

# Russia's Caspian Policy: Efforts to Hold Ground in a Contested Region

## Rusya'nın Hazar Politikası: İhtilafli Bir Bölgede Tutunma Çabaları

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### Abstract

*The Caspian Sea, the world's largest enclosed inland body of water prominent with its biological and natural resources drew attention of the international community with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The number of the Caspian coastal states rose to five with the emergence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as independent states. Shortly after this, an intense rivalry ensued among all the littoral states including Iran and Russia to divide up the spoils of the Caspian Sea. This paper will discuss this competition from the Russian perspective. Russia pursued an active policy to thwart the construction of alternative oil and natural gas pipelines that would bypass its territory, tried to bring together all the littoral states under a multilateral security organization and worked on the institutionalization of a regional environmental security framework. The article will evaluate the success of all these moves and will examine the extent of their contribution to strengthen Russia's position in the Caspian.*

**Key Words:** Russia, Caspian Sea, energy, security, ecology

### Öz

*Biyolojik ve doğal kaynaklarıyla ünlü dünyanın en büyük kapalı iç su kütlesi olan Hazar Denizi uluslararası toplumun dikkatini Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla çekti. Azerbaycan, Kazakistan ve Türkmenistan'ın bağımsız devletler olarak ortaya çıkmasıyla Hazar'a kıyıdaş devletlerin sayısı beşe çıktı. Bundan kısa süre sonra Hazar Denizi'nin ganimetlerini paylaşma konusunda İran ve Rusya da dahil olmak üzere kıyıdaş devletler arasında yoğun bir rekabet ortaya çıktı. Bu makale bu rekabeti Rus perspektifinden ele alacaktır. Rusya kendi topraklarını bypass edecek alternatif petrol ve doğal gaz boru hatlarının inşasını engellemek için aktif bir politika izlemiş, bütün kıyıdaş ülkeleri çok taraflı bir güvenlik organizasyonu altında bir araya getirmeye çalışmış ve bölgesel bir çevre güvenliği çerçevesinin kurumsallaşması üzerinde çalışmıştır. Makale bu hamlelerin başarısını değerlendirecek ve Rusya'nın Hazar'daki pozisyonunu güçlendirmesine katkılarının boyutunu inceleyecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, Hazar Denizi, enerji, güvenlik, ekoloji

### Introduction

The Caspian Sea, bordered by Russia on the northwest, Kazakhstan on the northeast, Azerbaijan on the southwest, Iran on the south and Turkmenistan on the southeast, is accepted as the largest enclosed inland body of water in the world. It was once part of the ancient Tethys Ocean which linked the

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Atlantic and Pacific oceans. However, the Caspian lost the connection with these two oceans 50 to 60 million years ago due to gradual shift of continental plates.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is landlocked and is connected to the Sea of Azov through the Volga-Don and Manych canals. The Caspian basin is rich in terms of energy resources such as oil, natural gas and sodium sulfate. Moreover, four-fifths of the world's sturgeon catch is carried out in the Caspian Sea and the eggs of these sturgeons are then processed into caviar, the luxurious delicacy.<sup>2</sup> The seal industry has also been developed in the northern parts of the Caspian mostly for furs.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian interest in the Caspian started in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century with the capture of Astrakhan in the north<sup>4</sup> and the Russian armies advanced southward steadily throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where they were confronted with the Persian military units throughout the period. The Treaty of Rasht of 1732 that was signed in the wake of one of these confrontations granted Russia freedom of trade and navigation in the Caspian Sea.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent agreements between Russia and Persia such as Treaty of Gulistan of 1813<sup>6</sup> and the Treaty of Turkmenchay of 1828<sup>7</sup> which were concluded following Persian defeats at the hands of the Russians provided the Russian navy the exclusive right to sail the Caspian Sea.

The Treaty of Friendship of 1921 between the Soviet Russia and Persia heralded a new era in the bilateral association as Moscow agreed to settle for a more equal relationship with Tehran in exchange for the closure of the Caspian basin to the extra-regional powers, especially to the United Kingdom (UK). Persia, similar to Russia, would have the right to retain military ships in the Caspian Sea.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the Treaty of Establishment, Commerce and Navigation of 1935 and the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation of 1940 that replaced it declared the Caspian Sea as a joint Soviet-Iranian Sea which reserved commercial and military navigation and fishing rights for Soviet and Iranian ves-

- 1 Mahmoud Ghafouri, "The Caspian Sea: Rivalry and Cooperation", *Middle East Policy*, XV/2, Summer 2008, s. 82.
- 2 "Caspian Sea", *New World Encyclopedia*, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Caspian\\_Sea](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Caspian_Sea).
- 3 "Caspian Sea", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>.
- 4 R. Hrair Dekmejian-Hovann H. Simonian, *Troubled Waters: The Geopolitics of the Caspian Region*, I. B. Tauris, London 2003, s. 10.
- 5 Kamal Makili-Aliyev, "Caspian Sea and Its International Legal Status", Carlo Frappi and Azad Garibov, (eds.), *The Caspian Sea Chessboard: Geo-political, Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Analysis*, Egea, Milan 2014, s. 29.
- 6 *Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, "Treaty of Gulistan (1813)", <http://mfa.gov.az/en/content/809>.
- 7 *Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, "Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828)", <http://mfa.gov.az/en/content/810>.
- 8 Makili-Aliyev, s. 30.

sels and other vessels flying their flags. Furthermore, nationals of third states would not even serve as crew members or as port personnel in the Caspian Sea.<sup>9</sup>

None of the Russian-Iranian agreements regarding the Caspian Sea contained any article about the exploitation of the mineral resources under the seabed. This situation generated problems in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 when the number of Caspian littoral countries rose to five with the debut of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on world stage as independent states. These countries were eager to utilize from the potential riches of the energy resources of the Caspian Sea in order to stand on their own feet in the post-independence period and brought into discussion the legal regime of the Caspian which precipitated a change in a short span of time in the strategic outlook of the region.

The Caspian region has witnessed the emergence of an intense rivalry among the coastal states as well as the regional powers and extra-regional actors since the early 1990s for the exploration, extraction, development and shipment of rich oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian Sea. Russia, the former hegemon of the region, seemed to have significant advantage vis-à-vis its competitors in the initial stages of the struggle as it enjoyed monopoly over the existing pipeline system and retained the strongest and most populous naval fleet in the Caspian. However, endless discussions among the littoral states for elaboration of the legal status of the sea which did not yield any fruition, construction of alternative pipelines that bypassed the Russian territory with explicit political backing and financial support of the extraterritorial actors especially the United States of America (USA), reluctance of the newly independent states of Caspian to become part of a Russian-led defense scheme showcased the limits of Russian power.

This paper aims to shed light on the details of the Russian attempts to hold sway over the Caspian by examining its policies pertaining to the region in three dimensions, namely energy, security and ecology. The study, while focusing on Russia's moves, will also take into account Moscow's interaction with the littoral states as well as the regional states and global powers that have interests in the region to provide an accurate and complete picture of the Russian Caspian policy.

### **Russia's Energy Policy in the Caspian: Struggling to Adapt to the New Situation**

Russia did not easily reconcile itself to the fact that it had to share both the control and resources of the Caspian Sea with the former Soviet republics in

9 Barbara Janusz, "The Caspian Sea: Legal Status and Regime Problems", *Chatham House Briefing Paper V/2*, August 2005, s. 2.

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the immediate post-Cold War period. Moscow objected to the division of the Caspian Sea into national zones and supported the condominium approach similar to Iran which called for equal division of the Sea among the littoral states as well as common sovereignty of its resources.<sup>10</sup> Predictably, Russia also came out against the unilateral attempts made by the littoral states for the development of the energy resources of the Caspian. Moscow submitted a letter to the United Nations in October 1994 stating that it would take the necessary measures to prevent a possible unilateral action in the Caspian Sea. In November 1994 Russian Energy Minister Yuri Shafranik claimed that the Caspian littoral states could not act on their own to exploit the resources of the Sea as its boundaries and navigation rights had yet to be defined.<sup>11</sup> Russia also forced Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to use Russian pipelines to dispatch the Caspian oil to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk.

The newly independent littoral states, while disagreeing with the Russian way of dividing up the spoils of the Caspian Sea refrained from antagonizing their former patron and tried to buy in the approval of Moscow by bringing in the Russian companies to their energy projects. Azerbaijan granted Lukoil 10 percent stake in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil project in September 1994. In November 1995 SOCAR, the Azerbaijani state oil company rewarded Lukoil with 32.5 percent shares of a new oil venture which would develop and explore offshore Karabakh oil field.<sup>12</sup> In February 1996, Lukoil was included in another oil project with a 10 percent stake that would develop Shah-Deniz oil field.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Socar and Lukoil formed a new oil partnership in July 1997 in which Lukoil had a 60 percent stake for the Yalama prospect in the northern part of the Azerbaijani offshore sector in the Caspian.<sup>14</sup> Kazakhstan, in a similar vein, granted 50 percent stake of the Kumkol oil project to Lukoil in 1995.<sup>15</sup> The Kazakh government also transferred 24 percent share to the Russian government and an additional 20 percent share to Lukoil and Rosneft in April 1997 to realize the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) project which would look for oil reserves in Tengiz field.<sup>16</sup> In November 1997, Lukoil also signed a production-

- 10 Tracey German, *Russia and the Caspian Sea: Projecting Power or Competing for Influence*, United States Army War College Press, Carlisle Barracks 2014, s. 27.
- 11 Brent Griffith, "Back Yard Politics: Russia's Foreign Policy Toward the Caspian Basin", *Demokratizatsiya*, VI/2, Spring 1998, s. 434.
- 12 "Moscow Claims Political Victory in Azerbaijan Oil Deal", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, I/132, 13 November 1995.
- 13 "Lukoil: Russia's Trojan Horse in the Near Abroad?", *The Jamestown Prism*, II/9, 3 May 1996 and Paul Kubicek, "Russian Energy Policy in the Caspian Basin", *World Affairs*, CLXVI/4, Spring 2004, s. 209.
- 14 "Azerbaijan Oil Contracts, Yalama", *Azerbaijan International*, [https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/62\\_folder/62\\_articles/62\\_socar\\_yalama.html](https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/62_folder/62_articles/62_socar_yalama.html).
- 15 "Lukoil: Playing by the Rules", *Kazakhstan International Business Magazine*, 1, 2002.
- 16 Mehmet Bardakçı, "Russian Interests in the Caspian Region and Turkey", *Dokuz Eylül*

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sharing agreement for the development of Karachaganak gas field in Kazakhstan with a 15 percent interest assigned by Gazprom.<sup>17</sup>

Russia decided to abandon the condominium approach with regard to the division of the Caspian Sea by mid-1998 and commenced to suggest a modified median-line method which entailed the division of the seabed into national sectors while preserving the joint use of the surface water. The political instability and economic problems along with an unexpected defeat in Chechnya led the Russian policy-makers to come to the realization that they were not equipped with the requisite wherewithal to prevent the littoral states from hammering out deals with the Western energy companies. This revelation, combined with the discovery of potentially rich hydrocarbon reserves in its own northern sector, induced Russia to clinch an agreement with Kazakhstan in July 1998 on dividing the seabed of the North Caspian.<sup>18</sup> In June 2002, the two countries signed a bilateral demarcation agreement and shared the deposits located along their mutual border. They also decided to jointly develop Khvalynskoye, Kurmangazy and Tsentralnoye oil and gas fields.<sup>19</sup> Russia agreed on a similar bilateral delimitation agreement with Azerbaijan in January 2001.<sup>20</sup> In May 2003 Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia came together in a meeting and divided the 64 percent of the northern Caspian seabed according to the modified medium-line principle which granted Kazakhstan 27 percent, Russia 19 percent and Azerbaijan 18 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Moscow's signing of delimitation agreements with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan pertaining to the Caspian Sea took place in the wake of a change of leadership in the Russian state. Russia continued to adhere to its main strategy of striving to prevent the construction of alternative energy pipelines in the Caspian region which would bypass its territory during the Vladimir Putin's presidency but endeavored to achieve this goal in a more organized, subtle and persistent manner. In May 2000, shortly after his inauguration as the new President of Russia, Putin appointed former Fuel and Energy Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny as Special Presidential Representative for the Caspian to oversee and coordinate Russia's policies regarding the region and to improve bilateral energy relations with the littoral states.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in July 2000, with

*Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, V/2, 2003, s. 12.

17 "Lukoil Signs Production-sharing Agreement on Karachaganak Field in Kazakhstan", *Rustocks*, <http://www.rustocks.com/index.phtml/pressreleases/0/1/4490>.

18 Stanislav Chemiavskii, "Problems of the Caspian", *Russian Politics and Law*, XL/2, March-April 2002, s. 88.

19 Oksana Antonenko, "Russia's Policy in the Caspian Sea Region: Reconciling Economic and Security Agendas", Shirin Akiner, (ed.), *The Caspian: Politics, Energy and Security*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York 2004, s. 250.

20 Bardakçı, s. 10.

21 German, s. 27.

22 Tomislava Penkova, "Russia in the Caspian Region: An Attempt to Preserve an Inherited Role", Carlo Frappi and Azad Garibov, (eds.), *The Caspian Sea Chessboard: Geo-political, Geo-*

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a probable propping up from the Kremlin, leading Russian energy companies Lukoil, Yukos and Gazprom set up the Caspian Oil Company to develop new oil and gas fields both in the Russian sector and in neighbouring states' sectors in the Caspian.<sup>23</sup>

The energy cooperation with Kazakhstan in the Caspian region started to reap its initial benefits in October 2001 when the CPC project came on stream. Today the pipeline carries about 50 million tons of oil per year<sup>24</sup> and serves as the main transit artery for the transportation of Kazakh oil to the European markets. In November 2001, shortly after the inauguration of the CPC, Kazakhstan and Russia also inked an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in gas industry. Accordingly, since 2002 crude natural gas has been transported from the Karachaganak gas field in Kazakhstan to the Orenburg processing plant in Russia by KazRosGAz, the joint venture between Gazprom and the KazMunaiGaz.<sup>25</sup> However, Kazakhstan made a significant stride towards decreasing its dependence on Russia for transmission of its oil in mid-2000s. The Atasu-Alashankou section of the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline was opened in December 2005 and 11.8 million tons of oil was transported through this route in 2015.<sup>26</sup> The Kenkiyal-Kumkol section of the same oil pipeline was put into operation in July 2009 as well and 6.2 million tons of oil was shipped through this track in 2015.<sup>27</sup> Kazakhstan also started to transport oil to the BTC oil pipeline through tankers in late October 2008 although its plan to construct a Trans-Caspian oil pipeline from Aktau to Baku was nipped in the bud because of Russian opposition.<sup>28</sup>

Russia set its sights on Turkmenistan following its oil and natural gas deals with Kazakhstan in the early 2000s. However, energy relations between Moscow and Ashgabat turned out to be much more problematic and conflict-ridden compared to the energy association between Astana and Moscow. Turkmenistan and Russia signed an intergovernmental accord in April 2003 which granted Russia the right to purchase all Turkmen natural gas for the next 25 years. The rift between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan regarding the possession of some gas fields in the Caspian and Russia's coaxing Turkey into the con-

*strategic and Geo-economic Analysis*, Egea, Milan 2014, s. 120.

- 23 Paul Kubicek, "Energy Politics and Geopolitical Competition in the Caspian Basin", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, IV/2, July 2013, s. 174.
- 24 Paolo Sorbello, "The Role of Energy in Russian Foreign Policy towards Kazakhstan", *Energy Brains*, February 2015, s. 33.
- 25 *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Kazakhstan*, "Russia-Kazakhstan Relations, Economic Cooperation", [http://www.rfembassy.kz/eng/lm/dvustoronnie\\_otnosheniya/torgovo-ekonomicheskie\\_svyazi/](http://www.rfembassy.kz/eng/lm/dvustoronnie_otnosheniya/torgovo-ekonomicheskie_svyazi/).
- 26 "About the Company", *Kazakhstan-China Pipeline*, <http://www.kcp.kz/company/about?language=en>.
- 27 *Aynı yer*.
- 28 Andrei Kazantsev, "Russian Policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Region", *Europe-Asia Studies*, LX/6, August 2008, s. 1085.

struction of a underwater pipeline in the Black Sea to supply Ankara's natural gas needs undermined the plans to build up a Trans-Caspian natural gas pipeline to transport Turkmen gas to the European markets. On top of these developments, the alleged coup attempt against the then Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov which took place in late 2002 and Russia's immediate backing up of his regime expedited the signing of the long-term energy agreement between the two countries.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in May 2007 Putin came together with the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and the newly inaugurated President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow to sign an agreement to upgrade the existing Central Asia-Center gas pipeline system and to construct a new pipeline along the Caspian shore to transmit gas from western Turkmenistan to Russia.<sup>30</sup>

The diminution in natural gas demand in Europe in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 as well as the remarkable decline in the energy prices came as a heavy blow to the Russian schemes pertaining to the Caspian. Although Russia offered to pay Turkmenistan European prices for its natural gas in 2007, Gazprom wanted to reduce gas imports from Turkmenistan in March 2009 on the grounds that the purchase of Turkmen gas at European prices would negate its profits from the resale to Europe.<sup>31</sup> When Turkmenistan insisted on the European prices, a mysterious explosion occurred in the Dowlatabat-Daryalik section of the Central Asia-Center pipeline in April 2009 which carried 92 percent of Turkmen gas to Russia across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>32</sup> The resumption of natural gas flow to Russia from Turkmenistan took place in January 2010 but the gas purchased had gone down from 40 bcm to 10 bcm.<sup>33</sup> Russia progressively decreased the amount of natural gas it bought from Turkmenistan in the next five years and in January 2016 decided to cut off the Turkmen natural gas deliveries completely.<sup>34</sup> This natural gas saga between the two countries speeded up the Ashgabat's urge to reduce its dependence on Moscow both as a buyer and transporter of the Turkmen gas. Its efforts in this direction came to fruition in December 2009 with the inauguration of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline.

29 Carol R. Saivetz, "Perspectives on the Caspian Sea Dilemma: Russian Policies Since the Soviet Demise", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, XLIV/8, 2003, s. 599.

30 Bud Coote, "The Caspian Sea and Southern Gas Corridor: A View from Russia", *Atlantic Council Global Energy Center*, April 2017, s. 13.

31 Annette Bohr, *Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism*, Chatham House Russia and Eurasia Programme, London March 2016, s. 80.

32 Georgina Marin, "Turkmenistan's Gas Hurdles: No End in Sight", *Energy Policy Group*, April 2017, s. 2.

33 Sergei Blagov, "Turkmenistan Is Eyeing Revived Ties Russia", *Asia Times*, 4 November 2016.

34 Fabio Indeo, "Energy Strategy of Export Diversification in Central Asia: Focus on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan", s. 3, [https://geopolitics.fsv.cuni.cz/GEO-8-version1-indeo\\_energy\\_strategy\\_of\\_expor.pdf](https://geopolitics.fsv.cuni.cz/GEO-8-version1-indeo_energy_strategy_of_expor.pdf).

Azerbaijan made significant headway towards weakening Russia's transit monopoly in the Caspian. The BTC pipeline project which aimed to transport crude oil from the Azeri–Chirag–Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan by traversing the Georgian territory was completed in May 2005 and the first oil flowed in June 2006.<sup>35</sup> Moscow did not like the idea of being bypassed and the Russian grievance was voiced at the high echelons of the Russian state. Kalyuzhny stated that the BTC was not economically viable<sup>36</sup> whereas Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov claimed that the goal of the pipeline was to expel Russia from the regions which fell historically under its sphere of influence.<sup>37</sup> Yet, Russia was also aware of the fact that what was done could not be undone. So although Lukoil withdrew from the BTC in April 2003 by selling its shares to the Japanese company Inpex, it participated to the South Caucasus pipeline project that ran parallel to the BTC and which was built to bring Azeri gas in Shah-Deniz to Turkey via Georgia.<sup>38</sup>

Azerbaijan's second grand project in the Caspian, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) was unveiled on 26 June 2012 following the signing of an intergovernmental agreement between Azerbaijan and Turkey. The project intends to bring natural gas from the Shah-Deniz-II gas field in the Caspian to Turkey passing through the Georgian territory.<sup>39</sup> From Turkey it is expected to connect to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline which will transport the gas to Greece, Albania and via the Adriatic Sea to Italy and then to Western Europe. Russia, being bypassed again, lashed out at Turkey following the announcement of the project. Three days after the clinching of the TANAP deal, Sergei Kuprianov, the spokesman of Gazprom revealed that Turkey demanded additional gas supply from Russia after an explosion on the Turkey-Iran natural gas pipeline on June 28. He added that as soon as the TANAP project was completed, Turkey could then ask help from Azerbaijan in the event of a similar emergency.<sup>40</sup> Russia, however, after this initial bickering came up with its own project TurkStream in December 2014. The projected pipeline starts from Southern Russia and runs across 930 km through the Black Sea and then reaches to Kiyıköy on the Turkish Thrace coast.<sup>41</sup> It then plans to connect to Greece and Italy similar to the TANAP. Different from the TANAP on the other

35 Ghafouri, s. 93.

36 *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, "Transcript of a Briefing by Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Viktor Kalyuzhny for Russian and Foreign Media, Moscow, May 19, 2003", [http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/mnogostoronnie-struktury-i-forumy/-/asset\\_publisher/KrRBY5EMiHCl/content/id/519830](http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/mnogostoronnie-struktury-i-forumy/-/asset_publisher/KrRBY5EMiHCl/content/id/519830).

37 Penkova, s. 125.

38 "South Caucasus Pipeline", *BP Azerbaijan*, [https://www.bp.com/en\\_az/caspian/operations/projects/pipelines/SCP.html](https://www.bp.com/en_az/caspian/operations/projects/pipelines/SCP.html).

39 "Why TANAP?", *TANAP*, <http://www.tanap.com/tanap-project/why-tanap/>.

40 "Gazprom 'Warns' Turkey on Gas Deal", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 June 2012.

41 "Project-The TurkStream Pipeline", *TurkStream*, <http://turkstream.info/project/>.

hand, TurkStream targets also Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary.<sup>42</sup> Despite pursuing rival natural gas projects, Azerbaijan and Russia continued to cooperate on the exploration and production of oil and gas resources. In this regard, Azerbaijan's SOCAR and Russia's Rosneft agreed on a deal in June 2014 which would facilitate cooperation in the development of oil and gas fields in Siberia and the Caspian Sea.<sup>43</sup>

Russia has come a long way in accepting the existence of rival oil and natural gas projects in the Caspian Sea. It is for sure that Moscow still strives mightily to avert energy plans that will bypass its territory and puts forth rival schemes to beat off these alternative pipeline projects. Yet, Russia's financial troubles and technological backwardness of its companies compared to their Western competitors, and Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's determined urge to diversify their energy partners to retain their newly-acquired independence led Russia to acknowledge, although grudgingly, the presence of various players in the Caspian energy equation.

Russia was not this acquiescent when it came to its security interests in the Caspian region. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the mid-1990s, the security threats perceived by the Russian state in the Caspian had been at meager levels. However, in the mid-1990s Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan started to build their own Caspian navies from scratch and Azerbaijan and Iran embarked on developing their moderate naval forces. Furthermore, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan commenced to cooperate with the USA to improve their defense capabilities. These developments did not bode well with Russia. Moscow especially frowned upon Washington's attempts to permeate into the Caspian through collaboration with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan while it was struggling with a radical Islamist current in Dagestan, the restive North Caucasian republic, which had a coastline on the Caspian Sea. So, beginning from the early 2000s, Russia has been trying to not only strengthen its Caspian Flotilla with new ships, weapons and personnel but also has been suggesting the formation of a multilateral security scheme in the Caspian in order to bar the influence of extra-regional powers, particularly the USA in the region. The following part of the study will focus on these Russian efforts and will assess the extent of their success.

### **Russia's Security Policy in the Caspian: Closing the Sea to the Encroachments of the Non-Coastal Powers**

Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in July 1992, its former members divided up the military ships and equipment of the Soviet Caspian Flotilla

42 Zaur Shiriyev, "Oil Price and Russian Pressure Put Azerbaijan's Strategic Gas Project at Risk", *Chatham House*, 19 July 2017.

43 "Azerbaijan Politics: Quick View-SOCAR Signs Deal with Russian Energy Firm", *The Economist*, 4 June 2014.

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among themselves. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan renounced their shares in favor of Russia and decided to come under the security umbrella of the Russian fleet. Thus, Russia captured 75 percent of the ships and equipment and the remaining 25 percent was granted to Azerbaijan.<sup>44</sup> Russia transferred its ships and equipment from Baku to Astrakhan and Makhachkala as well. Astrakhan received artillery warships and minesweepers while Makhachkala hosted the warships with missile armaments.<sup>45</sup>

Kazakhstan decided to establish its own Caspian fleet in 1994. Russia transferred five patrol boats to the Kazakhstani coastal guards in accordance with a military cooperation agreement signed between the two countries in January 1996.<sup>46</sup> The country set up a naval academy in the port city of Aktau and bought 10 ships from Germany and the USA.<sup>47</sup> Turkmenistan continued its naval cooperation with Russia until 1999 and started to purchase small-size ships in 2000 from the USA and Ukraine.<sup>48</sup> Azerbaijan had inherited a frigate and seven minesweepers from the Soviet Caspian Flotilla. Baku beefed up its fleet with patrol boats from Washington. The USA also helped Azerbaijan to install maritime radars along its Caspian coast and to establish a command and control center in Baku.<sup>49</sup> Iran consolidated its Caspian naval force with anti-ship cruise missiles and gunboats. Tehran bought a Varshavyanka from Russia in 1995 as well.<sup>50</sup>

The USA utilized both the multilateral instruments of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) such as the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) as well its own initiatives such as the Second Line of Defense Program and its Megaports Initiative, the Caspian Sea Maritime Interdiction and the Caspian Guard to penetrate into the Caspian region in the post-Cold War period. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan became members of the PfP in May 1994 which aimed to build mutual understanding, strengthened security relationship and enhanced interoperability between the NATO and non-member countries in the Euro-Atlantic area. The PfP military exercises were also held in the Caspian in 1997.<sup>51</sup>

44 Azad Garibov, "Militarization of the Caspian Sea: Naval Arms Race and Conflicting Interests", Carlo Frappi and Azad Garibov, (eds.), *The Caspian Sea Chessboard: Geo-political, Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Analysis*, Egea, Milan 2014, s. 45.

45 "Russia Builds Naval Base in Kaspiisk for its Caspian Flotilla", *Navy Recognition*, 3 October 2017.

46 Mevlut Katik, "Militarisation of the Caspian Sea", Shirin Akiner, (ed.), *The Caspian: Politics, Energy and Security*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York 2004, s. 304.

47 "Caspian Flotilla", *Federation of American Scientists*, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mf-caspian.htm>.

48 Garibov, s. 47.

49 Hossein Aryan, "Caspian Sea States on Course for Naval Arms Race", *RFE/RL*, 27 July 2011.

50 Katik, s. 300.

51 Kubicek, "Russian Energy Policy in the Caspian Basin", s. 209.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also participated to the EAPC which was launched in 1997 by the NATO to engage in discussions regarding the political and security matters with the non-NATO countries in Europe as well as the Asian states located on the European periphery.<sup>52</sup>

The Second Line of Defense Program and its Megaports Initiative intended to help countries in preventing illicit trafficking in nuclear and radiological materials by securing international land borders, seaports and airports.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, it provided special equipment to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to detect radioactive and nuclear materials at border crossings and seaports and extended training to law-enforcement officials in these two countries.<sup>54</sup> The Caspian Sea Maritime Interdiction provided equipment to detect and interdict weapons of mass destruction along the maritime borders of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The program also included naval training and the construction of a boat basin at Astara, Azerbaijan which was located on the border with Iran.<sup>55</sup> The Caspian Guard, launched in 2003, shortly after the commencement of the construction of the BTC, aimed to bolster naval competencies of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in face of threats of nuclear proliferation, terrorism, drug, human and weapons trafficking through building up of maritime surveillance, equipment upgrades and training of naval forces of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.<sup>56</sup> The initiative facilitated the integration of the airspace and maritime surveillance and control systems of the two countries along with their national command, control, intelligence systems and their response forces.<sup>57</sup>

Russia was concerned about the military activities of the USA in the Caspian Sea especially when it came across a serious security situation in Dagestan which lied on the Western shore of the Caspian Sea. Dagestan, once the epicenter of the Caucasian resistance to the Tsarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was renowned with its ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, rising crime rates and religious revival in the early 1990s. Many Islamic radicals from the republic took part in the First Russian-Chechen War of 1994-1996 against the Russian army. Chechen militants raided a hospital in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar in January 1996 and held many civilians as hostages.<sup>58</sup> Radical Islamic cells began to appear in the Buynaksk, Kazbek and Tsumada districts of Dages-

52 Carlo Frappi, "The Caspian Sea Basin in United States Strategic Thinking and Policies", Carlo Frappi and Azad Garibov, (eds.), *The Caspian Sea Chessboard: Geo-political, Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Analysis*, Egea, Milan 2014, s. 189.

53 Katya Shadrina, "Security in the Caspian Sea Region: Challenges and Opportunities in a Globalized World", *GCSP Policy Brief*, 9, 28 September 2006, s. 13.

54 A.g.m.

55 Nicola Contessi, "Traditional Security in Eurasia", *The RUSI Journal*, CLX/2, April/May 2015, s. 53.

56 Josh Kucera, "Russia and Iran Team up to Keep U.S. Out of Caspian", *Security Assistance Monitor*, 7 July 2013.

57 German, s. 47.

58 "Chechen Rebels Hold At Least 1,000 Hostages in Hospital", *CNN*, 9 January 1996.

tan in 1996 and in August 1998 sharia law was declared in some of the villages.<sup>59</sup> In August 1999 militants from the neighboring Chechnya led by Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab entered Dagestan to give a leg up to the sharia-ruled villages and to expand the Islamic insurgency further in the North Caucasus region.<sup>60</sup> The Russian security forces suppressed the insurgency a few weeks later with the support of the local people. Yet, several attacks against the state officials, law enforcement officers and government buildings continued unabated throughout the 2000s. With the proclamation of the so-called Caucasus Emirate (an Islamic jihadist organization that aimed to establish an Islamic state in the North Caucasus which would be ruled by sharia law) in October 2007 by the Chechen warlord Doku Umarov, the standoff between the traditional Sufi groups and the ascending Wahhabist-Salafist currents became much more apparent and the senior representatives of the official clergy that had leanings to the Sufi creed were targeted by the more radical Islamic factions in the Dagestani society.<sup>61</sup> Corruption, clientelism, nepotism, poverty, insufficient education and job prospects for the youth exacerbated further the already fragile situation in the republic.

The precarious security situation in Dagestan along with the USA's various attempts to bolster military cooperation with the Caspian littoral states urged Russia to strengthen its military presence in the Caspian. Russia set up a command center for a joint Ministry of Defense force in Kaspiysk, Dagestan to reinforce the main naval base located in Astrakhan in December 1998.<sup>62</sup> In August 2002 Russia carried out the largest military exercise in the Caspian Sea since the end of the Soviet Union with 60 vessels, 30 aircraft and 10,000 personnel.<sup>63</sup> While the Russian spokesman stated that the drills were organized to fight terrorism, to stop drug trafficking and to catch sturgeon poachers, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov added that they were also staged due to the continued fighting in Chechnya and the alleged presence of Chechen militants in Pankisi Gorge, thus indicated also the Caucasian security dimension of the matter.<sup>64</sup>

The next move of Moscow became the suggestion of a formation of a common regional security alliance, CASFOR in July 2005 that would be composed of all the five Caspian littoral states. Envisaged as a counter-initiative

59 Jan Koehler vd., "Insurgency-informed Governance in the North Caucasus: Observations from Chechnya, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, XXVII/3, 2016, s. 375.

60 Uwe Halbach-Manarsha Isaeva, "Dagestan: Russia's Most Troublesome Republic", *SWP Research Paper*, 7, August 2015, s. 17.

61 Halbach-Isaeva, ss. 17-18.

62 Timothy L. Thomas-John Shull, "Russian National Interests and the Caspian Sea", *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, IV/4, December 1999-February 2000, <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/TIMOTHY-L.-THOMAS-JOHN-SHULL.pdf>.

63 Antonenko, s. 258.

64 Saivetz, s. 601.

to the Caspian Guard of the USA, the CASFOR would cope with threats of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, drugs and weapons trafficking in the Caspian Sea basin.<sup>65</sup> However, none of the littoral states except Iran embraced the idea, most probably because of the fact that the proposed organization would be dominated by Russia militarily. A similar Russian proposal which was put forth in 2006 and offered the establishment of a regional rapid reaction force in the Caspian Sea to deal with security challenges could not muster up any supporters either.<sup>66</sup>

Russia performed better in barring the entry of foreign militaries to the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, along with Russia signed the Agreement on Security Cooperation in the Caspian Sea on 18 November 2010 which stated that the security in the Caspian Sea would be the prerogative of the littoral states. The agreement also anticipated cooperation between the signatories in fighting terrorism, organized crime, smuggling, human trafficking, illegal migration, weapons trafficking, drug trafficking, poaching and piracy.<sup>67</sup>

Moscow has been expanding and modernizing its Caspian Flotilla since the early 2000s as well. The Flotilla is made up of 28 warships which include two guided missile frigates, three guided missile corvettes, four small gunships, one guided missile boat, five gunboats, two base minesweepers, five inshore minesweepers and six landing crafts and many support vessels.<sup>68</sup> With nearly 20,000 personnel it is the most powerful naval force in the Caspian.<sup>69</sup> Russia also made a remarkable move in October-November 2015 to prove the might of the Caspian Flotilla. Four warships of the Flotilla launched 44 cruise missiles at targets in Syria, nearly 1,000 nautical miles away.<sup>70</sup> This operation while demonstrating the long-range striking capability of the Russian Caspian naval force, engendered concern in some Caspian states, specifically in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Although Baku and Astana were careful not to reveal any dissatisfaction with regard to the Russian move, Turkmenistan mentioned about Kazakh worries pertaining to the security of airspace over the Caspian Sea.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, on November 4, 2015, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan inked a security agreement which provided for joint naval exercises on the Caspian Sea.<sup>72</sup>

65 Garibov, s. 49.

66 German, s. 56.

67 *President of Russia*, "Agreement on Security Cooperation in the Caspian Sea Has Been Submitted to the State Duma for Ratification", <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/12055>.

68 "Russian Navy 2018", *RussianShips.info*, <http://russianships.info/eng/today/>.

69 Petr Bologov, "How Russia is Losing the Caspian Sea", *Intersection*, 14 May 2016.

70 Lidiya Parkhomchik, "Current Security Issues in the Caspian Sea Region", *Eurasian Research Institute*, 5 March 2016.

71 *Aynı yer*.

72 Evan Gottesman, "The Caspian States in Russia's Military Bind", *The Diplomat*, 27 November 2015.

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The mid-1990s witnessed the launch of Caspian navies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan while Azerbaijan and Iran consolidated their existing military force in the Caspian with new ships and equipment. There were also American initiatives to get into the region through augmentation of defense cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. These American moves came as a wake-up call to Russia that had been distracted for some time because of the unrest in Chechnya which had reverberations on Dagestan, the North Caucasian republic on the Caspian coast as well. So, Russia speeded up its efforts to strengthen its Caspian flotilla and commenced to carry out military drills in the Caspian Sea. Moscow also succeeded in persuading the littoral states to block the entry of foreign militaries to the Caspian Sea. Yet, it failed to coax them into setting up a multilateral security scheme in the Caspian due to the fact that the Caspian states, except Iran were reluctant to be part of a defense organization that would be dominated by Moscow.

The environmental policy of Russia with respect to the Caspian Sea had been subordinated to the country's energy and security interests in the region throughout the 1990s. Although the environmental matters still pale in comparison to the geopolitical issues in the Russian foreign policy making concerning the Caspian, there have been some serious attempts on the Russian side starting from the late 1990s, backed up by other littoral states and international organizations to take requisite precautions to protect the marine environment and to preserve the valuable biological resources of the Caspian Sea. The final part of the study will examine these multilateral initiatives after analyzing the sources of pollution in the Caspian Sea and the impact of this pollution on fish and marine mammals.

### **Russia's Environmental Policy in the Caspian: Taking Steps to Conserve the Natural Legacy**

It is possible to cite three main reasons for the pollution in the Caspian Sea. These are flows of onshore industrial and agricultural waste water and municipal effluents, emergence of alien organisms and offshore oil extraction. The Volga River is the supplier of about 80 percent of the Caspian Sea's inflows. The Volga basin also constitutes the economic heartland of Russia as the country's almost 45 percent of industrial production and 50 percent of agricultural production take place there.<sup>73</sup> Water purification system is limited in the area as private companies do not allocate funds for purification equipment and the municipalities lack financial resources to buy the necessary apparatus.<sup>74</sup> Predictably, pollutants such as heavy metals, phenols, surfactants,

73 Matteo Villa, "Escaping the Tragedy of the Commons: Environmental Cooperation in the Caspian Sea", Carlo Frappi and Azad Garibov, (eds.), *The Caspian Sea Chessboard: Geo-political, Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Analysis*, Egea, Milan 2014, s. 84.

74 Antoine Blua, "Caspian: Unique Ecosystems Face Environmental Threat", *RFE/RL*, 27 May 2003.

sewage which discharge into Volga flow directly to the Caspian Sea and contaminate its water. Araz River, similar to Volga accumulates industrial wastes from Armenian and Iranian factories and then passes through Azerbaijan to join to Kura River which flows into the Caspian Sea and pollutes its water.<sup>75</sup>

The industrial pollution in the Caspian Sea engendered the growth of alien organisms in the water as well which brought about the elimination of native species. The fertilizers in agricultural run-off triggered the growth of some sort of aggressive algae in the North Caspian which robbed the water of oxygen and created a dead zone in which other marine creatures were suffocated to death.<sup>76</sup> A similar organism, the azolla plant infiltrated the Anzali wetlands and after spreading into the Caspian Sea formed a thick green blanket which suffocated the area it covered.<sup>77</sup> Mnemiopsis Leidyi, a new organism which entered the waters of the Caspian Sea from the vessels' bottom at the end of the 1990s appeared to be another dangerous creature which had deteriorating impact on the ecological balance of the sea.<sup>78</sup>

Offshore oil and natural gas extraction in the Caspian Sea which has been continuing since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the construction of sea platforms and pipelines also contribute significantly to the pollution of the Caspian Sea. Flooded wells, accidental releases of oil, natural seeps are the main causes of oil contamination.<sup>79</sup> Russia has been trying to utilize the negative effects of oil and natural gas pipeline construction on the ecology of the Caspian Sea since the mid-1990s to avert the building of new pipelines. The Russian seismologists claimed that the construction of oil pipelines over the Caspian seabed might bring out accidents and oil spills as a result of underwater earthquakes.<sup>80</sup> These concerns were voiced by the Russian statesmen as well. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that it was important to understand the environmental impact that could arouse from the construction of pipelines in the Caspian before the launch of pipeline projects as the marine environment in the Caspian Sea was very fragile.<sup>81</sup>

75 Villa, s. 84.

76 Shirin Akiner, "Environmental Security in the Caspian Sea", Shirin Akiner, (ed.), *The Caspian: Politics, Energy and Security*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York 2004, s. 351.

77 Akiner, s. 352.

78 I. M. Efendiyeva, "Ecological Problems of Oil Exploitation in the Caspian Sea Area", *Journal of Petroleum Science and Engineering*, XXVIII, 2000, s. 230.

79 Farhad Nadim vd., "Management of Coastal Areas in the Caspian Sea Region: Environmental Issues and Political Challenges", *Coastal Management*, XXXIV/2, 2006, s. 158.

80 Igor Zonn, "The Caspian Sea: Threats to Its Biological Resources and Environmental Security", Gennady Chufirin, (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Solna 2001, s. 77.

81 "Russia Highlights Its Positions Regarding the Caspian Status", *Caspian Energy News Paper*, 16 October 2017.

The water pollution in the Caspian Sea took a heavy toll on the fish and seal population. The sturgeon catch which was navigating around 27,000 tons in the late 1970s plummeted to less than 1,000 tons in the 2000s.<sup>82</sup> This ailing situation led the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to classify the beluga sturgeon as critically endangered on its Red List of Threatened Species which indicated the serious danger of extinction.<sup>83</sup> Apart from the contamination of water, over-fishing, poaching, invasion of *Mnemiopsis Leidyi* which threatened the sturgeon's food supply, desiccation of the spawning grounds and construction of dams in the rivers all contributed to the declining numbers of the sturgeon in the Caspian. As the depletion of sturgeon would increase unemployment levels and make things more difficult for Russia especially in Dagestan, Russia along with Kazakhstan declared a moratorium on sturgeon catching in the mouths of the Volga and Ural Rivers in 1993.<sup>84</sup> The other littoral states followed suit and imposed similar bans in the succeeding years. The Russian President Putin also pointed out the gravity of the diminishing number of fishing stocks in the Caspian Sea during a visit to the Astrakhan in July 2005 and described the immense scale of poaching in the Caspian as bioterrorism.<sup>85</sup> Russia also opened up 21 experimental farms to cultivate sturgeon in order to compensate the declining figures. These facilities currently produce approximately 2,000 tons of fish on an annual basis.<sup>86</sup>

The number of the seal population in the Caspian Sea, similar to sturgeon, has recorded a striking decrease in the last 20 years. Their numbers which were estimated to be oscillating between 360,000 and 600,000 at the end of the 1990s, decreased to around 100,000 in the 2000s.<sup>87</sup> Industrial pollution in the Caspian Sea which weakened these mammals' immune systems was uttered as the main reason of their massive deaths in the early 2000s. The progressive warming of the Caspian Sea due to climatic changes which will reduce the extent and duration of the winter ice that these animals depend on for breeding is another significant future threat.<sup>88</sup> Cognizant of these dangers, the IUCN classified the Caspian seals as critically endangered on its Red List of Threatened Species as well.<sup>89</sup>

The increasing levels of water pollution and endangerment of fish and seal population led the Caspian littoral states to come together in a regional initiative in late 1990s to protect the marine environment and to preserve the valuable species in the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Environment Programme (CEP) was

82 Villa, s. 82.

83 "The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species", *International Union for Conservation of Nature*, <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>.

84 Douglas Blum, "The Russian Trade-Off: Environment and Development in the Caspian Sea", *The Journal of Environment & Development*, VII/3, September 1998, s. 251.

85 Shadrina, s. 13.

86 Nigar Orujova, "First Sturgeon Farm to Open in Azerbaijan", *Azernews*, 7 November 2013.

87 Akiner, s. 355.

88 Villa, s. 83.

89 "The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species".

established in May 1998 with the participation of all Caspian states along with contributions from international bodies such as the United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office for Project Services, the World Bank and the European Union through the Global Environment Facility.<sup>90</sup>

The CEP acted as a regional environmental dialogue and governance mechanism. It allocated each littoral state a key diagnostic theme. Russia became responsible for strengthening the institutional, legal and regulatory framework and for concocting strategies for sustainable management of fish and other valuable biological resources.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, Russia started to work on the draft of a regional cooperation agreement regarding environmental matters which would be binding for all the littoral states. It came into being on 4 November 2003 in Tehran when all the Caspian States signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea which laid down the general requirements and the institutional mechanism for environmental protection in the Caspian region.<sup>92</sup> Three of the ancillary protocols to the Convention were also signed. These are the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents signed in Aktau on 12 August 2011 and entered into force on 25 July 2016, the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities hammered out in Moscow on 12 December 2012 and the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity inked in Ashgabat on 30 May 2014.<sup>93</sup>

The Caspian states also agreed on three important agreements concerning environmental cooperation in the fourth of the summits they have been convening since 2002 at presidential level. On 29 September 2014 in the course of the Astrakhan Summit, the littoral countries signed the Agreement on Hydrometeorology Cooperation in the Caspian Sea, the Agreement on Cooperation on Disaster Warning and Relief in the Caspian Sea and the Agreement on Preservation and Rational Use of Caspian Sea Marine Biological Resources.<sup>94</sup> All of these three agreements came into force and the rescue services of all the littoral states have started to operate in the water area of the Caspian Sea as of fall 2017.<sup>95</sup>

90 "Summary", *Caspian Environment Programme*, <http://caspien.iwlearn.org/>.

91 Akiner, s. 357.

92 "Tehran Convention", *Tehran Convention*, <http://www.tehranconvention.org/spip.php?rubrique1>. The agreement came into force on 12 August 2006.

93 "Protocols to the Tehran Convention", *Tehran Convention*, <http://www.tehranconvention.org/spip.php?article41>.

94 *President of Russia*, "The Fourth Caspian Summit Has Taken Place in Astrakhan", <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46686>.

95 *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement at a News Conference Following the Meeting of the Caspian Littoral States'

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The environmental issues pertaining to the Caspian Sea have been relegated to the background compared to the matters of energy and security in the Russian foreign policy since the early 1990s. Yet, the growing water pollution in the Sea which precipitated disappearance of commercially valuable fish species such as the sturgeon along with the seals brought out a renewed interest, determined outlook and coordinated action on the side of all littoral states to prevent the further depletion of the Caspian Sea's natural resources. In this context, Russia took on the responsibility of preparing the legal framework for the institutionalization of a regional environmental security regime in the Caspian Sea. Moscow seemed to carry out this task successfully with the signing of a convention for the protection of the marine environment and many supporting protocols. Yet, the challenging task ahead of both Russia and the other littoral states will be the implementation of the clauses of these agreements.

### Conclusion

It took some time for Russia to grasp the repercussions of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in its near abroad and to adapt itself to the new realities. In the early 1990s, Russia was not quite prepared to concede to the unilateral moves of the Caspian littoral states which were collaborating with international oil and gas companies to develop the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. Therefore, Moscow, in alignment with Tehran, objected to the construction of alternative oil and natural gas pipelines which would sidestep its territory on the grounds that the legal status of the Caspian Sea had not been decided yet. However, by the late 1990s, Russia had become cognizant of the fact that it was deprived of the necessary financial and technological instruments to forestall the realization of the Western-backed energy projects especially while struggling with separatist currents and economic crises at home. Furthermore, with Putin's inauguration as President of Russia in 2000, Russia's Caspian policy has become much more realistic, coordinated and flexible. Russia has expedited its efforts to carry out joint energy projects with the other littoral states. Moreover, although Russia still makes serious endeavor to avert the actualization of contending oil and natural gas projects, it accepts the existence of competing players in the energy game in the Caspian.

The post-Cold War era brought about a change in the security environment of the Caspian Sea as well. Not only the Russian and the Iranian navies but also the military ships of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan started to sail on the waters of the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, the USA extended military ships, equipment and training to the Caspian littoral states except Iran which engendered discomfort on the Russian side. Russia responded to the

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Foreign Ministers, Moscow, December 5, 2017", [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2978643](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2978643).

American onslaughts in the region by invigorating its Caspian Flotilla with new ships and equipment. Moscow also suggested the formation of a regional security organization which would include all the littoral states but to no avail. Yet, it became successful to persuade the coastal states to impede the entry of foreign navies to the Caspian Sea. Taking into account the fact that Russia still retains the most powerful navy force in the region, it can be said that Russia will not be challenged militarily in the Caspian Sea at least in the near to mid-future.

Energy and security issues were not the only matters that came up on the agenda of Russian foreign policy makers regarding the Caspian region. The ecological condition of the Caspian Sea which had been going from bad to worse as a result of increasing water pollution impelled Russia to play a more active role in taking necessary precautions to prevent the extinction of valuable biological resources, particularly the sturgeon fish in the early 2000s. Russia undertook the duty of arranging the legal framework for protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea which resulted in signing of a framework convention for this purpose along with ancillary protocols by the littoral states. Yet, it remains to be seen whether the articles of all these agreements will materialize soon especially when they clash with the energy and security interests of the coastal states.

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