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~ EDITORIAL ~

TURKEY - EMERGING POWER OR BLACK SEA HEGEMON?

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Analyzing Turkey's role as an emerging power or hegemon in the Black Sea region is a multifaceted and complex issue, encompassing numerous dimensions. Considering Turkey's strategic, historical, and geographical significance, this country has played, and still plays (Mărcău, 2022), a pivotal role in the Black Sea area and in international relations at large.

On July 27, 2023, the United States Senate approved the U.S. defense budget authorization (National Defense Authorization Act / NDAA). Within the NDAA, the Black Sea Security Act was also approved, through an amendment introduced by Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Mitt Romney (Black Sea Security Act, 2023).

The Black Sea Security Act of 2023 addresses the security issue in the Black Sea region, especially in the context of the Russian Federation's aggressions in the area. The United States identifies the Black Sea as a region of Russian aggression and emphasizes the significance of the Black Sea littoral states in countering this aggression (Black Sea Security Act, 2023).

The Act determines that the U.S. policy should counter Russian threats in the region, encourage cooperation within NATO and the EU, support economic ties between the U.S. and the Black Sea states, provide economic alternatives to China's coercive offers, and support democratization in the Black Sea states (Black Sea Security Act, 2023).

Significantly, it mandates the formulation of a strategy within 180 days of its enactment, with clear objectives in areas such as security assistance, energy security, economic prosperity, democratic resilience, and regional connectivity.

A point that should not be overlooked is the fact that the U.S., in an official document, highlights concerns about Turkey, which might be worrisome given the mention that Turkey's behavior towards certain regional allies and democratic states has been counterproductive, adding to tensions in the region. It is suggested that Turkey should refrain from any actions that might further escalate regional tensions. Additionally, attention is drawn to Turkey's ongoing delay in ratifying Sweden and Finland's NATO accession, undermining the strength of the alliance and hindering a united international response to Russia's unjustified war in Ukraine (Black Sea Security Act, 2023). This behavior became evident after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

In summary, we can assess Turkey's behavior over the past years to determine if it exhibits hegemonic tendencies: 1) Diplomatically, Turkey attempted to maintain balanced diplomacy, adopting the "zero problems with neighbors" policy (Mărcău, Ciorei, 2013). However, in recent years, this



policy faced challenges, with increasing tensions with countries like Greece, due to disputes over maritime rights and exclusive economic zones; 2) Militarily, Turkey has intervened in Syria and Libya in recent years, showcasing its capability and willingness to use military force for its national interest. It's worth noting that these interventions were not in the Black Sea region but in other areas of interest for Turkey; 3) Economically, Turkey has often leveraged its economic relationships as a means of influence, especially with Black Sea regional countries; 4) With historical and cultural ties to many Black Sea region countries, Turkey has sought to utilize these connections to increase its cultural influence and soft power; 5) While Turkey cooperates with Russia in certain areas, tensions also exist, indicating that Turkey is not willing to allow Russia complete dominance over the region. Displayed strengths became prominent after the start of the Ukraine war, with Turkey even playing a mediating role in the "grain crisis" (EU, UN, and Turkey attempt to persuade Russia to accept the extension of the agreement allowing Ukrainian grain exports via the Black Sea, 2023); 6) Control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits is crucial for access to the Black Sea, and Turkey has utilized this strategic position to influence naval traffic and related policies. Moreover, it played a pivotal role in stabilizing the Black Sea after the onset of aggressions in Ukraine (Turkey banned warships from passing through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, 2022).

It's important to note that, despite these aspects, Turkey remains a valuable and strategic member of NATO, boasting the alliance's second-largest military and controlling the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which are crucial for access to the Black Sea. Some of its behaviors can be associated with a hegemon, particularly in terms of using military force and exerting economic influence. However, the Black Sea region has multiple significant actors, and the power dynamics are ever-evolving. Thus, even though Turkey exhibits certain hegemonic behaviors, it's challenging to classify it as a clear and undisputed hegemon in the region. Perhaps one of the factors influencing its behavior is the undemocratic regime in the country, especially after the 2016 coup attempt (Mărcău, 2019).

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