the sea (rocket attacks and artillery barrages, the latter of which should be regarded rather as a psychological measure concerning the defenders of the coastal city of Odesa). Apart from some propaganda successes, the Ukrainian Navy has been eliminated from the theater of operations as a result of being completely overwhelmed by the enemy’s potential and playing practically no role. The successful attack on a Russian landing ship moored in the harbor should be read instead as an effect of diversionary activities. A threat that may have a significant impact on the safety of navigation in the entire Black Sea area is the appearance of drifting sea mines reported so far off the coasts of Romania and Turkey.

The reports so far may indicate the need for navigational restrictions based on navigating only during daylight hours with additional precautions (increased radar and visual observation of the sea surface) that do not provide complete safety (mines may drift below the sea surface).

## Reflection

It should be noted that the full use of the potential arising from the coastal location of our country grows at the moment to the level of survival and ensuring the possibility of development. Therefore, the need to join NATO and EU activities, e.g., by delegating vessels with adequate combat potential to actions for maritime safety, becomes particularly important. The goal is to collectively protect the interests of the Alliance and the European Union on the one hand and on the other to secure the ability to achieve the country's own policy objectives. Modern, sustainable naval forces of a medium-sized coastal state with an appropriate combat potential should be considered an essential element of the national contribution to the implementation of activities in the area of conventional collective deterrence, building its own anti-access capabilities and limiting the freedom of action (area denial) of a potential adversary. It is required to shape the level of security on the seas and thus build the image of a committed and reliable partner. With the development of these capabilities, it is possible to build a potential that would effectively discourage a potential adversary from taking the risk of introducing a sea blockade or creating a threat from the sea, e.g., to elements of critical infrastructure (seaports, terminals, extraction, transmission and storage infrastructure, as well as production infrastructure — offshore wind farms), and, in total, viewed as aggression against Poland. The direction of development of the Polish Navy should result from the balancing of its abilities to defend (military function) and protect Polish maritime areas (police function) and the territory of the state against threats from the sea (including inclusion in the system of state air protection), with the performance of diplomatic functions and guaranteeing security on the sea communication routes.

The consolidation of NATO members is a necessary element. From the Polish perspective, its forms must assume the implementation of joint actions in the areas of vital importance for the interests of the Republic of Poland. However, this requires political will, determination, and social acceptance to bear the costs of building one's own security in the maritime dimension but translating into the security of each citizen.