

THE BLACK SEA AND THE ENERGY EQUATION IN THE MIDDLE OF POWER BALANCES¹

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Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the waters in the Black Sea have not calmed down.

From the first days of the occupation, although the demand of Western states, especially the USA, to send a navy in the Black Sea by suspending the terms of the Montreux Agreement, put Türkiye under great pressure, Türkiye has not made any concessions from the Montreux Agreement until now.

Desiring to see the Black Sea as a sea of peace, Türkiye established the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization and included even Armenia in this organization, seeing the Black Sea not only as a sea where borders are shared, but also as a common denominator where problems are resolved.

Among the difficulties faced by Türkiye in its geography, although the developments in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean have increased the possibility of conflict that has become more apparent in recent years, despite the Ukrainian occupation, a risk that engulfs Türkiye in the Black Sea has not emerged yet.

Although Russia's idea of locking the Straits lies behind the uncontrolled flow of sea mines off the Ukrainian coast, the absence of an exploding bomb is a result of Türkiye's keeping the necessary navy ready by following the process closely.

The fact that Russia is still the dominant power is still evident, even though the Ukraine invasion is subject to Ukrainian attacks that will take these steps back by Russia, which has advanced by cutting off its sea connection.

Excluding this and making a Ukraine-based Black Sea analysis may mean breaking with reality.

Since Türkiye knows Russia's power and influence from the very first day, it maintains its position of not accepting border changes in the future against border disputes involving Türkiye, while maintaining good relations with Russia despite Russia's aggression. Moreover, the fact that Russia, which sees NATO as the reason for attacking Ukraine, is willing to act as a mediator without even mentioning that Türkiye is a NATO member, shows the confidence shown.

This situation is actually a result of the joint security mechanism between Türkiye and Russia that was created in Syria and continues in Azerbaijan.

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Experienced processes have proven that new approaches, which are established by clearing the past fears and doubts, are also facilitating in the solution of other problems. What Türkiye wanted to provide in the Black Sea was the correct application of these previously established ties in the business.

In fact, it should not be overlooked that behind this, another process that started after the downing of the Russian plane that violated the Turkish airspace from the Syrian border is an accelerator.

After the downed plane, Russia's ban on tourists and the suspension of tomato imports from Türkiye hurt Russia the most.

After this loss, Russia, which is in search of normalization in relations without compromising its reputation, came to the rescue of the President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, with an apology letter.

The rapidly developing normalization process after the two countries made them see that they were the only losers.

A similar process has been taking place between Europe and Russia since the invasion of Ukraine. Although Russia, which was even excluded from the Council of Europe, was seen as a part of Europe until yesterday, the only reason why it is today's persona non grata is of course not the occupation of Ukraine.

The uneasiness created by Russia is the same as Hitler's Germany...

Europeans are living in Ukraine with the fear of German invasion, which cannot be lessened even by the involvement of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who gave the green light to Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, in the fate of another nation.

The Europeans, who do not believe that a piece of land to be given from Ukraine will stop Russia, are in great loyalty to the Ukrainians, with whom they are not very related.

But this loyalty brings with it another process where today Europe will suffer much more than a military invasion.

In recent years, we have watched European leaders, who say that NATO is brain dead, continue to divert this resource to other areas instead of fulfilling the NATO requirement to spend 2 percent of the budget for defense expenditures for years.

With the occupation of Ukraine, a sharp turn began to take place in this regard.

It was stated that the military power will be increased with the spending of 100 billion euros announced by the new Chancellor of Germany, Scholz.

In Japan, the first steps were taken to return from a pacifist constitution.

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After the assassination of Shinzo Abe, who argued that the constitution should be changed and Japan should establish an army with improved intervention capability, the goal of Abe's Liberal Party, which took power in Japan, was to enlarge the army.

Behind this decision, there is definitely the issue of the Kuril Islands, which is an area of conflict between Japan and Russia, as well as the developing aggression of Russia against Ukraine.

It is seen that Türkiye, which can only sit at the table with both sides, has a very unique place among the NATO countries, which are trying to distract Russia's aggression with more economic power instead of a chance to counterattack.

As the President of the Republic of Türkiye Erdogan stated in the 77th General Assembly speech of the United Nations, Türkiye wants to continue its mediation between Russia and Ukraine.

Although the expectation for a ceasefire after the Istanbul talks went back depending on the developments in the field, the establishment of the Grain Corridor shows that Türkiye's influence on the two states still continues.

The fact that Russia, which declared mobilization with the autumn months when Ukraine started a counter-attack, continued this step with Putin's threat of nuclear attack, showed that Russia's economic stagnation, as well as its tolerance for loss on the field, were up to a point.

This step of Russia, which cut off the natural gas flow indefinitely at the end of the summer, did not yield any results and the Europeans' emphasis on savings instead of taking a step back caused Russia to put forward a strategy that increased the military tone.

This situation, which Europe carries out without attacking Russia, may start a new process.

In particular, the fact that Finland and Sweden are waiting for approval in the parliaments of the last five NATO states regarding their NATO membership contains another threat.

Although it is an assurance for Russia that Türkiye has a say in the admission of these two states, which Putin warned about joining NATO, another threat exists as Europe maintains its sharp language against Russia.

Although it is not easy for Russia or Europe to reach this threat, the implementation of a referendum in the regions occupied by Russia and adding these regions to its borders can be seen as an effort to provide international justification for the nuclear attack.

The fact that the President of Ukraine, Zelensky, is gradually moving away from the ceasefire with his success in regaining the lost lands, exists as a great threat in the Black Sea's departure from the atmosphere of the sea of peace.

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The Black Sea, through which natural gas pipelines pass and is also a trade route for the Belt and Road Initiative, will also become a natural gas production region by 2023, making it a more strategic and conflict-free region for Türkiye.

Although it does not seem possible to find a solution for the European states to survive the expected hard winter, the process may soften if the expectation that Russia adopts a gradual normalization policy and that the pacifist reaction of the Europeans in the same Crimea will continue against the new referendum regions.

The increased risk of conflict will cause Russia to want to show its aggression even more harshly.

Even though there is enough US dollars in the Russian Central Bank until 2025, Russia's option to establish a new export route through Türkiye, which is isolated from international trade, strengthens the belief that the peace climate in the Black Sea will not deteriorate.

The general conclusion drawn from this whole equation was the fact that Europe's commitment to the green deal fell off the agenda and ignored all carbon problems to keep warm.

While it is clear that the green transformation targets planned for 2030 should be revised at a later date, the possibility of making Türkiye the new production base for the Europeans gives a slight chance of realizing the green agreement targets.

While Türkiye and European leaders' maneuvers in domestic and foreign policy will determine where the process will evolve, Türkiye's intimidation of the EU for membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization shows that Türkiye is aware of the balances and will not give up its trump card that easily.

In this intertwined process, the US's approach beyond selling LNG to Europe may cause it to assume a game-changing role, and the possibility that the unchanging stance will allow China to enter the playing field should not escape the attention.

With the investment plans of China, which is already energy-hungry, making Russia respond to its own demands, it reveals new economic routes that other states in Central Asia, including Mongolia, have gained.

There is a situation in which the world may embark on a transformation away from the USA's control with reserve money initiatives, but the USA's reaction to this cannot be predicted.

In all these balances, it would be an expression of truth to say that Türkiye and the Black Sea will have a say and this will have a changing weight in the system.

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