

Strategic military situation in the Black Sea basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia

2015/2036(INI) - 21/05/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Ioan Mircea PACU (S&D, RO) on the strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Members recalled that the **European Council has strongly condemned the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol**. They recalled that the European Council firmly supported the non-recognition of Russia's annexation of Crimea and that Russia's actions have seriously weakened the armed forces of Ukraine and destabilised the situation in the east of Ukraine.

Russia now unlawfully controls hundreds of kilometres of the Crimean coastline and the adjacent waters facing NATO and EU maritime borders. It has fuelled aggressive actions on Ukrainian territory in spite of the sanctions imposed on it by the European Union. Members warned that by occupying the entire peninsula, Russia has gained a very important launching pad facing both west (the Balkans, Transnistria and the Danube Mouths) and south (the Eastern Mediterranean), where it has established a permanent naval task force, and that the illegal annexation of Crimea offers Russia a 'southern Kaliningrad', another outpost directly bordering on NATO.

Change in the strategic and security landscape of the Black Sea: in this context, Members firmly supported the non-recognition of Russia's annexation of Crimea not without reiterating their commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. They noted that the illegal annexation of Crimea has precipitated a significant change in the strategic landscape of the Black Sea Basin and the adjacent area. They considered that the aggressive actions of Russia represent its return to a hostile, block-to-block type approach.

Members stated that the change in the geostrategic landscape, the evolving military situation in the Black Sea Basin and the forceful annexation of Crimea by Russia are indicative of **broader and systemic challenges to the post-Cold War, norms-based European security architecture**. The EU and the Member States must have a security response to these challenges and reconsider their foreign and security policies in light of this, which must be reflected in a **reviewed European Security Strategy**, in the European Maritime Security Strategy and in the EU Strategy for the Black Sea. Members are particularly concerned about Russia's continuous military build-up in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia regions of Georgia. **This military infrastructure of both defensive and offensive character, with its wide operational range, poses a serious threat to the whole Black Sea region.**

Noting with concern that Russia has bolstered its air and naval defences in the Black Sea Basin considerably, deploying new naval defence (anti-ship) missiles (with a range of 600 km, able to reach the Bosphorus), Members recalled President Putin's declaration that he was ready to put **Russian nuclear forces on alert** during Russia's seizure of Crimea, had the West intervened against the annexation. The potential Russian deployment of dual-capable weapon systems in Crimea place in doubt Russia's good intentions when it comes to achieving progress on the multilateral nuclear disarmament agenda in the forthcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty review, undermining the efforts already made in that direction.

Members are concerned about the **situation in the east of Ukraine** and called for all hostilities to be halted and prevent further war crimes and new victims.

Staying firm and communicating with Russia: Members underlined that the relationship with Russia should, in general, be cooperative rather than confrontational in the long run. They called for a change of Russian policy towards Ukraine, in particular the full and unconditional implementation of the Minsk agreements of September 2014 and February 2015 and the return of Crimea to Ukraine.

Members called on EU Member States to remain firm and united in their commitment to the **agreed sanctions against Russia**, also by freezing all military and defence cooperation and by cancelling contracts, such as for the delivery of Mistral class amphibious assault ships to Russia.

Energy, maritime, border and human security in the Black Sea region: Members urged the Member States to take the steps needed to reduce their energy dependence and to ensure the security of oil and gas exploitation and transportation activities in the Black Sea region. They called on Commission to resume the work towards the construction of the Nabucco gas pipeline. They reaffirmed that given Europe's dependence on the Black Sea for the transit of energy supplies, the EU has a strategic interest in deterring regional actors from brinkmanship and, for that purpose, may need to **mobilise European naval and airspace assets to the Black Sea**.

Members condemned the violations of human rights in Crimea that have occurred since the occupation by Russian forces, including censorship of freedom of speech and the persecution of minorities (Crimean Tatars in particular).

On an ecological level, Members drew attention to the extreme environmental vulnerability of the Black Sea basin and stressed that the growing militarisation of the region poses further risks to this delicate ecosystem.

They recalled that, faced with the Russian hybrid war in Ukraine, **the EU must stay united and speak with a single voice** which is considered as a prerequisite of an effective response to all security threats.

Role of the EU and international actors: Members underlined that the Black Sea region should have real priority for the EU. They considered that the current **Black Sea Synergy (BSS) format is outdated** and called for a revision of this strategy.

They stressed that, in spite of the fact that the BSS is practically on hold, effective cooperation with the states in the Black Sea Basin should continue.

Members stressed the critical importance of coordinating with NATO, in particular with the Black Sea littoral states that are members of the Alliance, and with the United States, as the Black Sea Basin is a key component of **Euro-Atlantic security**. They called for the modernisation and enhancement of the military capabilities of those Black Sea littoral states that are members of EU and NATO. They called on NATO to continue to develop its cyber and missile defence capabilities, including in the Black Sea region, and to develop contingency plans for deterring and countering asymmetric and hybrid warfare. **They urged the Commission to support the Member States in their efforts to identify solutions for increasing their defence budget to the level of 2%**. They welcomed, in passing, the pledge made by members of NATO during the last NATO Summit in Newport to ensure that their defence spending reaches a minimum of 2% GDP by 2024. They noted that following the 2008 war in Georgia and the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea, Russia has territorially crippled the two countries, making them ineligible for NATO membership. They considered that, while not being able to defend them directly, NATO has a moral obligation to support Georgia's and Ukraine's ability to defend themselves.

Lastly, Members recalled that NATO should preserve its general naval and air superiority in the Black Sea Basin.