

Ukraine to Build Military Base in the Sea of Azov

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*Ukraine recently announced that it will start building a military base in the Sea of Azov, just 67 km away from the Russian coast. The news was confirmed on the last visit of Ukrainian **President Volodimir Zelenski** to Berdiansk, where the naval base will be installed. According to official sources, it aims to protect commercial vessels transiting the region. The local commercial port will have its infrastructure transferred to the Ukrainian Navy later this year. In 2021 reforms will be carried out, with the arrival of new ships, the repair of administrative buildings and the construction of residential buildings for people involved in the activities of the base. It is estimated that the works will cost around 20 million dollars.*

As an auxiliary project for the installation of the base, there is a plan to create a military teaching department at the State Pedagogical University of Berdiansk, which will be ready in a few years and will train the officers who will work at the new base. These are the words of President Volodimir Zelenski:

“It is very important to have ships in this place. After all, this way we will protect our ports, our trade. This is a direct aid to the economy”.

It has been reported that the resources of the Vostok naval base, currently located in Nikolaev, will be deployed at the Berdiansk base. This is, in fact, an old Ukrainian project, which integrates a wide range of aggressive policies on the part of Kiev in the Azov Sea region. Kiev showed interest in building a base in the region for the first time in 2017. In 2018, part of the Black Sea fleet was transferred to Azov. At the end of last year, Zelenski, continuing the policies of his predecessor, **Petro Poroshenko**, announced the creation of a ship division for the Azov, with a base to be installed between Berdiansk and Mariupol. Now, finally, Azov’s militarization projects seem to be materialized.

“The main objective of the base should be to guarantee the security of the city and the region. However, the military base will not interfere with the commercial port and will not reduce its capacity,” said the statement from the port administration. The Ukrainian reason for ratifying these projects is an alleged Russian threat to the country’s maritime trade route. However, it is public knowledge that these acts constitute nothing more than the simple continuation of the conflicts that started in 2014, as a result of the total alignment with Washington and the European Union by the new Ukrainian political elite, which rose with the Euromaidan.

The myth of Russia as an enemy of Ukraine has become increasingly widespread in the country, causing regrettable episodes such as the persecution of Russian and pro-Russian

minorities within Ukrainian national territory. The greatest example of this is the civil war in the Donbass region, which has lasted for more than six years, having been interrupted indefinitely by the Minsk Protocol, which imposed an immediate ceasefire.

Ukraine has interrupted the ceasefire on several occasions, sometimes openly violating it through military attacks, sometimes sneakily sabotaging it through illegal arrests and terrorist attacks. In recent times, sneak attacks have become increasingly frequent. On April 9, a young 25 years-old woman was brutally murdered by Ukrainian neo-Nazi paramilitaries. Miroslava Voronkova died in a terrorist attack with bombs, where Mikhail A., 59 years-old, was also wounded.

The unfounded fear of a Russian threat in Azov becomes even less credible when we look at data such as this from the terrorist attacks perpetrated by pro-Kiev paramilitary groups. The existence of a Navy of the Donetsk People's Republic is also supposedly one of the reasons why Ukraine is so afraid for the security of the region. But it is neither Moscow nor Donetsk who are committing crimes and attacks in Donbass. Kiev seems to be clear in its political and geopolitical praxis: it causes tensions with clandestine activities, from which it awaits answers (which often do not appear) to respond with the recrudescence of its defense policies under the pretext of having a certain "threat".

Last year, Ukraine called on several countries to debate on the imposition of international sanctions against Russia due to its policy on the Sea of Azov. The reason for such Ukrainian indisposition in relation to Russian naval policy was the fact that Russia vetoed the entry of NATO ships into the Azov and seized Ukrainian ships that crossed the Russian maritime border. In fact, these acts only have to strengthen a policy of good neighborliness in the region, maintaining the dominance of the sea between the both States, under strict respect for territorial limits, and canceling out the interference of foreign nations. But, it seems Ukraine is not interested in maintaining good relations with Moscow and insists on further militarizing the region.

Certainly, Kiev will take advantage of the construction of the naval base to try again to deploy NATO vessels in the Sea of Azov, in clear affront to Russia. It will also take the opportunity to impose reprisals on the Donbass people's republics. The commercial port protection speech is just a facade, a lie told as an official version. The most curious thing is that Kiev is so concerned with such policies of hostility against Russia at a time as what we are currently experiencing, where concerns about the new coronavirus are taking place over the world. Now, if NATO cancelled its biggest military exercises in 30 years (the Defender Europe 2020 project) due to the pandemic, would the Western military alliance be really interested in subsidizing a project as bold and unnecessary as the creation of a naval base in the Azov at a time like this? Kiev is betting on its ties to the West and appears to be making a big mistake.

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