

30. The sample amounted to 619 respondents. The survey covered 7 out of 10 cities of the republic and 27 rural settlements.
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2021.04.002. ELENA DMITRIEVA. GEOSTRATEGY OF THE CASPIAN STATES // *Condensed abstract was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: Caspian region, resources, security, challenges, legal status of the Caspian Sea, national interests, geopolitical interests.

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1. Sidorov S.A. The Caspian Region in the System of International Relations* // *"Pravo i Gosudarstvo: Teoriya i Praktika"*. 2021. № 4 (196), P. 162–165.

2. Pushkareva V.V. The Caspian Region in Modern Politics: Problems of Regional Cooperation* // *"Bulletin of Udmurt University. Sociology. Political Science. International relations"*. 2021. Vol. 5, № 2, P. 211–220.

The author of the article (1) believes that the situation prevailing today in the Caspian region is complex and requires sustained attention from the Russian authorities. Geopolitical rivalry has been spurred by entirely diverging interests of countries of the Caspian Sea region, growing importance of energy resources, strengthening of the political influence of the

* Translation of the title is presented in author's version.

US and the EU, economic presence of China, collapse of the USSR and emergence of new independent states in the region. Due to a number of its features, the Caspian region is strategically important and geopolitically significant not only for Russia, but also for the US, China, Turkey and the EU countries.

The fast-growing Asian market with China at the helm might also find the resources of the Caspian Sea area attractive. The 1991 parade of sovereignties changed the balance of power and increased the number of the Caspian Sea states. At present, apart from Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also have access to the sea. As the successor to the USSR and as a regional power in the Caspian region, Russia is working to maintain its influence on the emerging security system. On the one hand, a substantial regional market for goods and technologies can provide significant compensation for financial losses connected with sanctions against Russia; on the other hand, enhancing relations between five countries in the Caspian Sea region can set new milestones for growth within the framework of the policy for economic diversification adopted by Russia.

Analyzing the processes in the Caspian region, the author is of the view that the Caspian region includes only coastal territories comparable in size to the sea itself. Thus, the region includes most of Azerbaijan, the Caspian territories of Russia (Daghestan, Kalmykia and Astrakhan Oblast), Western Kazakhstan and virtually all of Turkmenistan and Northern Iran. It should be noted that the 2011 events subsequently led to a major change in the Arab world. In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, the constitutional order was overthrown and pro-American governments were established, with the features of "managed chaos" with a tinge of religious extremism retaining. In Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Bahrain, the policy shifted in favour of the US. Therefore, being aware of the strategic importance of the Caspian region, the US works to establish a unified naval force with the Caspian Sea states in pursuit of a priority position in the world and advantageous foreign policy

balance of power. For example, the US Caspian Guard Initiative was designed to safeguard pipeline projects in cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, as well as to prevent and, if necessary, respond to terrorist activities, nuclear proliferation and human trafficking.

The author of the article draws attention to the US strategic security concept in 2013, where strengthening the role of NATO in the Caspian Sea region is among the priorities. According to the US, NATO could be involved in addressing new challenges and threats to security in the region, potentially posed by the Iranian nuclear program. In recent years, the US and its NATO allies have been working to establish their military presence in the Caspian Sea area by obtaining the consent of the countries in the region. Such plans go against the interests of Russia.

The author notes that the EU countries are particularly interested in the potential of the Caspian region. Making the Caspian Sea resources part of the EU energy supply system is in line with the plans to diversify oil and gas imports. The EU policy in the Caspian region was initially shaped with regard to transport and energy projects, which were supposed to contribute to development of the East-West transit corridor. Programmes such as TACIS, TRACECA and INOGATE involve integration of the transport systems of the former Soviet republics with similar international systems.

The author emphasizes that both Russia and Iran are concerned about the activities of the aforementioned external players in the Caspian region, since they are actively working to oust Russia from the coast of the Caspian Sea and destabilize the situation in the region. Russia is facing new regional challenges in the Caspian Sea area, i.e. an upsurge in crimes committed at sea (poaching, drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling) and increased threat of terrorist attacks.

At the same time, the author points to the fact that there is no clear strategy to counter existing and new security threats in the region, agreed among the Caspian Sea countries. All the

coastal countries, with the exception of Turkmenistan, have supported Russia's initiative to form the CASFOR naval forces, named by analogy with the BLACKSEAFOR in the Black Sea. The issues related to its creation have not yet been resolved, since even those countries that welcomed the initiative fear an increase in influence of Russia within this structure.

Russia has also proposed the creation of the Caspian Economic Cooperation Organization (CECO), since at present there is no international association, which would include the "Caspian Five" countries. Once more, this initiative was met with reservations by the Caspian Sea countries. Although in terms of strengthening regional security in the Caspian Sea, CECO is probably the only solution, Turkmenistan objected the idea, while Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan did not endorse it for a number of reasons. The actions of extra-regional actors in the region also indicate the need for such an organization, e.g. the US, the EU and China are actively promoting their economic and geopolitical interests in the region by fomenting contradictions between the Caspian Sea countries and thereby undermining credibility and security in the region.

The author concludes that the interest of world politics in the Caspian region is expected to only grow every year. It will remain the focus of geopolitical strategies of both regional and non-regional powers, with each side seeking benefit by trying to influence the policy of the Caspian Sea countries. The growing militarization of the region is an alarming development, since the Caspian Sea area may soon turn into one of the most unstable regions in the world. The ongoing confrontation between the US and Iran is a source of particular tension.

There is still no international legal framework for cooperation between the coastal states in the Caspian region. Countries of the "Caspian Five" should step up their efforts to create a regional organization dealing with security and cooperation in the Caspian Sea. The "Caspian Five" countries should pool efforts to achieve unanimous recognition of the

Caspian Sea as a unique inland body of water, obtain legal status for the sea and ensure its exclusive use by the coastal states.

The author of the article V.V. Pushkareva (2) believes that the lack of cooperation and inability to create a reliable mechanism to protect regional interests present a major challenge for the countries of the Caspian region. The author notes that now the Caspian Sea zone is controlled by five states, while before the collapse of the USSR only two countries – the USSR and Iran – had access to the sea. The “Caspian Five” countries are Iran; Russia, a successor of the USSR; and three former Soviet republics – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The “Caspian region” concept in a political sense emerged after the collapse of the bipolar system and the USSR. It was coined in the US State Department, but later the countries in the region started using it too.

The author points to the fact that there is no unified view on the question of the structure of the Caspian region. Initially, the Caspian Sea area was considered important due to the second largest energy reserves after the Persian Gulf zone. Recently, however, the growing military-political aspect of the Caspian Sea region has come to the fore in terms of global politics. This is evidenced by Russia’s successful use of the Caspian Sea to launch missiles at militants in Syria and ongoing militarization of the region.

The author analyzes the development of cooperation and close interaction between the countries in the region and identifies a complex set of internal and external factors.

Discussing internal economic factors, the author notes that the “Caspian Five” countries are now facing economic challenges, especially after the fall in oil prices; there is a need for investments and loans, modernization of production and new environment-friendly technologies for oil and gas production. Possessing large reserves of energy raw materials, the coastal countries have sought to benefit from the interests of their neighbour states or cooperation with non-regional countries, such

as China, Turkey or the EU. International oil companies took advantage of the weakness of the post-Soviet states, and today most of the Caspian oil belongs to foreign investors. They set the transit routes of the produced oil, allowing the political factor to dominate over economic expediency. For example, Azerbaijan would prefer to fill its pipelines with Turkmen oil, while for Turkmenistan it is more profitable to export most of the extracted raw materials to China.

The Caspian Sea is home to about 120 species and subspecies of fish; moreover, it is the world's gene pool of sturgeon species, the catch here accounts for about 90 per cent of world's sturgeon landings. For comparison, one kg of oil costs only 50 cents, while one kg of black beluga caviar costs about one thousand dollars (one kg of golden caviar of albino beluga costs \$44.000). It is a very important resource, but at present hydrocarbon extraction comes first. The Caspian Sea states have not yet established uniform rules for fishing and joint control over the sturgeon catch, which also gives rise to disagreements in the region. Thus, Iran opposes the construction of a pipeline by Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in the southern part of the Caspian Sea since it would severely damage the environment. Instead, Iran suggested using its infrastructure, i.e. pipelines and terminals for transit of gas to world markets and oil refineries. Most of the aspects of trade, economic, investment, energy and transport development of the Caspian Sea region are of a cross-border nature and cannot be successfully addressed by individual states.

As for political factors, the author believes that the regional competition over hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea prompts the coastal states to build up their naval potential with external support. In particular, the US cooperates with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and Turkey is working closely with Azerbaijan. The situation is further aggravated by military interests of two major regional powers, Iran and Turkey, which are on opposite sides of the confrontation with the US.

After the collapse of the USSR, the post-Soviet political elite tended to weaken ties with Russia; nationalism combined with the revival of religious values prevailed in the newly formed states; the Russian-speaking population did not fit into clannishness, which was gaining momentum. At present, the Soviet past is still being criticized, the Cyrillic alphabet has been replaced by the Latin alphabet, and Soviet education diplomas are not recognized.

The diverse ethnic composition of the Caspian Sea region often causes interethnic confrontations, e.g. the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is extremely complex. Also, in the atmosphere of growing competition between the oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups stepped up their activities in the region, contributing to the spread of extremist religious movements. The population of three countries of the Caspian region – Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan – is predominantly Turkic-speaking. In addition, there are many Turkic-speaking Diasporas in Russia and Iran. In this regard, the so-called Turkic factor plays an important role in the developments in the Caspian region. Viewing itself as the center of the Turkic world, neighbouring Turkey is working to enhance its presence in the region. Turkey has created a vast network of educational institutions in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia, the educational standards of which are against the established secular paradigm.

The author also discusses external factors affecting regional stability. Located in the centre of Eurasia, the Caspian region connects Europe with Asian regions via transit transport corridor. As a result, economic and geopolitical interests of the world's leading countries are interwoven here. The US, EU, China and Turkey are most active players in the region. Claiming the role of a global leader, the US seeks to control the economies of the post-Soviet countries and the extraction and transit of hydrocarbons; all the activities of the US are therefore aimed at weakening historical ties between the Caspian states and Russia. The US also

hampers the activities of China in the region, trying to clash the interests of China and Russia. The author nevertheless believes that so far China is the most successful extra-regional player in the Caspian region in comparison with other countries. Among the Caspian states, China gives priority to Kazakhstan as the richest state in terms of raw materials, purchasing oil primarily from this country. China also enjoys beneficial gas supplies from Turkmenistan, investing heavily in the production of gas, which is transported through the West-East gas pipeline, the longest energy pipeline in China. China is Turkmenistan's largest foreign trade partner.

The author notes that Chinese companies continue to invest in Iran, profiting from US sanctions on the Iranian nuclear deal, because European companies do not want to cooperate with Iran because of the sanctions imposed by the United States. In terms of geopolitics, the Caspian Sea fits in the Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by China. Thus, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) is advantageous for China, since it bypasses the territory of Russia and therefore strengthens energy cooperation between China and the Caspian states.

The Caspian Sea is the only sea not covered by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, since it is viewed as inland waters and belongs to the coastal states. In practice, the legal status of the Caspian Sea as a lake means that the five states have agreed to solve any problems without the involvement of external countries. At the military level, this means that the water area of the Caspian Sea can only be used by the naval forces of those states that have access to the sea. This makes the Caspian Sea an area free from the presence of NATO, as well as from China, which is building up its military forces. Since the Caspian region adjoins the Caucasus on one side, and Central Asia on the other, there are numerous threats and causes of destabilization, from terrorist activities to NATO attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries in this region. Thus, cooperation it

the military sphere is as important as the division of maritime zones.

The external political situation in the Caspian region is complex. The possible “colour revolutions” in a domino sequence are posing a serious threat to national security of all the Caspian states. The destabilization of the situation in one of the countries would trigger political instability in all the Caspian Sea countries.

The author analyzes the complex political situation in Iran, where there is a threat of developments similar to those in Syria or Iraq. Should this happen, the situation in neighbouring Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan would automatically escalate. By posing a threat to Azerbaijan, radical Islamists might also jeopardize the situation in the North Caucasus region of Russia and infiltrate areas with Muslim population.

The author concludes that current situation in the Caspian Sea area and lack of regional cooperation is a source of serious concern for the security in the region. Under the pretext of “combating international terrorism”, the US and NATO are stepping up their efforts to establish their military and political control over strategically most important regions of the world, including the Caspian region. The growing influence of global powers; covert and open struggles for the control over energy resources and transit; national policies aimed at fuelling discord; severing of traditional ties and lack of a mechanism for coordinating cooperation between the “Caspian Five” countries allow extra-regional players to control overall developments in the region.