



Research Report

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Committee: Security Council

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Issue of: The issue of the Sea of Azov



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Forum: Security Council
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Introduction

In 2003 the Russian Federation and Ukraine decided upon an agreement to treat the Sea of Azov and Strait of Kerch as historically internal waters, and that all Ukrainian and Russian vessels have free navigation in these waters. This is very important for both nations, as the sea of Azov allows for import and export.

The sea of Azov lies between Russia and Ukraine and is connected to the Black sea by the Strait of Kerch. On the left side of the Strait of Kerch lies the Crimean Peninsula and on the right lies Russia.



In the past couple of years, the Russian Federation has been militarizing the Sea of Azov and surrounding areas, and the fact that they occupy the Crimea makes this a lot easier for them. As decided in the 2003 agreement, the Sea of Azov and the Strait of Kerch are shared waters, but Russia has a lot of control over the ships that pass through this territory. In November 2018, the situation escalated. Three Ukrainian navy ships were blocked passage by a Russian tanker. The tanker opened fire and injured 6 sailors before seizing the ship and 24 sailors on the ships. It took nearly a year for them to be returned to Ukraine.

Definition of Key Terms

Annexation

When a country takes possession of a country or a piece of land without permission or by force.

Crimea

Crimea is a peninsula located at the south of Ukraine surrounded by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

Sea of Azov

The Sea of Azov is a sea connected to the Black Sea by the strait of Kerch. It lies between Ukraine and Russia.



Mariupol

Mariupol is a big Ukrainian city at the north coast of the Sea of Azov. It has a big steel production industry and exports this through the Sea of Azov.

Berdyansk

Berdyansk is, like Mariupol, a trading port that heavily depends on its export through the Sea of Azov. It lies a little to the west of Mariupol.

Kerch Strait Bridge

The Kerch Strait Bridge, also known as the Crimean bridge, was constructed by Russia between 2016 and 2018. The bridge is 19 km long, but not very high, spanning over the strait of Kerch.

General Overview

History

Ukraine and Russia have a long and difficult history. The area of Crimea has played a key role in those relations for a long time. Unrest in the Ukraine in 2014, where the population protested against a Russia friendly government, resulted in the government falling. In the aftermath, Russia annexed Crimea. Due to Crimea's position, this gave Russia control over the Strait of Kerch. Russia has continued pressure on the Ukraine, both military as well as politically.

How the situation unfolded

In 2015, Russia started the construction of a bridge across the Strait of Kerch. The bridge allows easy transportation of Russian equipment and arms into Crimea, which makes it even easier for Russia to control the area, but more importantly, controls the flow of shipments from important Ukrainian trading ports. Due to the height of the bridge (only 33 meters) no fully loaded, large ships can pass through the Strait of Kerch.



After the construction of the bridge, Russian vessels began stopping both Ukrainian and other foreign ships to and from the Sea of Azov. This has had huge financial consequences for Ukraine and has thereby led to the decision of Ukraine in September 2018 to not renew the Russian-Ukrainian friendship treaty which had been in place since 1997.

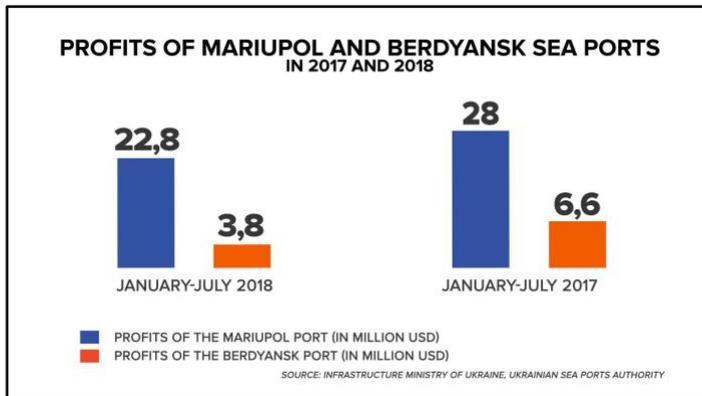
The Russian-Ukrainian friendship treaty was put in place after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and contained, among other things, the promise to respect each other's territorial borders. Unfortunately, at the time, the shape of those borders was not yet agreed between the two parties.

The importance of the Sea of Azov



The first reason why the Sea of Azov is so important is that it is vital the economic wellbeing of Ukraine. Along the coastline of the Sea of Azov lie many trading ports that are greatly impacted by the ongoing conflict, especially Mariupol and Berdiansk. In the graph below you can see the decline of profits made through these ports due to the construction of the Crimean bridge. Because of the bridge constructed by Russia over the Strait of Kerch, it is not possible for big, fully loaded ships to pass through the only exit out of the Sea of Azov. This particularly affects the

import and export of steel and grain which causes a decline in demand for Ukrainian companies providing these materials. The production has slowed significantly compared to the pre-conflict situation, which means it will be very hard to get back on track if it were to become possible to freely enter and exit the Sea of Azov again.



Of course, the Kerch Strait Bridge has more than just an economical value. The construction of the bridge provides Russia with direct access to the Crimean territory,

allowing for easy troop movements and supplies. On top of that, the bridge provides the tactical position necessary to decline access to the Black Sea for the Ukraine. To further emphasise the strategic advantage, Russian navy ships are stationed in the areas of the Black Sea that are the common territory of both Russia and Ukraine, and there have been regular small-scale conflicts there. This situation could easily inflame and pull allies into the conflict.

A further centre of contention with Russia's annexation of Crimea is that the Black Sea areas associated with the Crimean Peninsula are estimated to hold a large cache of oil and natural gas, which industry experts' value in the trillions of US dollars.

Major Parties Involved

Russia

Russia is one of the two countries that are in conflict. The conflict started with the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The international community has questioned the validity of the Crimean status referendum that has taken place after an armed insurrection. The bridge that Russia has constructed over the strait of Kerch has done nothing to bring the two nations closer to a mutually acceptable solution. The military Russian ships that are organizing surveillance on the Sea of Azov are also part of the issue.

Ukraine

The Ukrainian parliament has taken many measures in order to get back Crimea and regain control over the Sea of Azov. None of these attempts have been particularly successful, even with the financial and political help Ukraine has received from other nations.

United States of America



The U.S. has supported Ukraine in several different ways. They sold advanced patrol boats to Ukraine along with providing them with a \$250 million aid package. The U.S. navy is helping with the development of a surveillance plan for the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Ukraine is now also a NATO “enhanced opportunities partner”. This means they receive support from NATO as well.

United Kingdom

The UK navy has assisted in the training of marines in Ukraine along with Sweden, Denmark and Canada. They are the leading party for this initiative. The UK has also deployed warships in the area.

Timeline of Key Events

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| December 2003 | Agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on cooperation in the use of the sea of Azov and the strait of Kerch is made. |
| February 20, – March 26, 2014 | Crimean crisis: During this time period Russia Annexed Crimea |
| March 16th 2014 | The Crimean status referendum. |
| March 27th 2014 | the General Assembly passes a (non-binding) resolution declaring the referendum invalid |
| March 2014 | The G7 block announces the cancellation of the G8 summit in Sochi |
| May 2018 | Russia finishes the construction of the Crimean bridge. |
| September 17th 2018 | Ukraine decides to abrogate the agreement made in 2003 with Russia. |
| November 2018 | Russia seizes three Ukrainian ships and 24 sailors, escalating the situation. |

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

In the past years there have been many attempts made by the UN and other parties to resolve the conflict. On March 27, 2014 the General Assembly passed a (non-binding) resolution declaring the 2014 referendum held in Crimea invalid. This was not the first resolution that was debated within the UN. On the 15th of March the Security Council voted on a similar resolution. This resolution, however, did not pass due to a Russian veto.

In addition to UN involvement, there have also been sanctions imposed on Russia by several other parties. The European Union has taken action in several different ways. In addition to the suspension of agreements between the EU and Russia, they also



decided to suspend talks about visa and economic matters. Restrictive measures for 100 individuals who were considered to have undermined Ukraine's territorial integrity were also part of the EU response. These measures include a travel ban and an asset freeze. The United States imposed similar sanctions on Russia. Furthermore, the EU imposed economic sanctions on Russia, targeting mainly the trade of military goods, and trade restrictions on Crimea. A branch of the EU, the European Commission, decided to suspend Russia from the G8 summit that would have been held in Sochi, and instead held the summit in Brussels. Several other nations announced sanctions against Russia and Crimea, such as Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada.

In response to the sanctions, Russia imposed counter-sanctions on the US, EU and Canada. It banned politicians from these countries from entering Russia. In response to being banned from the G8, Russia discontinued its payments to the Council of Europe, which impacted the Council's budget.

Possible Solutions

The sanctions that are currently imposed on Russia have not been enough to resolve the issue. In order to achieve this, more measures should be taken. Firstly, stronger sanctions could be imposed on Russia by, for example, targeting more important Russian officials who have not been sanctioned yet because of their position close to the president. This has not been done due to possible retaliation from Russia.

Next to stronger sanctions, Ukraine could be supported with military and economic aid. A free-trade agreement has already been made between Ukraine and the EU. Such agreements could also be made by other countries, especially major trading partners of Ukraine. Other incentives could be taken to reduce the impact of waiting costs caused by the bridge over the Strait of Kerch, like different methods of transportation, or targeted levies on Russian products in impacted Ukrainian industries. Military aid could come in the form of further financial support, military supplies and troops.

Lastly, there should be a debate on the bridge and how to resolve the issues that it's causing. Making it possible for all ships, regardless of size or how full they are, to pass through would be a great start, but the removal of the bridge would help return the Sea of Azov back into truly shared control by Russia and Ukraine.

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