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# Regional Concepts in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Geopolitically, the region of the Black Sea has been considered pivotal. The region was often mentioned within the debate on geopolitics-related ‘key’ notions such as Eurasia’s *heartland* and *rimland* coined by Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, and Zbigniew Brzezinski.<sup>1</sup> Partly due to its geopolitical significance, the Black Sea was one of the central battlefields during World War I and World War II, and it became even more prominent during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period, in the era of pipeline diplomacy and the murky relationship between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and with regard to its proximity to the Greater Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, its geopolitical significance rose remarkably. Several aspects are essential for study of regional concepts on the Black Sea in a *longue durée*. First, the reception of the Black Sea, of its place in the regional concepts of national security and *raison d’état*, is asymmetric in the countries sharing its coast. For Turkey and particularly for Russia, access to the Black Sea is important, but Russia has access to dozens of other seas. Secondly, huge asymmetry exists in military terms as well: The Turkish army is the second strongest within NATO, while Russia’s military force is the second strongest in the world, and its nuclear potential remains leading worldwide. For all other Black Sea nations like the EU and NATO member-states Bulgaria and Romania and pro-NATO-oriented Georgia and Ukraine, the Black Sea is of paramount importance in economic, political, and cultural terms. In the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the Black Sea is the only sea they have access to.

The Russian e-journal *Odna Rodina* (One Motherland) reported critically on the foundation of the “Alliance of Baltic-Black Sea Nations” (ABChN) in late 2014.<sup>2</sup> The Kyiv-based Ukrainian-language media published the memorandum signed by more than ten Ukrainian, Georgian, but also Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian far-right organizations. ABChN sees itself as a pro-EU and a pro-NATO organization and aims for

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Created within the framework of the DFG SPP 1981: Transottomanica: Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics (project number 313079038), accessed February 2, 2024, [www.transottomanica.de](http://www.transottomanica.de).

1 See Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919; repr. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1942), 76–78; Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), 25–26; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Great Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 46–52.

2 Vladislav Gulevich, “Zachem natsionalisty sozdaiut Alians balto-chernomorskikh natsii,” *Odna Rodina*: Infomatsionno-analiticheskoe izdanie, accessed February 9, 2021, <https://odnarodyna.org/content/zachem-nacionalisty-sozdayut-alyans-balto-chernomorskikh-naciy>.

“united resistance” against the “ambitions of aggressive imperialistic Russia.”<sup>3</sup> While the Russian *Odna Rodina* portrayed the ABChN as fascist, ABChN is a strange conglomerate of extreme far-right organizations as well as liberal political parties with an environmental agenda. A neo-Eurasianist journal, *Ritmy Evrazii* (Rhythms of Eurasia), reported on one of the rallies organized by the ABChN in Kyiv in the late May of 2015. This rally was devoted to the anniversary of the foundation of the state of Georgia in 1918. One of the ABChN female activists, Tamara Shavladze, an ethnic Georgian, said during the demonstration: “I believe that we will have no borders when Russian troops disappear from the Black Sea. We will have a common sea, the Black Sea, that will be both Georgian and Ukrainian [...]” A Ukrainian journalist who joined the rally and reported on it asked Shavladze about the ‘common Ukrainian-Georgian border’ and then “whether we [Georgians and Ukrainians] would give anything [within this common Georgian-Ukrainian Black Sea] to the Turks.” Shavladze smiled and answered: “We will give them a bit. But the Turks have to give back what they took away years ago.”<sup>4</sup> This message was disseminated by Russian state-backed media quite quickly.<sup>5</sup> This example mirrors the current-day populist views and narratives on the Black Sea and on the question as to whom it should belong to; however, there have been several international legal documents regulating the demarcations of coastal and sea borders.

It was Russia and Turkey, or the Russian and Ottoman Empire, that managed to dominate the entire region on their own for centuries. The facts of Tsarist and Ottoman control of the Black Sea coined the notions of a “Russian lake” (Russian: Russkoe more, Turkish: Rus gölü) and a “Turkish lake” (Russian: Turetskoe more, Turkish: Türk gölü). In the Russian and Turkish discourses, these notions are still alive today, and are used as horror scenarios of foreign domination and a challenge to their own geopolitical aspirations and security. When Russian-Turkish relations deteriorated following the Turkish attack on the Russian military airplane over the Turkish territory on the Syrian border, the Turkish president Recep T. Erdoğan warned NATO at the Tenth Meeting of the Heads of the General Staff of the Balkan region of the danger that the Black Sea would turn into a “Russian lake” in May 2016.<sup>6</sup> Valerii Gerasimov, the head of the Rus-

3 “Memorandum politychnykh ta hromadskikh organizatsii Aliansu Balto-Chernomorskikh Natsii (ABChN),” *Ukrainskyi pohliad*, December 3, 2014, <http://ukrpohliad.org/komentari/memorandum-politychny-h-ta-gromads-ky-h-organizatsij-al-yansu-balto-chornomors-ky-h-natsij-abchn.html>.

4 “Tbilisi i Kiev deliat Chernoe more bez Rossii,” Youtube video, May 27, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jeWgWVzfCU>.

5 See Dmitrii Rodionov, “Ukraina i Gruziiia podeliat Chernoe More?! Natsionalisty Tbilisi i Kieva preteniuiut na ves Chernomorskii region?,” *Svobodnaia Pressa*, May 27, 2015, <https://svpressa.ru/politic/article/123298/>; “V Tbilisi i Kieve deliat Chernoe more bez Rossii,” *Gruzinform*, May 29, 2015, <http://ru.saqinform.ge/news/22734/v-tbilisi-i-kieve-delat-Chernoe-more-bez-rossii-.html>. Gruzinform is a Russia-backed Georgian news portal.

6 “Suriye’de Tüm Kırmızı Çizgilerin Aşılmasına Rağmen Bir Adım Atılmadı,” Official Website of Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, May 11, 2016, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/43922/suriyede-tum-kirmizi-cizgilerin-asilmasina-ragmen-bir-adim-atilmadi>.

sian General Staff, and the inventor, or revitalizer of “hybrid warfare,”<sup>7</sup> announced in September 2016 that Turkey was no longer the boss on the Black Sea.<sup>8</sup> Gerasimov announced this just a couple of days before his official visit to Turkey,<sup>9</sup> and the prominent Turkish columnist and intellectual Taha Akyol critically discussed the statement in the daily *Hürriyet*.<sup>10</sup> According to Gerasimov, the “reunification” of Russia and Crimea, the reappearance of the Russian navy and military in the peninsula, and the foundation of Russian airbases in Syria ended the alleged Turkish domination of the Black Sea. Russian discourses portray the idea of the Russian Black Sea as a necessity to overcome Western expansionism, while the Turkish discourse on the Turkish Black Sea has certain roots in intellectual neo-Ottomanism. Furthermore, the images and conceptualization of the Black Sea are quite different within national ideoscapes.<sup>11</sup> It is hardly possible to speak on the Russian concepts of the Black Sea or that of Turkey. And finally, the concepts of the Black Sea or concepts in which the Black Sea plays a certain role exist in the ideological constructions of the societies without access to the Black Sea. Recently, Chris Miller, the director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute’s Eurasia Program, wrote about the crucial importance on the Black Sea region for Americans.<sup>12</sup> Luke Coffey from the Washington-based Heritage Foundation claimed that “the Black Sea should be a US and NATO priority.”<sup>13</sup>

This chapter’s goal is to portray several concepts from the region(s) of Central, Eastern, and South-eastern Europe in which the Black Sea plays a central role. I will concentrate on so-called Polish-backed Prometheanism, Ukrainian geopolitical thought on the Black Sea, Russian-backed Eurasianism, and the Turanian perception of the

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7 See Molly K. McKew, “The Gerasimov Doctrine: It’s Russia’s New Chaos Theory of Political Warfare. And it’s Probably Being Used on You,” *Politico Magazine*, September/October 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538>.

8 Inna Kimakovich, “Genshtab RF: VMS Turtsii perestali byt khoziaevami na Chernom More,” *Federalnoe Agentstvo Novostei*, September 14, 2016, <https://riafan.ru/555021-genshtab-rf-vms-turcii-perestali-byt-hozyaevami-na-chernom-more>.

9 Sputnik Turkey reported on it in Turkish, and contributed to the dissemination of the message in Turkey. “Rusya Genelkurmayı: Türkiye artık Karadeniz’in efendisi değil,” *Sputnik Turkey*, September 14, 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/rusya/201609141024832161-rusya-genelkurmay-turkiye-karadeniz/>.

10 Taha Akyol, “Karadeniz’in efendisi!,” *Hürriyet*, September 15, 2016, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ya-zarlar/taha-akyol/karadenizin-efendisi-40224368>.

11 The notion of the ideoscape was proposed by Arjun Appadurai as one of five dimensions that help better understand the disjuncture and differences in the evolution of the global cultural economy. Regarding the fluidity of ideas a central condition, Appadurai described ideoscapes as “concatenations of images” which were “often directly political” and linked with ideology of the political regime. Ideoscapes are densely bound with mediascapes, fluid spaces of information flows. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 36.

12 Chris Miller, “Why the Black Sea?,” *Black Sea Strategy Paper*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 23, 2017, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/01/why-the-black-sea/>.

13 Luke Coffey, “The Black Sea Should be a US and NATO Priority,” *Middle East Institute*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/black-sea-should-be-us-and-nato-priority>.

Black Sea. From the outset, I have to add that the respective ideas are very heterogeneous, and very asymmetrical in their scholarly elaboration. Notions such as “Russian Eurasianism” and Turanism should not be understood as strict and ethnically defined but rather as multiconfessional and multiethnic phenomena. Ukrainians contributed heavily to Prometheanism as well as developing distinct Ukrainian plans for the Black Sea beyond the Poland-supported federalism or “intermarium”<sup>14</sup> concept. Common to all them was the idea of a certain cultural superiority of their own value systems, geopolitical and imperialistic aspirations, and justification of territorial acquisition. When speaking about all these “isms” today, we should use the prefix “neo,” since “classical” Prometheanism and Eurasianism were founded in the interwar period, and Turanism, or linguistically defined (Pan-)Turkism, goes back even to the end of the nineteenth century. The circulation of ideas is an additional dimension that should be kept in mind when discussing regional concepts of the Black Sea. It was the Turkic intellectuals from the Russian Empire that transferred the idea of “Turan” and of what became Pan-Turkism to the late Ottoman Empire. Along with this logic, the perception and conceptualization of the Black Sea flow from one national discourse into another, impact and influence, and finally co-shape each other, particularly today thanks to the acceleration of the information flow via the internet and social media.

## 1 Ukraine

The rise of nationalism on the eve of and during World War I was crucial for the ideological re-thinking of the Black Sea in the littoral societies. The Ukrainian intellectual Stepan Rudnytskyi reflected on the Black Sea in his seminal two-volume study published in the years 1910–14 in Kyiv and Lemberg (Ukrainian: Lviv, Polish: Lwów) in Ukrainian, and in 1916 in German in Vienna.<sup>15</sup> Two years later, in 1918, the prominent Ukrainian activist and politician Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi issued *Na porozi Novoi Ukrainy* (On the Threshold of the New Ukraine), and titled one of its central chapters “Black Sea orientation.” Both Rudnytskyi and Hrushevskyyi defined the Black Sea as crucial for Ukraine, its statehood, and its very existence as a nation-state. According to Hrushevskyyi, Ukraine belonged culturally—in his terms “intellectually and mentally”—to the West, but geographically to the South, to the Black Sea. Hrushevskyyi claimed that the Black Sea had historically played a unifying role, writing that it “did not divide but connected the littoral states.”<sup>16</sup> He saw the Black Sea as an important bond between Uk-

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14 For more on the Intermarium concept, see Stefan Troebst, “‘Intermarium’ and ‘Wedding to the Sea’: Politics of History and Mental Mapping in East Central Europe,” in “Geschichtsregionen: Concept and Critique,” ed. Stefan Troebst, special issue, *European Review of History/Revue européenne d’histoire* 10, no. 2 (2003): 293–321.

15 See Stephan Rudnyckyj [Rudnytskyi], *Ukraina: Land und Volk. Eine gemeinfassliche Landeskunde* (Vienna: Verlag des Bundes zur Befreiung der Ukraina, 1916), particularly 17–23.

16 Mykh.[ailo] Hrushevskyyi, *Na porozi novoi Ukrainy: Hadki i mrii* (Kyiv: Petro Barskyi u Kyivi, 1918), 17.

raine and the Middle East. The radicalization of the Ukrainian national perception of the Black Sea and the articulation of its own imperialistic views began among the Ukrainian exile intellectuals in the 1930s. Iurii Lypa embodied the group of Ukrainian intellectuals who shared anti-Polish and anti-Soviet views but was pro-German in orientation. In 1938, Lypa published in Lwów his essay *Pryznachennia Ukrainy* (Ukraine's Purposes) as the first part of a sequel on Ukrainian geopolitics. Influenced by the German discourses on *Raum*, Lypa published two books with several maps and schemes in 1940, *Chornomorska doktryna* (Black Sea Doctrine), and a year later, in 1941, another under the title *Chornomorskyi prostir*<sup>17</sup> (The Black Sea Space; see fig. 14). These monographs were issued by the Warsaw-based Ukrainian Black Sea Institute, which was co-founded by Lypa in German-occupied Warsaw with the financial support of Nazi authorities. The main idea of Lypa's "Black Sea Doctrine" was the Ukrainian acquisition of the Black Sea, particularly of the Crimean Peninsula, and even beyond. Lypa referred to Hrushevskyi's idea of the Black Sea's past unifying function but 'elaborated' a distinct Ukrainian strategy towards the region. He portrayed the Black Sea coast with Crimea and Odesa, as well as the Azov industrial quadrangle, as "natural

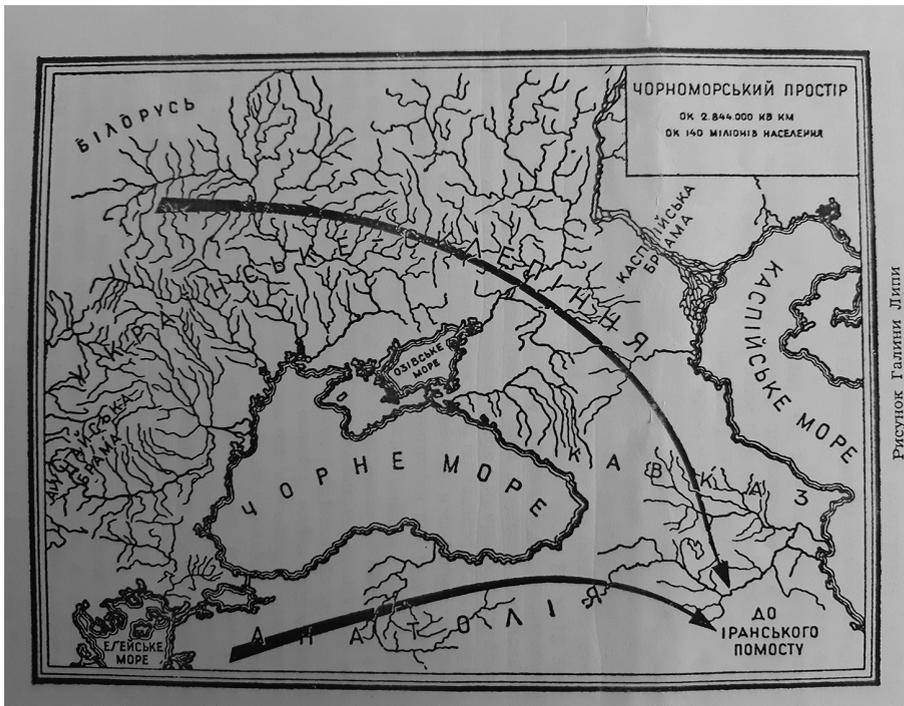


Fig. 14: Iurii Lypa's conceptualization of the Black Sea region.

17 Iurii Lypa and Lev Bykovskiy, *Chornomorskyi prostir: Atlas* (Odesa: Ukrainskyi Chornomorskyi Instytut, 1941).

provinces (territories) of Ukraine” (*naturalnye oblasti Ukrainy*). According to Lypa, Ukraine should cooperate with the “bulwark of Europe in Asia Minor,”<sup>18</sup> that is, with Turkey. With regard to the Caucasus, Lypa stressed the fact of Ukrainian-Caucasian cooperation in 1917/18 and wrote about the “unification of Ukraine with the Caucasus.” Having elaborated that, he mentioned the rich mineral resources of Chiatura and Baku; this unification “from the historical-political view would second the traditions of the Kingdom of Pontus at the time of Mithridates VI.”<sup>19</sup> Lypa’s “Black Sea Doctrine” was republished several times during World War II. In 1944, he was arrested by the Soviet secret service, the NKVD, and murdered, and the Ukrainian Black Sea Institute was disbanded. In 1947, the “Black Sea Doctrine” was republished for the Ukrainian diaspora overseas. Lypa belonged to the right-wing Ukrainian nationalists from the former Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia, which was a part of the Polish Republic in the interwar period.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to this group of intellectuals, many other Ukrainian activists supported the Warsaw-backed project of Prometheanism.

## 2 Polish Prometheanism, the Intermarium, and the Three Seas Initiative

Prometheanism emerged within the milieu of Polish Socialists around Marshall Józef Piłsudski, who played a crucial role in the foundation of the Republic of Poland in 1918 and dominated Polish politics after seizing power in May 1926. This milieu initially opposed Russian expansionism, witnessed persecution by the Tsarist authorities, and experienced arrests and harassment by the Tsarist police. Piłsudski himself, his comrade-in-arm Leon Wasilewski, the diplomats Tadeusz Schaetzel and Władysław Pelc, the editor and publicist Włodzimierz Bączkowski, and many others defined the Polish *raison d'état* as a strong bulwark on Europe’s margin, as a Commonwealth of Nations, as they supposed was the case in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth back in the early modern period. Polish Prometheanists aspired Poland’s close cooperation with all non-Russian nations of the former Tsardom in order to strengthen its own capacity for resistance against the Soviet Russia. After a short withdrawal from politics in the early 1920s, Piłsudski managed to seize power in May 1926. Prometheanists founded several research units and numerous journals and conducted anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propaganda in Poland itself, as well as in Paris, Istanbul, Rome, and Constanța. Prometheanists pleaded for close cooperation between the so-called Promethean peoples of the Baltics, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, the North Caucasus, Crimea (Tatars), and the Volga region. The idea was that these nations should collaborate and overthrow Soviet domination and forge cooperation with each other, and that Poland

18 Lypa and Bykovskiy, 19.

19 Lypa and Bykovskiy, 16.

20 For more on Lypa, see Iurii Kovaliv, “Iurii Lypa,” *Slovo i chas* 5 (2019): 82–89.

had to coordinate these processes. Polish Prometheanists recalled times when Poland had access to the Black Sea, back in the afore-mentioned period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Polish Prometheanists considered it Poland's duty to involve itself in the Black Sea and the Caucasus. The Crimean Tatar politician and leader Cafer Seydahmet met Marshall Piłsudski in Warsaw after he had left the peninsula for political reasons. Poland was invited to accept the protectorate over Crimea, and Seydahmet sent the appropriate declaration to the League of Nations. In the following years, Seydahmet, living in Polish and Turkish exile, tried to use Polish Prometheanists as intermediaries in his dialogue with the Ukrainian political diaspora that began to lay claim to Crimea in the 1930s. Promethean maps localized Crimea outside of Ukraine. According to the Promethean plans for the former Tsarist littoral states, that is, for an independent Ukraine, Crimea, and Georgia in 1918, Russia had to lose its presence in the Black Sea and be reduced to the territory of the Moscow Principality. According to the Polish-backed Prometheanism, the region of the "Intermarium" (Polish: *międzymorze*) between the Baltics and the Black Sea should become politically and economically independent of Russia. Polish intellectuals certainly thought of their own economic interests in this "between-seas region" but it was not about the Polonization of those territories, or integration into the Polish state.<sup>21</sup>

In the Prometheanist journal *Problemy Europy Wschodniej* (Problems of Eastern Europe), the Polish intellectual Jan Kowalewski wrote in his programmatic article "Bałtyk – Morze Czarne" (Baltic – Black Sea) in May 1939: "We have to dig up the continent [...] the revitalization of the Baltics-Black Sea axis via the Vistula, San, Dniester, and Prut is the most important duty of Poland's current generation."<sup>22</sup> He asserted that Warsaw and Poland's southeast were a certain core of the spatial bond between the Baltics and the Black Sea (see fig. 15). In September 1939, German and Soviet troops attacked and occupied Poland. Polish activists like Tadeusz Schaetzel moved to London, as did, eventually, the entire Polish government. Jan Kowalewski escaped via Romania to France, Seydahmet stayed in Istanbul, and the prominent Ukrainian Prometheanist Roman Smal-Stotskyi taught at Charles University in Prague. In 1945, Schaetzel and Seydahmet stayed where they were, but Smal-Stotskyi moved to Munich and then to the U.S. Prometheanism underwent a metamorphosis as its elements were absorbed by new groups of exiled Polish and Ukrainian intellectuals. In 1946, a programmatic volume with different articles under the title *Międzymorze* (Intermarium) was published in Polish in Rome. Its slogan was "The Future of the Intermarium is the destiny of 160 million Europeans." The map which the editors placed on the fourth page included cities like Tallinn, Prague, and Kyiv as well as Belgrade, Athens, and Sofia (see fig. 16). The

21 For more on Prometheanism, see Marek Kornat, ed., *Ruch prometejski i walka o przebudowę Europy Wschodniej (1918–1940): Studia i szkice* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2012); Paweł Libera, ed., *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego* (Warsaw: CAW, 2013); Zaur Gasimov, *Warschau gegen Moskau: Prometheistische Aktivitäten zwischen Polen, Frankreich und der Türkei 1918–1939* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2022).

22 Jan Kowalewski, "Bałtyk – Morze Czarne," *Problemy Europy Wschodniej* 1, no. 5 (May 1939): 273–74.

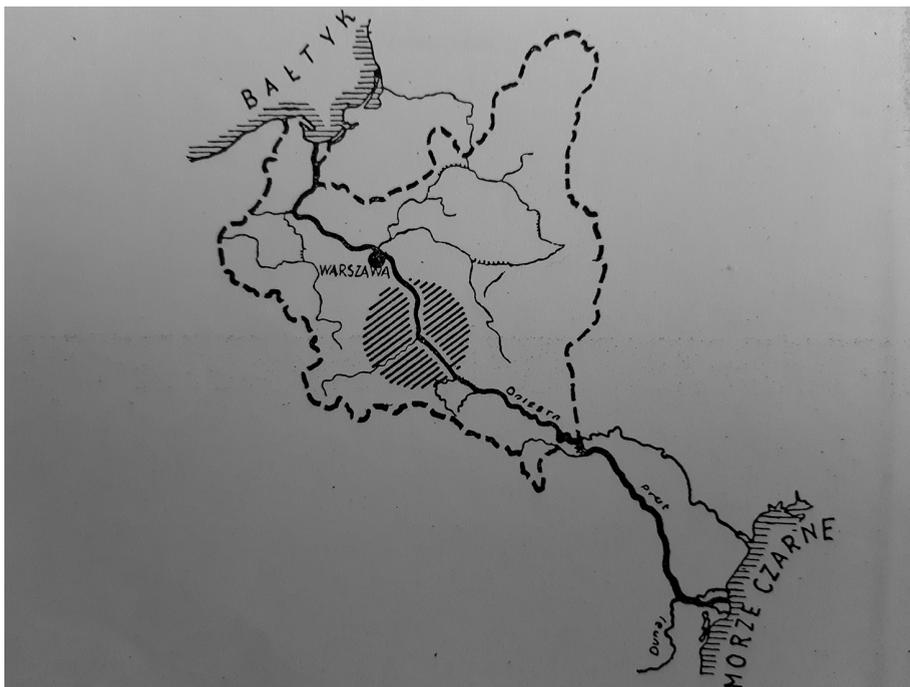


Fig. 15: Jan Kowalewski's idea of a Baltic-Black Sea axis.

Black Sea was literally divided into two parts: Bulgarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian coasts of the Black Sea were included, while Turkish Thrace and the Soviet Georgian coast were left aside. The editors delivered their definition of the “Intermarium” as a space in Central and Eastern Europe surrounded by the Baltics, the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Adriatic Sea.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the post-war “Intermarium” integrated Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece, which were either already ruled by Communists or challenged by them. While this circle of Polish and other East European exiles such as Miha Krek, Juliusz Poniatowski, or Ciril Žebot ‘broadened’ the definition of the “Intermarium” by bringing the Black Sea into a dialogue with three other ‘sea regions,’ the Paris-based circle of the Polish intellectual Jerzy Giedroyc, himself a former Prometheanist, reduced Polish Prometheanism to the formula ‘ULB.’ Derived from the initial letters of Ukraine (Ukraina), Lithuania (Litwa), and Byelorussia (Białoruś), the ULB was characteristic of Polish exiles’ aspiration to improve relations with these societies and to search for understanding with Russia as well. Giedroyc’s intellectual journal *Kultura* (Culture) had no aspirations of a geopolitical or geo-poetical kind with regard to the Black Sea.

23 Klub Feder. Środ.-Europ, *Międzymorze* (Rome: Sitwa, 1946), 9.



Fig. 16: The concept of the Intermarium.

In cooperation with Croatia, Poland launched the idea of the Three Seas Initiative in 2015. Coined by the Dubrovnik Summit in 2016, the organization currently comprises twelve EU members and targets “economic growth, security and a stronger and more cohesive Europe.”<sup>24</sup> Along with Poland, Croatia, three Baltic nations, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia are members of the initiative representing the space *trójmorze* (between three seas), the area between the Baltic, the Adriatic, and the Black Sea. During the meeting in Warsaw in 2017, U.S. president Trump attended the session and backed the initiative that was considered a

<sup>24</sup> Homepage of Three Seas Initiative, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://3seas.eu/about/objectives>.

sort of East European opposition to German-Russian cooperation in the energy sector. Some observers outside of Poland as well as some Polish politicians and scholars see the initiative as a continuity of the Polish geopolitical idea of the Intermarium.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 Turkish and Turkic Perspectives

Pan-Turkism was more of a Turkic, or more precisely a Tatar and Azerbaijani, phenomenon than Turkish; however, it was Turkey where the exiled Turkic intellectuals could elaborate their ideas and publish and popularize them by influencing their Turkish contemporaries. The Turkish discourse on Crimea and Dobruja remains abundant but the perception of the Black Sea (Turkish: Karadeniz) is ambiguous. The Black Sea is literally the watershed between Turkey and Russia. During the final stage of World War II, Moscow launched its territorial claims to the eastern parts of Turkey by initiating the famous letter by two Soviet Georgian historians about the Kars and Ardahan provinces in the Soviet media. According to these large-scale pretensions, the Turkish Black Sea coast including the ports of Trabzon, Giresun, and Ordu had to become Soviet. The Soviet strategy to change borders on the southeastern Black Sea was without success, but it heavily damaged Soviet-Turkish relations and forced Turkey to join NATO in 1952.

The key notion of Pan-Turkist thought is “Turan,” an ambiguously defined space with blurred borders between Turkish Thrace and China.<sup>26</sup> The intellectual fathers and mothers of Pan-Turkism, such as the Russia-born Yusuf Akçura, Ali Bey Hüseyinzade from Azerbaijan, and Zeki Velidi Togan from Bashkíria, as well as Ziya Gökalp, Halide Edib Adivar, and Nihal Atsız from the Ottoman Empire, elaborated and partly mystified Ergenekon, a Central Asian steppe somewhere in present-day Mongolia, Western China, and Central Asia as the cultural cradle of the Turks. Praising the ethnic, linguistic, and even religious Turkicness, Pan-Turkists, particularly the Tatar and Central Asian exiles, published and popularized knowledge about the “Outside Turks” (*dış türkler*) in Turkey. They portrayed Tatar life in Romanian Dobruja and in Crimea, as the main coastal centers of Turkic cultural life outside of Turkey in the in-

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25 Exemplary is the edited volume published by Warsaw University in 2016 under the title *Międzymorze: Nadzieje i ograniczenia w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Studium Europy Wschodniej, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2016). In her preface, the distinguished Polish historian Elżbieta Znamierowska-Rakk traces the evolution of the Polish idea of the Intermarium and reflects on “the menace of an economic nature, the German-Russian project of Nord Stream II that negatively affects the energy interests of the countries of our microregion.” See Elżbieta Znamierowska-Rakk, “Wstęp,” in *Międzymorze: Nadzieje i ograniczenia*, 10.

26 For more on Pan-Turkism, see Jacon M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*, 2nd rev. and updated ed. (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Berna Pekesen, “Pan-Turkism,” European History Online (EGO), published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), January 29, 2019, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/pekesenb-2014-en>.

terwar period. The nationalistic perception of the Black Sea in the Turkish and Pan-Turkist context took place later, and was somewhat sporadic.

The example of Ahmet Cevat's verse *Çırpınırđı Karadeniz* (The Black Sea Struggled) is an interesting example of cultural transfer within the Turkic world. During World War I, the Azeri poet Ahmet Cevat travelled to the Ottoman Empire, joined its army as an officer, and took part in the Battle of Çanakkale. He wrote reports from the front, then moved to Batumi, where he remained for several years, working as a teacher at a local school. Deeply impressed by the Ottomans, Cevat wrote the verses, and in 1918, the Azerbaijani composer Üzeyir Hacıbeyli composed the music, and the piece was played during Nuru Pasha's arrival in Baku. A year later, it was published in Cevat's collection of poems. Neither the manuscript of the verse nor that of the musical notes survived. Cevat was murdered in the course of the Stalinist purges in 1937. Less known in Azerbaijan itself, this song became popular in Turkey. In September 2018, a Kyrgyz singer performed it during the official visit of Recep T. Erdoğan to Bishkek,<sup>27</sup> and it was performed by thousands of supporters of Turkey's nationalist Party MHP, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, and by its leader Devlet Bahçeli during the political rally in Samsun on June 19, 2018.<sup>28</sup> The video clip of its performance by Azerbaijani soprano Azerin in Istanbul's central Taksim Square in 2012 has since attracted about nine million "likes." The song coined the notion of "Çırpınırđı Karadeniz" in Turkey's political language.<sup>29</sup> Aside from this geopoetical preoccupation with the Black Sea as a source of inspiration for Turkish nationalism, I have been able to discover few statements regarding the Black Sea's "inclusion Turkish influence sphere." Kemal Güçlü, the head of the Konya-based marginal Islamist *Ahlak-Der* (Society of World Ethics and Morals), posted the video with Erdoğan condemning the Russian occupation of Crimea and his non-acceptance of this violation of international law, and wrote beneath the link "Everyone should know that Crimea is a Motherland of Muslim Turks. It is our duty to unify all of Caucasia with Turkey and turn it into a Turkish Sea again in order to bring justice to the people of the region within thirty years."<sup>30</sup>

27 "Erdoğan'a 'Başbuğ' sürprizi," *Yeni Şafak*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.yenisafak.com/video-galeri/gundem/erdogana-cirpinirdi-karadeniz-surprizi-2182161>.

28 "Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Genel Başkanı Sayın Devlet BAHÇELİ'nin Samsun'da düzenlenen 'Çırpınırđı Karadeniz Bakıp Türk'ün Bayrağına' mitinginde yapmış oldukları konuşma. 19 Haziran 2018," website of Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, accessed January 26, 2021, [https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4433/mhp/Milliyetci\\_Hareket\\_Partisi\\_Genel\\_Baskani\\_Sayin\\_Devlet\\_BAHCELI\\_nin\\_Samsun\\_da\\_duzenlenen\\_Cirpinirdi\\_Karadeniz\\_Bakip\\_Turk\\_.html](https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4433/mhp/Milliyetci_Hareket_Partisi_Genel_Baskani_Sayin_Devlet_BAHCELI_nin_Samsun_da_duzenlenen_Cirpinirdi_Karadeniz_Bakip_Turk_.html).

29 See Orhan Dede, "Çırpınırđı Karadeniz şimdi ise kaynıyor," *Yeni mesaj*, November 29, 2018, <http://www.yenimesaj.com.tr/cirpinirdi-karadeniz-simdi-ise-kayniyor-H1308083.htm>.

30 Kemal Güçlü (@\_kernalguclu), February 3, 2020, Tweet, [https://twitter.com/\\_kernalguclu/status/1224458241674858496](https://twitter.com/_kernalguclu/status/1224458241674858496).

## 4 Russian Eurasianism in the Interwar and Post-Soviet Eras

The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought masses in motion. Thousands of Russian and non-Russian intellectuals refused to cooperate with the Bolsheviks and left the country. Reflection on why the Russian Revolution happened and why the Bolsheviks were able to hold onto power dominated Russian minds in and outside of Soviet Russia. Based at the universities and academic institutions in Sofia, Prague, and Paris, a group of Russian exiles published the programmatic manifesto *Iskhod k Vostoku* (Exodus towards the East). Opposing the Bolshevik ideology, these intellectuals searched for a post-imperial re-construction of Russia. They condemned Russian Bolshevism as European domination (Romano-Germanic influence), while praising the century-long co-existence and mutual influence of Slavic and Turkic societies. In close co-operation with Turkic ethnic groups and peoples, Russia had to reorganize itself as a Eurasian continent and oppose the European influence worldwide. The Russian-Turkic symbiosis was perceived as the savior of humankind.<sup>31</sup> The prominent linguist and Professor of Philology of the University of Vienna, Nikolai Trubetskoi, wrote on the eternal antagonism of Europe vs. humankind in his seminal *Evropa i chelovechestvo* (Europe and Humanity)<sup>32</sup> and praised “the Turanian element in Russian culture,”<sup>33</sup> to cite the title of an article of his that was well-received by Russian Eurasianists of the interwar period and still is by neo-Eurasianists today, both in Russia and in Turkey. Similar to the Turkish Pan-Turkists, Trubetskoi perceived Central Asia, specifically its rural areas, as the cradle of Turkicness, and in its nature he saw similarities with Russian folk culture. The urban spaces of Baku and Tbilisi were poisoned by urbanism, by Persian culture, and condemned. Savitskii, another representative of Eurasianist thought, stressed the importance of seas for Russia, and for its economy: “One should reach real guarantees that an enemy’s navy would not pass the straits and would not bomb the coasts of the Black Sea. It is fruitful to gain access to the Persian Gulf [...]. One should keep in mind that the both aims are not of extraordinary importance.”<sup>34</sup> According to Savitskii, Russia had to strengthen integration on the continent, and it should not invest too

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31 For more on Russian Eurasianism, see Leonid Luks, “Die Ideologie der Eurasier im zeitgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 34, no. 3 (1986): 374–95; Stefan Wiederkehr, *Die eurasische Bewegung: Wissenschaft und Politik in der russischen Emigration der Zwischenkriegszeit und im postsowjetischen Russland* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007).

32 N. S. Trubetskoi, *Evropa i chelovechestvo* (Sofia: Rossiisko-Bolgarskoe knigoizdatelstvo, 1920).

33 N. S. Trubetskoi, “O turanskom elemente v russkoi kulture,” *Evrasiiskii vremennik* 4 (1925). This article was repeatedly republished in post-Soviet Russia. The Russian text is available online (accessed November 5, 2021): [http://www.hrono.ru/statii/turan\\_ru.html](http://www.hrono.ru/statii/turan_ru.html). See the English translation of the article: Nikolai Trubetskoi, “On the Turanian Element in Russian Culture,” *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 37, no. 1 (1998): 8–29.

34 Petr Savitskii, “Kontinent – Okean (Rossiia i mirovoi rynok),” accessed January 26, 2021, <http://nevmenandr.net/eurasia/1921-isxod.php>.

much in “monkey-like imitation of the “oceanic” politics of others.”<sup>35</sup> The “classic” Eurasianists of the interwar period preferred continentality, soil-relatedness, and were much less admirers of the sea. The Neo-Eurasianists around the ill-known political analyst and ‘grey cardinal’ of present-day Russian politics, Aleksandr Dugin, seem to be more integrationist in their views on the geopolitics of the seas. Dugin preaches Neo-Eurasianism, and propagates close cooperation between Russia and every other nation against the alleged U.S. hegemony and NATO.<sup>36</sup> He is intertwined with Europe’s far right circles,<sup>37</sup> is a polyglot, and his works have been translated into several languages. The Eurasianist television channel *Evrasiia* and several news portals disseminated the “Directive of Dugin” under the title “The Black Sea Belongs to us and not to NATO.”<sup>38</sup> Dugin’s rhetoric is harsh but not new. Andrei Okara wrote in *Evrasiiskoe obozrenie* (Eurasian Review) in May 2002, almost twenty years ago: “[T]he countries of the Black Sea region could turn the Black Sea into an inland lake of Eastern Christian civilization, however, it is turning into an inland lake of NATO.”<sup>39</sup> The Bulgarian intellectual Mincho Minchev repeated the ideas of importance, indeed the “centrality” of the Black Sea for Russia-dominated Eurasia, in his essay “The Black Sea as the Center of Eurasia” of November 2012. For Minchev, the Black Sea is the “starting point of the great project of Eurasian unity.”<sup>40</sup>

The narrative on the Black Sea attracts interest not only among Neo-Eurasianists but also in the broader extreme right and staunchly conservative circles in Russia. In 2016, the conservative daily *Zavtra* (Tomorrow) published an article with the title “Baltic Melody about the Black Sea,” a nostalgic imperialistic verse of Aleksandr Klimov. The aim of this piece was the restoration of a “Soviet” mental map of possessions Moscow once controlled.<sup>41</sup> In an essay titled “A Thousand Years-long Struggle for Russian Sea and Tsargrad,” Aleksandr Samsonov, an amateur historian and far-right intellectual, called Crimea a “parasite state”: “The liquidation of this “tumor” was a monumental task for the Russian state.”<sup>42</sup> According to the author, “Strategic security of Russian civilization in the South is concerned. Enemies occupied Kyiv and part of the northern *prichernomore*<sup>43</sup> [...]. Georgia and Ukraine are bulwarks of NATO. Turkey is a historical

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35 Savitskii.

36 For more on Neo-Eurasianism and Dugin, see Audrey Tolstoy and Edmund McCaffray, “Mind Games: Alexander Dugin and Russia’s War of Ideas,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 6 (2015): 25–30.

37 See Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

38 “Chernoie more: ne NATO, a nashe,” Website of Aleksandr Dugin, accessed January 26, 2021, <http://dugin.ru/en/node/4891>.

39 Andrei N. Okara, “Prichernomore: Forpost ili podbriushe Bolshoi Evrazii,” Website of Mezhdunarodnoe Evraziiskoe Dvizhenie, published May 24 2002, <http://med.org.ru/article/375>.

40 “Bolgarskii ekspert: Prichernomore mozhet stat startovoi tochkoj grandioznogo proekta evraziiskogo proekta,” *regnum*, November 21, 2012, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1595499.html>.

41 Aleksandr Klimov, “Baltiiskaia melodiia o Chernom more: Nostalgii,” *Zavtra*, July 6, 2016.

42 Aleksandr Samsonov, “Tysiacheletniaia borba za Russkoe more i Tsargrad,” *Voennoe obozrenie*, November 17, 2018, <https://topwar.ru/149901-tysjacheletnjaja-borba-za-russkoe-more-i-cargrad.html>.

43 *Prichernomore* is a Russian word meaning literally “the lands before the Black Sea.”

enemy and a member of NATO. [...] A thousand-years-long battle for the Russian (Black) Sea and Constantinople-Tsargrad is not over.”<sup>44</sup> The far-right Russian writer Elena Chudinova, the author of *Mechet' Parizhskoi Bogomateri* (English title: *The Mosque of Notre Dame in Paris: 2048*), wrote just after the Russian annexation of the Crimea: “Not Putin, but we need the Black Sea [...]. For the first time in the last 23 years, European Russia crosses the borders of the 17<sup>th</sup> century [...]. It is not only about the Black Sea [...]. The destinies of living people and the reunification of Russian lands is more important [...].”<sup>45</sup>

The Black Sea commands great attention among geographers, philosophers, and other intellectuals in the context of the region’s geopolitical significance. It plays a certain role in the Russian debates on Eurasia, and in the Turkish discourse on “Turan.” However, the Black Sea has never been at the center of intellectual discourses. For Polish (Neo-)Prometheanists, the region was of importance as part of the “Intermarium” concept as well as in the Poland-backed Three Seas Initiative of 2015. And they do share with U.S. strategists the common idea of the region’s importance for containing Russia. In the regional concepts of Ukraine and Georgia, the Black Sea is perceived as central to those countries’ national security.

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44 Samsonov, “Tysiacheletniaia borba.”

45 Elena Chudinova, “Martovskie idy Ukrainy,” March 13, 2014, [http://www.golos-epohi.ru/?ELEMENT\\_ID=11792](http://www.golos-epohi.ru/?ELEMENT_ID=11792). Also published in Elena Semenova, ed., *Evromaidan i russkaia vesna: Istoriia, fakty, analitika* (Moscow: Traditsiia, 2014), 483–85.