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**Article**

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## NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES AND UKRAINE: IN SEARCH OF NEW INTERNATIONAL MODELS AND COMBINATIONS

Vladlen MAKOUKH\*

**Abstract:** *The new geopolitical realities pose difficult challenges for Ukraine in reviving old, as well as in searching new international models, combinations and configurations. Thus, when considering regional models such as the incentives GUAM, «V4», or BSEC, Ukraine should take into consideration, both their ups and downs. Within this context, the current paper proposes to assess the risks of Ukraine's participation in various forms of blocs and alliances.*

**Keywords:** «Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian Union»; GUAM; «V4»; BSEC; Ukraine

### Introduction

The new geopolitical conditions, which are being formed in the Black Sea region, represent the major stimulus that pushes the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry to assess the feasibility of reviving old and finding fundamentally new regional alliances involving Ukraine.

This paper investigates the question of efficiency regarding Ukraine's participation in regional blocs and organizations that already exist, such as BSEC and GUAM, or within newly established «V4» group, as well as whether to assess the prospects of joining international association, which will probably be established in the near future ("Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian Union").

The issue of Ukraine's participation in various regional organizations, blocs and alliances was debated in the significant number of works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists, among which are the studies of political scientists of Odessa National University - Irina Maksimenko, Sergei Glebov, Lyudmila Rossokha, Hanna Shelest, Marina Vorotnyuk, as well as Nadiia Bureiko, and Oksana Dobrzhanska, affiliated to Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. Nevertheless, at global level, the interest in this topic among foreign scientists decreases every year. Despite this decrease, there are still researchers interested in this topic, such as the well-known Georgian research scientist and diplomat Zurab Marshaniya, the Turkish scientists Halil and Bugrahan Nuri Erdemir, or the Romanian scientists Lavinia Lupu and Alexandru Voicu.

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## **1. Regional blocks and alliances: assessment of feasibility of Ukraine's participation**

### ***1.1. Ukraine's participation in already established regional organizations***

GUAM (est. in 1997) represents a regional group conceived as an alternative to EurAsEC and to other integration blocks in the CIS. It includes Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova. Under the Charter (GUAM, 2015), the main purposes of GUAM are: promoting democratic values and the rule of law, ensuring of human rights and sustainable development; strengthening of international and regional security and stability; deepening of European integration for creation of common security space, and expansion of economic and humanitarian cooperation; development of socio-economic, transport, energy, scientific-technical and humanitarian capacity; intensification of political interaction and practical cooperation in the areas of mutual interest.

GUAM member states cooperate in the framework of international organizations, including the UN and the OSCE. In 2003, GUAM was granted observer status within the UN General Assembly. According to the GUAM-US framework program for facilitation of trade and transportation, ensuring border and customs control, combating terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, the members of GUAM with the assistance of the US, the SECI Centre, together with experts from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary had implemented a number of joint projects. In particular, it was established the GUAM Virtual Center for combating terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and other dangerous crimes. Currently, the center works on realization of project for facilitation of trade and transport. On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, the GUAM Secretariat in Kyiv hosted the 35<sup>th</sup> meeting of the GUAM Council of National Coordinators. The Council considered the question of promoting the draft resolution «Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development» in the General Assembly of UNO.

The main standing challenge for GUAM is Russia's position in relation to the organization, which has been relatively negative from the beginning. The Kremlin sees GUAM as the organization that damages Russia's interests in the post-Soviet territory.

It is likely that an integrated approach will allow Ukraine to use GUAM as a platform to implement ideas and initiatives that could contribute to regional security and stability in the Black Sea. This can be achieved not only through the efforts of member states, but also by involving a wide range of international partners.

Cooperation within the **Black Sea Economic Cooperation** organization is an important priority for Ukraine. Except for Ukraine, the other members of the organization are: Azerbaijan, Albania, Bulgaria, Armenia, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Serbia and Turkey (Black Sea,

2014). The primary task of the BSEC is to develop economic cooperation in the Black Sea region, including: the promotion of various joint integration projects, starting with the regional "free trade zone" to smaller, such as the transport corridor (so-called "ring around the Black Sea"), and various energy projects: transportation of oil and electricity.

Besides, the BSEC is extremely important for the EU as a possible tool for promoting European interests in the Black Sea region. After the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria, as well as in the context of the existing internal debates among European countries regarding Turkey's integration in the EU, the actuality of the «Black Sea direction» strengthening in the regional policy of EU became apparent (Cooperation, 2015). In this regard, there could be outlined the decisions on both issues – the seriousness of EU's intentions to interact with the Black Sea regional organizations, as well as the reality of prospects for "Great Black Sea" countries integration to the EU (most of which are still outside the European Union - Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia).

Taking into account the "special attitude" of Russian attitude towards the European integration course of these countries, the long-term strategy of President Putin includes the political and economic division of Europe ("West") with the aim to create opportunities to interact with each particular state, using the Russian military-political and economic potential. It is also clear that the occupation of parts of its neighbors' territories as a tool for blocking the process of these states' integration in the western political and security space and it becomes the main instrument of the regional dimension of Russia's policy.

Thus, at present, strengthening its positions within the Black Sea region should become one of the highest priorities for the EU, because after the Crimea annexation, the military-political potential and Russian ambitions in the Black Sea have increased significantly. It should be noted that both Turkey and Ukraine give particular importance to BSEC as an organization, and this fact increases their weight in negotiations about possible accession to the EU (Maksimenko, 2012). The presence of European states within BSEC is very important as it seriously contributes to shaping possible opposition to Russia's counteractions regarding a number of foreign policy issues, thus becoming a solution in which Ukraine is interested in. Moreover, a noteworthy aspect is that within the BSEC framework, Russia continues to show interest in participating in various projects concerning specific issues, such as: the common energy market, transport infrastructure, cross-border cooperation etc. With this in mind, one cannot rule out Russian lobbying of energy projects which for various reasons is not profitable for Ukraine. However, direct involvement of Russia in the Syrian conflict on the side of the forces of the President Bashar al-Assad regime and the differences in the positions of Turkey and Russia on "the future of Syria" may affect the dynamics of Turkish-Russian relations.

BLACKSEAFOR is a military component of the naval operative interactions in the Black Sea region. However, unlike EUROMARFOR or "Visegrad Battle Group", the BLACKSEAFOR now has more challenges than opportunities. For more than ten years of existence, BLACKSEAFOR has become less of a naval "unit", but rather a "club", where the military member countries may decide without mediators specific issues of military and military-technical cooperation in the context of security in the Black Sea region (Poltorakov, 2011).

### *1.2. Ukraine's participation in new regional associations*

"Visegrad Four" (also called "Visegrad Group" or «V4») – is an association of four Central European countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. It was established during the Summit of Heads of State and Government of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland in Visegrad castle, in Hungary, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1991. From the beginning, the Presidents of the three countries established the so-called "Visegrad three" («V3»), which after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia turned into "Visegrad four" («V4»). The initial aim of «V4» was to promote the integration of member countries into NATO and the EU.

The idea to create a group to support Ukrainian reforms was initiated in the course of negotiations of «V4» countries with western partners in Bratislava in 2014. Then, it was decided to organize a joint visit of the Polish, Hungarian, Slovakian and Czech Foreign Ministers to Ukraine (Doroga, 2015). In addition, «V4» countries announced a plan to create a special fund to support Ukraine. While the assets of the Fund have not been made public, it was announced that the Fund is ready to provide Ukrainian students with 410 scholarships to study in Europe (Korba, 2014).

During the official meeting in Kiev with the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced Ukraine's intention to join the "Visegrad Four", and subsequently to convert the group into "Visegrad five". Some European countries "quartet" supported this idea. Thus, the Foreign Minister of Poland Grzegorz Schetina said that Poland is interested in the integration of Ukraine into the European Union and, accordingly, its joining the "Visegrad Four". Similarly, Slovakia expressed its interest in creating a more effective union based on «V4», provided that the main priority of such a union would be lobbying the common interests of the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) on the EU forums. It is possible that with this purpose, some amendments would be introduced regarding the membership of the association and in the organizational framework of «V4». Overall, the Ukrainian party counts on the support of all organization's members on the issue of Ukraine's entry into the «V4» and its transformation to «V5».

Thus, it is essential to deepen cooperation between Ukraine and the "Visegrad Group", in particular, for borrowing the European experience and further development of cross-border cooperation in the process of enlargement of the European Union (using certain benefits from the creation of free economic zones, development of joint cross-border projects and cross-border infrastructure, improvement of cross-border control, etc.). It is also important to consult on other issues of mutual interest. Particular attention should be paid to issues related to the promotion of political and economic interests of Ukraine in international organizations and receiving effective assistance from the countries of the Visegrad Group in the form of additional financial resources (to support and stabilise the Ukrainian economy).

The initiative "**Baltic-Black-Caspian Sea Union**" (Voloshin, 2013) was announced by the former Presidents of Ukraine and Georgia, respectively Victor Yushenko and Mihail Saakashvili in 2005. It is believed that the Union should encompass countries-initiators (Ukraine and Georgia), countries of the Baltic region (Lithuania in the first place), Caucasus (Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan). The geopolitical aim of the union, above all, was to create a political and economic counterweight to the Belarus - Russia - Kazakhstan bloc, which, at that time began to be strengthened, as well as to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. An important role in distancing potential member countries from Russia's Union was played by Poland. In addition, there was a count of pro-American orientation among the potential member countries 'elites.

However, for that period the creation of the alliance was complicated by the presence of a number of factors. First, by the heterogeneous attitude of the planned Union population towards the new association. Second, by the fluctuations within Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan leadership on the entry into the Union (it should also take into account the fact that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had already been members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

After a long "downtime" and in the context of the crisis in the recent years (including the conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine), in 2015, the President of Poland Andrzej Duda addressed the idea of a reanimation of the Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian project. He suggested setting up a union in an updated format (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia with the possible accession of Moldova and Turkey).

In such ideas, Warsaw can hope on Washington's assistance, as far as the US devotes great attention to the idea of Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian Union. The New Community may be useful to Americans as a lever of pressure on the old "pillars" of EU - France, Germany and the UK. However, the Baltic-Black Sea arc, which should be the place of accomplishing Andrzej Duda's geopolitical plans, is not very viable. Thus, relations between Poland and Lithuania have some historical nuances.

Adding to this the fact that many Central European countries have strong pro-Russian lobby. All potential candidate countries have their own national interests that may compete with each other (Leusenko, 2015).

In addition, for an effective functioning, the Union badly needs Turkey, which plays the role of a "cork" in the Caspian bottle. Thus, the pipeline in Central Asia can go only through Turkish territory, as far as Azerbaijan sandwiched between the territories of two countries which often display unfriendly attitude towards the American geopolitical experiments - Iran and Russia.

Moving forward with the plans for creating the Baltic-Black Sea arc (in any format), one can expect reactions from the Russian Foreign Ministry (Karaichentsev, 2004). Therefore, the tactics of Russia consist of creating and maintain the existing "frozen" conflicts, especially in the region between the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas, which will allow Russia not only to slow down the integration process of regional states in NATO and the EU, but also to emphasize the internal contradictions within the European Union, thus trying to split its unity on the issue of sanctions against Russia.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the above, we can conclude that, in general, Ukraine's participation in the work of such organizations and blocs such as the "Visegrad Four", BSEC, or GUAM, will boost its international prestige and strengthen regional security and stability in the Black Sea region.

However, it should be noted that the main obstacle to Ukraine's joining the European integration space is a lack of consensus between Western, Central and Eastern Europe both on the issue of its membership in some international and regional organizations, as well as on the interaction between Ukraine and Russia, especially in the context of managing "hot" regional issues and "frozen" conflicts.

Overall, in the future, one cannot exclude the possibility of establishing new regional blocs, unions and organizations, which could incorporate Ukraine. It is likely that the participation in such unions contributes to restoring peace and enhancing stability, both in Ukraine and in the "frozen conflicts" areas located on the territory of other post-Soviet countries.

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