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The Baltic-Black Sea Axis: Historical background and implementation factors

Abstract. In the context of current geopolitical challenges and reorganisation of the world order, the study of the Baltic-Black Sea axis is of great strategic importance for understanding the processes and interconnections in the region that affect its stability and development. The purpose of this study was to retrospectively analyse the historical development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis and identify the main factors that will contribute to its implementation. The study uses a set of methods, including the historical method, the method of geopolitical analysis, and the method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. The study thoroughly analysed the stages of the emergence and development of the idea of creating a superpower association, considering different historical periods. It was determined that in the initial stages, this idea was mainly economic and cultural, promoting the exchange and development of trade routes. In its further development, specifically during the growing political instability in the region, the project of creating a geopolitical association acquired important military significance, creating a basis for joint defence in the future. An essential element of this study is the analysis of current geopolitical and economic trends that affect the further development of the axis. Furthermore, the study found the potential for further expanding cooperation in the fields of culture, education, and science. In general, this analysis shows the importance and prospects of cooperation between the participants of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis, which can become a crucial factor in the geopolitical and economic development of the region. The practical significance of this study is that its findings will contribute to a better understanding of the historical background and potential of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, which may open new opportunities for cooperation and development in the region, and will also serve as a basis for further research in the field of international relations and geopolitics

Keywords: geopolitical cooperation; strategic alliances; economy; integration; military aspects; potential

Introduction

In today's world, where geopolitical shifts and economic dependencies are becoming key factors in determining international relations, the study of the history and development of regional strategic alliances is becoming extremely relevant. Specifically, the Baltic-Black Sea axis is an important one, as it is one of the possible international associations of economic, cultural, and geopolitical interests in Central and Eastern Europe. The Baltic-Black Sea axis is becoming an object of growing interest for analysis and study, as it aims to unite countries and regions of prominent geostrategic importance (Sinovets & Maksymenko, 2020).

The problem of this study is that so far there has been no exhaustive analysis of the historical background and factors of the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis in the complex. Existing studies, while containing important

findings, mostly focus on separate aspects, without fully covering the evolution of the idea of creating this association from the beginning to the present. The lack of a comprehensive approach to this topic in terms of understanding its historical background and current challenges hinders a more profound understanding of its essence.

Specifically, in the article by A. Djakona & K. Kikste (2023), the authors analyse the potential of the Baltic and Black Sea region's unification. They study the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of such an alliance and predict the prospects for its development. The authors argue that there are substantial economic ties between the countries of both regions, which can serve as a basis for further geopolitical cooperation. Researchers also address the potential for joint military defence in the event of a

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threat to both regions. However, researchers focus mainly on the aspects of economic and military cooperation, with insufficient attention paid to the analysis of cultural and political aspects, which are also important for the successful functioning of such an association.

R. Panchuk (2020) analyses scientific research on the concepts of geopolitical integration of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The study assesses the views and concepts of various scholars on the possibilities and prospects of this association. The author shows that there are different approaches to understanding and implementing the idea of geopolitical integration of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The author emphasises that it is important to find a balance between different aspects of integration to achieve a successful functioning of the union. However, the analysis focuses mainly on an overview of different opinions on geopolitical integration, without providing a detailed analysis of concrete methods and instruments that can be used to achieve this goal. Additional study of concrete practical aspects of integration could broaden the understanding of the opportunities and challenges that arise in the context of the Baltic-Black Sea axis.

The study by A. Doroshko & I. Tsyra (2021) investigates the concept of the Baltic-Black Sea region as a geopolitical reality. They analyse whether this alliance exists as an independent geopolitical entity and what factors influence its formation. The authors conclude that the concept of the Baltic-Black Sea region is important and justified in the context of current geopolitical and economic realities. They emphasise the existing cultural, economic, and political ties between the countries of the two regions, which can serve as a basis for further geopolitical cooperation. However, the study does not provide a detailed analysis of the possible obstacles and challenges facing the creation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. An additional review of the possible obstacles, including political, economic, and other aspects, could broaden the understanding and identify ways to overcome these difficulties on the way to implementing the idea of a Baltic-Black Sea association [4].

In the article by M. Gladyshev *et al.* (2022), the authors examine the political and security aspects of the Baltic-Black Sea region. They explore the possibility of increasing the region's resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges. The authors identify the key aspects that contribute to the resilience of the Baltic-Black Sea region, focusing specifically on political cooperation and security mechanisms. The researchers recommend intensifying cooperation between the countries of the region to strengthen its stability. However, this study is limited to approaches to the political and security aspects of the region and does not provide a complete overview of other key aspects, such as the economy, socio-cultural interaction, and geopolitical perspectives. Additional research into these aspects could broaden the overall understanding of the potential and challenges associated with the Baltic-Black Sea region.

The study by M. Khylo (2023) reinterprets the Black Sea security factor. The author analyses the current situation in the region and highlights the key aspects affecting its security. Khylo concludes that crisis management and conflict prevention in the Black Sea requires strengthening

joint efforts and more effective mechanisms of cooperation between the countries of the region. However, the study did not consider the full impact of economic factors on the security of the region and the ability of economic instruments to ensure stability.

The study by O. Brusylovska *et al.* (2022) focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. The study examines the response of countries to the pandemic and its impact on various sectors of society. Specifically, the report highlighted the decline in economic activity, rising unemployment and other economic challenges faced by the countries of the region, as well as analysed international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic and the level of solidarity between countries.

Analysing the above, it can be argued that most studies in this area have focused on certain aspects, such as economic cooperation or political interaction, but this is insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of the establishment and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to thoroughly analyse the historical background of the establishment and development of the axis, identify the key factors that contributed to the idea of creating this superpower association and its implementation in the context of current geopolitical realities, and to substantiate possible ways to further develop cooperation between the participants of this strategic alliance.

Materials and Methods

To fulfil the purpose of this study, various methods of scientific cognition were employed, such as the historical method, the method of geopolitical analysis, and the method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the region. The historical method is one of the key components of this study, as it helped to carefully examine the development of the axis over different historical periods and identify key events and factors that influenced the project's emergence. This method also helped to identify the cultural, economic, and political ties between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions throughout different eras. The study helped to consider the impact of global and regional events, such as wars, geopolitical conflicts, and economic crises, on the implementation of the idea of creating a geopolitical association and the relations of the member states with other regions.

Geopolitical analysis is an important method of studying relations between countries and regions in the context of their geographical location, political interests, economic resources, and strategic goals. In this study, the examination of geopolitical conflicts and common interests helped to understand what factors contributed to the development of the axis and what may hinder the cooperation in the future. The geopolitical analysis helped to identify opportunities for strategic cooperation between the countries, as well as geopolitical factors that could affect the stability and security of the region.

The method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the region includes various aspects that allow analysing and predicting

the future development of cooperation. This forecasting method is based on the analysis of current trends, historical events, and the current state of relations between countries. A careful analysis of past events helped to identify which factors facilitated or hindered cooperation. The identification of key trends helped to anticipate future opportunities and challenges for cooperation. The analysis of current relations between the countries, considering political, economic, social, and other aspects, helped to identify and track key events in the region. This clarifies what factors may affect further development.

To fulfil the purpose, the study analysed statistical data on economic development, which indicate the state of the economies of the countries of the region and their economic cooperation (Latvia, n.d.; GDP per capita..., n.d.; Belarus, n.d.). Furthermore, the study analysed such regulations as the Charter of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1999), official documents of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States..., 2020; Joint Statement of the 28th..., 2023). A separate group of sources includes the texts of international agreements and declarations between the states of the region (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal's Office in Lublin, 2014; Final document of the VIII session..., 2017; Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs..., 2020). These documents describe the legal context and official commitments of the countries within the framework of cooperation.

The use of a comprehensive approach made it possible to examine the historical background and current factors influencing the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. This approach helps to provide a reasonable estimation of the prospects of the alliance and develop strategies for its further development in the context of current global challenges and opportunities.

Results

The Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a concept of geopolitical and economic unification of countries located along the coasts of the Baltic and Black Seas. This idea emerged as a strategic way to strengthen cooperation and interaction among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Baltic-Black Sea Axis serves as a platform for the countries of the region to work together in many aspects, with the purpose of promoting the development and increasing the importance of this geopolitical space in the modern world.

The first attempt to create a Baltic-Black Sea axis took place in the early 20th century. The IV Buldur Conference, held in August 1920 at the Buldur Palace near Riga, is a historically significant event that paved the way for the formation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. The main purpose of the conference was to discuss and resolve issues of security and stability in the region between the Baltic and Black Seas, as well as to establish friendship and cooperation between the countries of this space. The conference was attended by representatives of countries bordering the Baltic and Black Seas, including Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. The main topics of the conference were territorial integrity, security, and the development of economic relations between the countries. The conference considered the programme developed by

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Sigfrids Anna Meyerovics (Volovych, 2016), which called for peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the countries of the region. The programme was aimed at integrating the economic, financial, and political systems of the Baltic-Black Sea region. It also envisaged a political convention on mutual recognition and support (Golovchenko, 2011). However, despite the ambitious plans, the negotiations proved difficult due to differences in political views and strategic interests of the participants. These differences proved insurmountable, preventing the formation of a full-fledged military and political alliance. This indicates that while the countries of the region shared common security and cooperation goals, they also had their own interests and views on how to achieve these goals. It is important to bear in mind that the formation of an alliance requires solving complex issues and finding compromises between the participants. Thus, although the convention contained ambitious plans for regional cooperation, the reality of the political and economic landscape turned out to be more complex than planned. Still, the Buldur Conference was a major step towards the formation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. It laid the foundations for further cooperation and friendship between the countries of the region (Lepparanta & Myrberg, 2009).

After the disintegration of the USSR and the collapse of the "socialist camp", the idea of creating an association or alliance based on the Baltic-Black Sea axis received a new impetus. Officials of the independent states that emerged from the collapse of the former Soviet Union expressed a positive attitude towards the possibility of joint association. They noted the potential benefits of such a union in the areas of economy, politics, security, and other aspects. These statements reflected the general mood of the period of political transition when many countries in the post-Soviet space were rethinking their geopolitical status and looking for new forms of cooperation and interaction. This period of intense debate and discussion has contributed to the emergence of new forms of cooperation in the region and the formation of various initiatives for joint development and security in the Baltic-Black Sea area (Derevianko & Halabala, 2016).

The next stage in the development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis is characterised by the intensive development of cooperation between the countries of the region and a shift in emphasis from post-crisis recovery to the implementation of joint strategic projects. An important aspect was the consolidation of participants and the coordination of their positions. The focus was on developing trade, investment, and joint economic projects. In 1992, two economic regional organisations were established in the Black and Baltic Seas: the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) (Charter of the Organisation of the Black Sea..., 1999) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States..., 2020). Efforts were also made to improve transport links in the region. The project, which envisages the establishment of railway links between Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, is called Vikings. It was initiated in 2003, which indicates the strategic focus of these countries on the development of railway connections in the

region (Volovych, 2016). At this stage, attention was paid to the development of the energy sector, specifically, joint projects in the field of energy production and transportation. In other words, this stage determined the strategic course for in-depth cooperation and joint development of the countries within the Baltic-Black Sea axis. During this period, the foundations for further successful steps in the development of the alliance were laid (Rudnytska, 2015).

The analysis suggested that 2010-2020 were important for the development and consolidation of the position of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis countries in the international arena. The countries of the region have identified key geopolitical challenges and interests, which has become the basis for further cooperation. Another major step was taken in 2020 with the launch of an initiative known as the Lublin Triangle. This idea brings together the three countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region – Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine – to develop economic and political cooperation. This cooperation was the result of a trilateral meeting held on 28 August in Lublin. The foundation of this form of cooperation is the common historical heritage, specifically the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which at one time achieved significant economic and political success (Bornio, 2020). This stage reflected the successful implementation of geopolitical goals and the establishment of the Baltic-Black Sea axis as an important player in international relations (Maisaia, 2021).

Today, the term Baltic-Black Sea Axis refers to the creation of a supranational association of the following states: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. The development of the alliance is marked by considerable achievements and the strengthening of the alliance's position as a prominent geopolitical player. At this stage, the focus is on developing effective tools for managing and coordinating joint initiatives. Work continued on key projects, such as the E40 project (Shemaev, 2019) and the Three Seas Initiative (Golub & Tomenchuk, 2020), aimed at joint development and implementation of strategic objectives. Furthermore, strategies for the joint use of energy resources (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal's Office..., 2014) and environmental protection measures continue to be developed and implemented, as well as the improvement of military-technical cooperation.

The study identified the factors that had the greatest impact on the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. These factors include geographic location, economic opportunities, energy security, cultural, and educational exchange.

Geographical location. Geographical location plays a key role in the establishment and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. First of all, the Black Sea is a natural central object that unites the countries of the region. It is a route for maritime traffic and trade. The countries of the Baltic-Black Sea axis are located at strategic points between Europe and Asia. This creates opportunities for efficient transport links and the exchange of goods. Direct access to the Black and Baltic Seas provides countries with the opportunity to develop maritime trade, which is important for the economy and energy needs. The location of some countries along energy flow routes (e.g.,

gas pipelines) gives them a significant role in the region's energy security. The geographical location determines the interests and activities of countries in international affairs, especially in the context of interaction with the leading countries of the European Union (France and Germany). In general, geographical location is an essential factor that facilitates cooperation and mutual understanding between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea axis (Lepparanta & Myrberg, 2009).

The increased use of the common borders between Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania is caused by the new challenges posed by the Russian-Ukrainian war. Experts believe that the constant diversion of considerable volumes of Ukrainian goods to the west, mainly through the land border with Poland and the river ports on the Danube on the border with Romania, will become a sustainable trend (Bykova, 2023a). As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, cooperation in the defence sector is intensifying, and the need to strengthen cooperation in this area is declared in the Joint Statement of the 28th Baltic Council Summit (2023). The importance of such cooperation has also been emphasised by the Interparliamentary Assembly of Lithuania and Ukraine (Joint statement by the Seimas..., 2022). It can be noted that Russia's expansion to the West has only strengthened integration in the region. Almost every new format of interaction between the states of Central and Eastern Europe today emphasises the need for joint efforts to defend against aggression and overcome the consequences already caused by Russia's aggression since 2014 (Kuleba, 2021).

Economic opportunities. Economic opportunities play an important role in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis. To fully understand the economic possibilities of implementing the idea of creating a union, it is necessary to analyse the economies of the leading countries in the region. Specifically, Latvia has a strong economic potential. The economy grew rapidly in 2000 as a result of the progress of the Baltic Tigers. As of 2023, Latvia's gross domestic product is \$32,733 USD per capita. In turn, Estonia's economy is one of the most promising of the Baltic states. Estonia has the highest GDP per capita among them, at \$32,826 USD. The main export partners are Finland, Sweden, and Latvia. Imports are mainly represented by such countries as Germany and Finland. Imports include mineral fuels, electrical equipment, and vehicles (GDP per capita..., n.d.). Considering the Polish economy, the GDP of the Republic of Poland is \$36,798 USD. Poland's main export and import partners are mainly European countries. The top three countries to which Poland exports are Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic. Poland's imports are estimated at \$278 billion USD (Poland. OEC, n.d.). Belarus' exports are estimated at \$33.2 billion USD. Similar to Ukraine, Belarus imports more than it exports. Imports are estimated at \$35.2 billion USD. Belarus is the only country without access to the sea border. However, it performs a transit function, on which the trade turnover in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine depends. Lithuania's exports are valued at \$32.7 billion USD and are concentrated in piles, electronic devices, nuclear boilers, furniture, plastics, etc.

Oil and fuel account for a large share of imports, which is typical for all countries in the region (Belarus. OEC, n.d.).

Analysing the above data, we can conclude that in their general statistics, the countries of the region are interested in exporting and importing similar products and goods. The region is characterised by cooperation with both Europe and the Eurasian vector. Therefore, the economic potential of the countries of the region is a key element in the successful implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis (Lithuania. OEC, n.d.). A prominent factor in the implementation of this cooperation will be the implementation of the Via Baltica and Rail Baltica projects, as noted by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland in 2017 (Final document of the VIII session..., 2017).

Energy security. Energy security in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a critical aspect for the stability and development of the region. Diversity of energy sources (coal, natural gas, alternative sources, etc.) and different suppliers reduce the risk of energy crises and dependence on a particular supplier. Investing in renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and hydro power, also contributes to the creation of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources. The development and modernisation of transport infrastructure for energy transit (gas pipelines, oil pipelines, power grids) ensures reliable energy supply and distribution. In the south of the Baltic-Black Sea region, important infrastructure projects have been implemented, mainly aimed at ensuring energy supplies from Azerbaijan to Europe. Specifically, the former Baku-Batumi oil pipelines were restored and expanded, enabling the Baku-Supsa (in the 1990s) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (in the 2000s) to operate today. There is also the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway route. The energy sector also offers a project that dates to the 1990s – the Euro-Asian Oil Transportation Corridor (EAOTC). This project can be implemented based on the existing Odesa-Brody oil pipeline. According to this option, the pipeline would connect Gdansk in the north with Baku in the south, connecting the Caspian and Baltic Seas. With the signing of the “nuclear deal” between Iran and six leading world powers in 2015, Iran was able to increase its energy exports, specifically to Europe, in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. This opened the possibility of returning to the idea of building a Persian pipeline through the Black Sea and Eastern Europe. According to the State Oil and Gas Company of Ukraine and Ukrimpex, several projects for the construction of gas transmission corridors along this route were considered in the 1990s, the most promising of which was the Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Black Sea-Ukraine-Poland route (Derevianko & Halabala, 2016). Energy security is a crucial factor in ensuring the stability and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, and its provision requires joint efforts and a comprehensive approach of all member states (Skvorchevsky, 2021).

Cultural and educational exchange. Cultural and educational exchanges play a vital role in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis, contributing to the strengthening of mutual understanding, common values, and the development of civil society. The exchange of

cultural traditions, art, and other aspects of culture promotes understanding and tolerance between the peoples of the region. Joint training programmes, conferences, and projects facilitate the exchange of knowledge and research experience between universities and research institutions of the member states. For instance, the Erasmus+ project “Rethinking Regional Studies: The Baltic-Black Sea Connection” (Erasmus+ Key Action..., n.d.). Opportunities to study at universities and take part in student exchange programmes promote mutual understanding and shape the international practices of the younger generation. Interaction in the cultural and educational spheres contributes to the improvement of diplomatic relations between the member states (Ewert, 2011).

Geopolitical analysis suggests that the idea of creating a Baltic-Black Sea Union is conditioned by a complex of geopolitical, economic, strategic, and other factors. The creation of such an alliance will be a response to changes in the global political and economic picture, as well as a choice to jointly achieve strategic goals and protect common interests.

Analysing the above, it can be argued that the Baltic-Black Sea axis can develop in various directions, combining economic growth, political stability, cultural exchange, environmental protection, and social progress. The region’s potential is rich, and developing the idea of a union could lead to a viable and influential association. As for the possible political realities of such an association, current trends indicate that Poland may well play a leading role in it. Poland is the country with the greatest economic potential among the hypothetical member states (Poland, n.d.). Furthermore, the country’s active trade relations with its neighbours have resulted in a positive trade balance, which is particularly evident in relations with Ukraine. A large decline in Ukraine’s GNP in 2022 and its recovery in 2023 by only two per cent will only mean a low level of exports to Poland and an increase in the already traditional (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal’s Office in Lublin, 2014) dependence on imports from this country (Bykova, 2023b). Poland already has the potential to become a logistics hub for the region, where trade routes from various destinations, including Ukraine, intersect. The shift in European policy attention to Central Europe and Warsaw is already reflected in official EU documents and strategies (Bykova, 2023a). Given Poland’s economic strength against the background of other countries in the Baltic-Black Sea region and its transit role between the south of the hypothetical union and the north, we can predict its future role as the leader of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, provided it is institutionalised. This perspective is evidenced by a comparison of integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe with those in Western Europe. Thus, for many years, Germany has been the informal leader of the European Union and has been ranked 1st in the world in terms of exports 10 times (Hutsal, 2012). Countries with a deficit trade balance tend to be more economically and politically dependent on their neighbours with a surplus. Therewith, one should not forget that such a distribution of forces in a hypothetical union has historical preconditions, as Poland was the leader of the

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Another factor that may contribute to Poland's leading role in the region is the European integration aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Their European integration aspirations will largely depend on their relations with Poland, which plays a key role in the Eastern Partnership Policy (Karolewski & Wilga, 2018), as emphasised, specifically, in the establishment of the Lublin Triangle (Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs..., 2020), which Ukrainians trust more than the UN and the OSCE (Among all international organisations and associations..., 2023).

Depending on the specific objectives and priorities, the selected scenarios can be combined or adapted to achieve maximum benefits for the region. It is important to consider the unique characteristics of each member state and common aspirations to achieve sustainable and harmonious development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis idea.

Discussion

The Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a conceptual notion that describes the idea of creating a potential strategic alliance between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. This idea has great potential in the context of current geopolitical challenges and could affect the balance of power in the region. The Baltic-Black Sea Axis opens the way for cooperation and development of the countries of this region to jointly confront global challenges and make beneficial use of their geopolitical potential.

Comparison of the results of this study with the scientific works of other authors makes it possible to identify consensus points, common aspects, as well as differences in approaches and interpretations. In addition, given the broad international context of the study, a comparison with the works of foreign scholars provides an opportunity to assess the uniqueness and relevance of the topic in the international academic community.

The study by K. Kikste (2022) focuses on the necessary preconditions for the creation of a regional security system within the Baltic-Black Sea Union. The study thoroughly examines the geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural factors that may influence the creation of an effective security mechanism in the region. The author examines the main aspects of political stability and internal security, namely, considers the role of joint military and political alliances in the formation of collective defence. Kikste also emphasises the need for effective economic cooperation and resource sharing among the members of the alliance to stabilise the region and ensure its security. The paper also analyses cultural and historical aspects that may affect the implementation of the idea of unification and its ability to provide security and stability. Specifically, when comparing the paper with the present study, it should be emphasised that both studies address key aspects of security formation and provision in the Baltic-Black Sea region (Kikste, 2022).

Considering the study by E. Zakaradze & M. Muradishvili (2023), it is necessary to consider the details of its content and main conclusions. The authors thoroughly examine the importance of the Black Sea region as a strategic "catalyst". They analyse aspects such as its impact on geopolitical dynamics, conflicts, and cooperation in the region. The authors

also examine the relationship between different countries and actors in the Black Sea region. A prominent aspect of the study is the focus on security and stability in the Black Sea region. Analysing possible threats and challenges, the authors propose strategies to ensure stability and security. The paper has a similar focus to the present study, specifically, both focus on the importance of regional cooperation for stability and security in the European context. They also emphasise the geopolitical importance of the region but discuss different regions (Black Sea and Baltic) and the factors that influence their dynamics.

F. Tassinari (2005) examines the politics of the Baltic States and its importance for security and cooperation in the European Neighbourhood. The author analyses various aspects of security cooperation, economic relations, and regional governance in the Baltic region. The research conducted in this paper, as well as the present study, emphasises the importance of regional cooperation for ensuring stability and security in the European context. However, they look at different regions (the Baltic and Black Sea regions) and identify different factors and aspects that influence the dynamics of cooperation between the countries.

J. Hwang & H.K. Yoo (2022) explore the role of environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The authors analyse the activities of various actors in the context of climate change and environmental issues in the region. However, the authors' study focuses on environmental issues and the role of cooperation in this context, while the present study comprehensively examines its geopolitical aspects.

One of the key notable aspects is the correlation between the historical background and modern factors influencing the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. M. Chihaiia (2015) analyses the security challenges and vulnerabilities that have emerged in the Baltic and Black Sea regions since the end of the Cold War. The author analyses key issues related to geopolitical changes and the dynamics of relations between states in these regions. This paper, unlike the present study, is aimed at analysing the current aspects that affect relations between the countries. Nevertheless, both studies are important for understanding the geopolitical and security challenges facing the regions of Europe.

The study by O. Brusylovska *et al.* (2022) analyses the Black Sea region in the context of world politics. The authors examine the key actors, influential factors that affect the policies of the countries and consider possible future scenarios for the region. Special attention is paid to geopolitical and geoeconomic aspects. The analysis of the findings of this study suggests that both studies aim to analyse regional aspects of international relations. However, the authors' study focuses on the Black Sea region as a whole, including its political and economic aspects, while the present study addresses the prospects for implementing the idea of creating a superstate association.

T. Melchiorre (2009) analyses the geopolitical and economic relations between the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The author highlights the similarities and interdependence of these regions in geopolitical and economic terms, pointing to their common interests and potential

for cooperation. Comparing this study with the one conducted, it can be noted that both studies focus on the analysis of cooperation between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. Although both studies deal with similar topics, they have different emphases and provide different perspectives on the issue of international cooperation in regional contexts.

The paper by J. Alley (2021) highlights the topical issue of public goods theory in the context of alliances. The article provides a detailed analysis of the main concepts and principles of public goods theory and its application to the analysis of international alliances. The author points out the need to reinterpret this theory and proposes novel approaches to understanding the interaction of countries within alliances. Compared to the present study, J. Alley's (2021) article aims to analyse theoretical approaches in the context of international alliances and use empirical data to support its conclusions. The present study is a comprehensive investigation that focuses on the historical background and factors of the union's implementation.

In conclusion, the analysis of the findings confirms the need for further investigation and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis as an important geopolitical format. Considering the identified differences and shortcomings of previous studies, the conclusions and recommendations proposed in this paper can contribute to the formation of a strategic alliance that meets modern challenges and tasks.

Conclusions

The present study analysed the historical background of the project, as well as the factors that would contribute to the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis as a potential strategic alliance. The study provided an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the establishment and development of various areas of cooperation between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The main findings of this study pointed to key factors that would contribute to the formation and implementation of the union in the future, such as political will, economic opportunities, energy security, and cultural exchange.

A study of the historical background of the idea of creating a supranational union found that this project had been in existence for 100 years. The first attempts at such an association failed for a variety of reasons, including geopolitical risks and the lack of clear strategies. The study was also aimed at identifying factors that would facilitate the implementation of the project of creating a geopolitical association. The geographical location of the region, specifically its coastal location along the Baltic and Black Seas, creates a strategic potential for cooperation. Economic opportunities, including market potential and infrastructure, are also important for the development of a future alliance. Energy security is becoming a topical issue considering Europe's search for alternative energy transit routes. All this demonstrates the importance and relevance of developing and implementing the idea of creating a Baltic-Black Sea Axis to ensure stability, security, and common prosperity of the countries of the region.

This study emphasised the importance of developing and implementing the Baltic-Black Sea Axis project in the current geopolitical environment. However, the success of the future alliance will depend on the ability of the participants to avoid past mistakes and adapt to the complex challenges they face. The study showed that the implementation of the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis would require detailed strategies and careful planning to ensure stability and security in the region, and Poland would play a leading role in this association, given its economic and political potential within the region and the EU.

The prospect of future research is to compare the integration processes in Western Europe in the 20th century with the current integration formats in Eastern and Central and Eastern Europe, which will allow for a more accurate prediction of their prospects and development vector.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Балто-Чорноморська вісь: історичне підґрунтя та чинники реалізації

Анотація. У контексті сучасних геополітичних викликів та реорганізацій світового порядку, дослідження Балто-Чорноморської вісі набуває важливого стратегічного значення для розуміння процесів і взаємозв'язків у регіоні, що впливають на його стабільність та розвиток. Метою даного дослідження є ретроспективний аналіз історичного розвитку Балто-Чорноморської вісі та виявлення основних чинників, що сприятимуть її реалізації. У дослідженні використано комплекс методів, зокрема історичний метод, метод геополітичного аналізу, а також метод прогнозування розвитку подальшого співробітництва між країнами Балто-Чорноморського регіону. Під час дослідження було ретельно проаналізовано етапи зародження та розвитку ідеї створення наддержавного об'єднання, враховуючи різні історичні періоди. Визначено, що на початкових етапах така ідея мала в основному економічну та культурну спрямованість, сприяючи обміну та розвитку торговельних маршрутів. У подальшому розвитку, зокрема під час зростання політичної нестабільності у регіоні, проект створення геополітичного об'єднання набув важливого військового значення, створюючи в перспективі основу для спільної оборони. Значущим елементом дослідження є аналіз сучасних геополітичних та економічних тенденцій, які впливають на подальший розвиток вісі. Крім того, дослідження виявило потенціал для подальшого поглиблення співпраці в сферах культури, освіти та науки. Загалом, даний аналіз вказує на важливість та перспективи співробітництва учасників Балто-Чорноморської вісі, що має потенціал стати важливим фактором у геополітичному та економічному розвитку регіону. Практична значимість даної роботи полягає в тому, що результати даного дослідження сприятимуть кращому розумінню історичного підґрунтя та потенціалу Балто-Чорноморської вісі, що може відкрити нові можливості для співпраці та розвитку в регіоні, а також стане основою для подальших досліджень у сфері міжнародних відносин та геополітики.

Ключові слова: геополітичне співробітництво; стратегічні альянси; економіка; інтеграція; військові аспекти; потенціал