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## **WORKING DOCUMENT**

on The strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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## **The strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia**

The illegal annexation of Crimea and the subsequent destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine have significantly altered the strategic landscape in the Black Sea and the adjacent area. Russia's challenge to the international legal order and to the European post-Cold War security system, initiated in the wider Black Sea region, generated and will further require both tactical and strategic responses from the European Union, NATO, the US and from all Black Sea riparian States.

A European Parliament report dealing with the strategic, political and military implications of the illegal annexation of Crimea and of the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine for the security situation in the Black Sea Basin is thus timely.

### **Context and general approach**

In general lines, the report aims to analyse the military and security situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the ongoing military conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The report intends to bring the European Parliament's perspective on the challenges to the individual and/or the collective security and defence policies of the countries in the region and the roles assumed by the European Union, NATO and the US in contributing to the stability in the Black Sea Basin.

Your Rapporteur believes that the change in the strategic landscape and the evolving military situation in the Black Sea Basin are indicative of broader, systemic, challenges to European security and that the European Union and the EU Member States must have a coherent and unitary response to these challenges. The Report will also scrutinise the factors that might lead to further dynamics and developments (improvement/deterioration) of the security situation and regional threats.

The report will make several recommendations on how to address the regional challenges, by using existing CFSP and CSDP tools. The rapporteur is looking forward to cooperating with shadow rapporteurs and fellow colleagues for achieving a common perspective of the European Parliament on the matter.

### **Change in the strategic and security landscape of the Black Sea**

The takeover of Crimea changed significantly the strategic landscape in the Black Sea Basin.

The military balance in the Black Sea Basin has shifted, with Russia getting closer to NATO by hundreds of kilometres; the Azov Sea has been sealed, thus strengthening Russia's defence and providing direct access to the oil and gas reserves of the continental shelf of Ukraine. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea and the expansion and modernisation of the Black Sea Fleet will enhance Russia's defensive and offensive military posture and her ability to project power, beyond the Black Sea, towards the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and the

Middle East.

Still, by exercising control of the Black Sea Straights, combined with the naval and air general superiority, NATO continues to hold the upper hand militarily in the Black Sea.

The report will equally analyse the potential military consequences for the other riparian States and the strategic implications for the current "frozen/protracted conflicts" in the wider region.

By annexing Crimea, Russia challenged the international legal order and the established rules of behaviour between states. A number of questions including: borders, water delimitation, resources (oil, gas), supply solutions etc. need to be addressed.

Further efforts are needed to respond properly to the new threats in the region, including subversion and hybrid war.

The current crisis could affect existing frameworks of cooperation dedicated to other dimensions of security, such as combating illegal trafficking and migration, organized crime etc.

The correlation with the critical aspect of energy security in the Black Sea and beyond will be also explored.

### **Role of international actors**

Due to the heterogeneous character of the region, there is no Black Sea institutional architecture with security relevance.

The EU has a wide range of external policies for the Black Sea region in order to respond to the diversity of states and regional challenges: the Black Sea Synergy; the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, particularly the Association Agreements with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia; the formerly strategic partnership with Russia; the relationship with Turkey; as well as CSDP civilian missions.

In order to increase its credible contribution to the Black Sea region as a whole, the European Union must have more than a minimal approach.

The rapporteur considers that the Black Sea region should get higher priority for the EU, as requested by the European Parliament in several resolutions (most notably in the 2011 Resolution "An EU Strategy for the Black Sea")

The Report will also present NATO's strategic reassurance measures for the eastern Allies, as decided at the Wales Summit, and will stress the need for strengthening NATO-EU as well as the transatlantic coordination in the Black Sea region.

The EU puts more pressure on Russia by tightening the sanctions and widening its ban on investment in Crimea to target the Russian oil and gas exploration in the Black Sea.

The European Council strongly condemned the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the EU Member States will not recognise it.

For Russia the annexation of Crimea is, consequently, associated with significant political and economic costs.

Russia is an indispensable major actor of the international system and will remain so for the foreseeable future which would require a cooperative, rather than conflictual relationship in the long run. However, in the short term, any resumption of cooperation should be first backed up by a strong strategic reassurance continuing to be offered to NATO's eastern members and second, by the fact that there can be no political solution based on accepting the illegal annexation of Crimea.