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European Perspective on the Black Sea Security

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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

With the outbreak of trench warfare in World War I, tanks first emerged as indispensable combat tools. Since then, tanks have continually solidified their role as an embodiment of military capability in the armed forces. First developed in the early 20th century by Western armed forces with the British “Big Willie” and the French Renault FT-17, tanks today are the product of a century of innovation and have spread worldwide. Since their inception, tanks have undergone impressive optimisations through many technological and operational developments as a result of new countermeasures within modern warfare, new operational theatres, and the evolving international threat environment. This complex process led to the development of Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) such as the well-known British Challenger II, French Leclerc, German Leopard 2A7 or US M1A2 Abrams.

For centuries the Black Sea has been an important body of water for the region, from access to the Mediterranean Sea to fisheries. Today, the Black Sea represents a major strategic asset for the region's countries and surrounding areas. Countries and regions rely on the pipelines and fibre optic cables laid on the seabed. Turkey and Russia's energy extraction from the Black Sea represents a form of commercial and political dominance over the region. This dominance creates tensions that ultimately lead to full-fledged armed conflicts, as in the case of the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. In the aftermath of this event, NATO and the EU intensified their presence in the region and strengthened their alliance with Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia, and, with more uncertainty, Turkey.

This paper considers the current challenges in the region and reflects on the legal, commercial, political, and energy issues going on between Russia and the littoral countries. This work analyses each country's approach and policies and their implications on the region. Considering the complexity of the situation, this paper aims to give a comprehensive outlook of the main challenges and tries to disentangle the perspectives of each actor involved.

We are confident that our readers can acquire insights into the European perspective on Black Sea security challenges through this work. Moreover, we hope that by illustrating the region's main issues, our readers will be given the necessary tools to shape their own critical idea on the Western actors' military presence in the region.



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Director PSec

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries the Black Sea has been an important body of water for the region, from access to the Mediterranean Sea to fisheries. Today, for the region's countries and surrounding areas, the Black Sea represents a major strategic asset. Countries and regions rely on the pipelines and fibre optic cables laid on the seabed. The straits and the right of passage represent a major issue not only for military reasons but also mostly for daily trade amongst nations. Over the last decade, the Black Sea region has known multiple tensions, some leading to full-fledged armed conflicts, such as the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and its consequences for Ukraine's sovereignty and control in the Black Sea and its neighbouring countries. This paper will try to analyse from a European perspective, what challenges exist around the Black Sea. Furthermore, we will try to present a comprehensive overview of the policies and approaches taken by the different actors to face said challenges. Therefore, we will start with a short presentation of the EU perspectives and interests in the Black Sea. First, we will focus on energy, transportation, and different initiatives taken by the region's EU Member States, such as Romania and Bulgaria and further West, to advance cooperation and development. Second, we will focus on the international and regional organ-

isations that have interest and, hence, assets in the region. NATO's own Romania and Bulgaria border the Black Sea, but Ukraine and Georgia have cooperated more closely with NATO to face Russian ambitions. The OSCE has also seen their role increase, especially in Ukraine, in dealing with Russian aggression. Nevertheless, it's not all about security; the BSEC and their initiatives and goals regarding the region's economic development, trade, and energy are also important to better understand what is at stake. Multiple states are on the Black Sea, and others have interests in the region. Third, we will focus on these states, particularly Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and their national interests around the Black Sea. We will give particular attention to their capacities to push their policies forward. Finally, before moving on to our conclusions, we will provide a detailed and comprehensive examination of the main issues for most of the actors previously presented. This part will discuss securitisation in the Black Sea and thus the main military and geostrategic issues, from access to warm water ports to strait control. This part will focus not only on the issues but also on the solutions certain countries affected propose and the ensuing dilemmas when nation states have conflicting approaches or overlapping interests.

EU PERSPECTIVES ON THE BLACK SEA

This part will primarily focus on the European Union's non-military perspectives in the region. The EU has two Member States in the region, Romania and Bulgaria, and partnerships with Turkey, Georgia, and Ukraine – and Russia, its most important geopolitical rival. For the EU, the Black Sea remains mostly a space for trade and economic development (Blue Economy) and commodity transit, with the two Turkish straits giving access to the Mediterranean Sea. Another important matter for the EU is energy-related issues surrounding the Black Sea. There are thousands of kilometres of cables and pipelines crossing the Black Sea and connecting European Member States with each other and their partners. Also, one of the most important ports in the region is in Romania, (part of the EU), and, specifically, the mouth of the Danube River. Let us first focus on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme, more specifically the partnership with two of the six partner countries, Ukraine and Georgia, both bordering on the Black Sea. Although the EaP is not mainly focused on security policy, it does represent significant time, effort, and financial investment from the European Union. The EU's goals through this partnership are to support these countries in achieving global policy objectives like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN 2030 Goals for Sustainable Development. Increasing the stability, prosperity and resilience of these countries will undoubtedly help the EU foster a closer

and better relationship with its neighbours. For 2025, the top ten targets have been selected. Some of the more salient targets are increased investment in these countries' economies, focus on the respect of the rule of law, sustainable energy, and security and cyber resilience. With the EaP, cyber security is expected to rapidly develop a proper framework for identifying and tackling threats to better prepare for a future where these threats will not only increase but rapidly evolve.¹ When looking at EU relations with the Black Sea region, another important policy initiative is the Black Sea Synergy, launched in 2008. This initiative aims to focus on and push for further investment in the region to develop and increase better cooperation amongst the region's countries and the EU. The partnerships primarily focus on the environment, transport, energy, and, more recently, maritime policy. The Synergy is supposed to make cooperation between the concerned actors easier, more flexible, and more coherent, maximising positive outcomes for each party. The Black Sea Synergy initiative and its benefits is a testament to the potential of an EU regional bottom-up policy approach, focusing on strengthening regional cooperation through select projects with all the tools at the EU's disposal. Even in the present complex geopolitical context, the EU still focuses on adding value to the life of the citizens in the region.

A third important initiative, the Three Seas

1. EU Neighbours East, Policy, [online] Available at <https://euneighbourseast.eu/policy/>

Initiative, includes 12 EU Member States, two of which are on the Black Sea. The initiative gathers the states surrounding the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic seas. Although these countries are, for the most part, culturally distinct, they do share a common story, that of impeded development, growth, and cooperation for the better part of the 20th century – the Iron Curtain. Today, the Three Seas Initiative tries to counter the Iron Curtain’s negative impact on these countries. From railroads to pipelines, the countries in Three Seas Initiative remain disconnected from each other as well as the other western EU countries. Trying to eliminate the deficit between Western and

Eastern Europe has been a goal towards which the EU has strived; however, this deficit still lies at around 1.15 trillion euros. Eliminating this astronomical obstacle would be beneficial not only for the eastern countries but also for the whole of Europe, making it stronger and more united. The presidents of the countries meet annually, and the initiative now includes an annual business forum and an investment fund; the initiative is meant to complement all the efforts made by the European Union.² When considering the Black Sea, one important aspect is energy – especially for the EU. The Black Sea is a region with immense potential for energy production and trans-



Source: Stockvault, <https://newsroom.consilium.europa.eu/permalink/468801>

*Flags of the eastern countries of the EU.
European Union*

2. Three Seas Initiative, Story, [online] Available at <https://3seas.eu/about/threeseastory>

portation. A paper published in CEPS Policy Insight by Kustova and Egenhofer explains how beneficial Black Sea offshore wind power could be for the EU's climate ambitions. In total, the Black Sea has the potential to generate 435 GW of offshore power, with a significant percentage of this possible on Romanian and Bulgarian waters. However, this potential can only be achieved if there is regional access and proper governance of the waters. Offshore wind produced by the two Member States alone could reach 100 GW and could help reduce the continent's dependence on increasingly expensive and inefficient coal. The investment in low-carbon energies also means there will be a significant increase in employment surrounding the region's energy sector, further pushing economic growth and development. In the same article, the authors explain that with the importance of the Next Generation EU recovery fund, there will be no shortage of money for this sort of project. However, political will and the subsequent planning might

be the missing components this time around.³ The number of maritime security threats is increasing worldwide and becoming more complex every day in geopolitical areas that directly impact EU security and prosperity. However, for a long-time, maritime security and hence Naval power has been put on the back burner by most EU Member States. Yet, in this everchanging context, if the EU wants to maintain its access, it must change this status quo. The Strategic Compass to be published in March 2022 by the European External Action Service should detail how the EU can develop its naval power in an effective and efficient way to keep and defend its interests.⁴ Some of these interests are in the Black Sea Region. As previously discussed, access to this body of water is not only important for goods transportation but also for military operations. Russia notoriously makes use of the annexed Crimean territory for their Russian Black Sea Fleet to supply their military actions in Libya and Syria.

PERIPHERAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE BLACK SEA: NATO, OSCE, AND BSEC.

The Black Sea has always represented an important crossroads between different economies as well as cultures. For instance, it is the geographical place where Europe, Asia, and the Middle East meet and is also a region rich in gas pipelines and fibre-optic cables.

However, for a large portion of the 20th century, the Black Sea has mostly been under Tzarist and Soviet control. As a matter of fact, “on the eve of World War I, 50 per cent of all Russian exports, and 90 per cent of Russian agriculture exports, passed through the

3. Irina Kustova and Christian Egenhofer, (2020), 'How Black Sea offshore wind power can deliver a green deal for this EU region', CEPS, [online] Available at <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/how-black-sea-offshore-wind-power-can-deliver-a-green-deal-for-this-eu-region/>

4. Daniel Fiott, (2021), 'Naval Gazing? The Strategic Compass and the EU's Maritime Presence, Institute for Security Studies, [online] Available at https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/naval-gazing-strategic-compass-and-eu-maritime-presence#_ocans_apt_eu_maritime_ambitions_and_the_reality

Bosporus from the Black Sea”.⁵ The political control of the Russian Empire first and of the Soviet state later took a toll on the potential development of the region, both economically and commercially. Due to these conditions, the Black Sea was considered a “Soviet Lake” since only Turkey was an autonomous state, although it joined NATO in 1952. That said, the Black Sea returned to be a crucial region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Events in the early 1990s paved the way for the new independence of Bulgaria and Romania, as well as for Ukraine and Georgia, which released their ties with Moscow after seventy years. During the 1990s, all littoral states had to adapt to the new economic and political

framework. In 1992, these countries and other bordering states established the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)⁶ to promote dialogue, cooperation, economic development, and peace among the Black Sea states. Over the years, several organisations started to operate in the region, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which gradually became more dynamic in that area, although for different reasons. The former increased its activity in Georgia (1992-2008) to mitigate the effects of the Georgian-Russian conflict, then in Ukraine, after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The latter enhanced its presence after Romania and Bulgaria embraced NATO.



NATO ships exercise in the Black Sea

Italian Frigate Virginio Fasan, 19 July 2021

5. Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, (2021), 'NATO Summit 2021: Black Sea Strategy Needed', The Heritage Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/186087.pdf>

6. Member states of BSEC: the Republic of Albania, Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, Hellenic Republic, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Republic of Serbia, Republic of Turkey, and Ukraine.

However, Crimea's annexation represented a game-changer even for NATO, which began to increase its military and strategic presence in the Black Sea.

NATO

Although Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952, the Black Sea has only recently become a crucial hotspot for NATO. Indeed, Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004, but Ukraine and Georgia also developed strong ties with the Organization, as they mainly experienced the rise of Russian assertiveness in the region. Among all littoral states, three are NATO members, two are reliable partners, while the remaining one is the Russian Federation – by far the strongest and most aggressive state. Since being appointed President of Russia, Vladimir Putin has always aimed to restore influence over former Soviet territories and halt the Euro-Atlantic integration process towards the East. In this context, the peak of Russian aggression is represented by the annexation of Crimea by force, to the detriment of Ukraine, in 2014. This act showed the strategic aims of the Russian Federation, both in terms of politics and security. First, it strengthened Russia's presence in the sea and, accordingly, in the Mediterranean Sea because it is Russia's only warm port. However, this upgrade in the region provided Russia "a platform for regional power projection, from which long-range cruise missiles and coastal defence systems can more effectively threaten Western forces

throughout the Black Sea and – to some extent – beyond".⁷ Russia's military actions seem to confirm the will to create an Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) zone in the Black Sea, as stated by the Russian Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, a few years ago: "Russia has installed a self-contained military formation in Crimea consisting of a naval base, an army corps, and an aviation and air defence division".⁸

Since then, NATO has multiplied its efforts to balance and check Russian aggression. Decisive steps in that direction were taken in 2015 and 2016. In December 2015, NATO and Romania decided to initiate the Bucharest HQ of NATO's Multinational Division Southeast, with two Force Integration Units (FIU) attached to it. Located in six Eastern European countries, these relatively small command-and-control units play an outsized role for NATO, since "their primary mission is to speed the deployment of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force into front-line Europe in the event of a military crisis".⁹ In other words, the Bucharest HQ "will be able to command troops deployed in NATO's southeast division to ensure implementation of NATO's Readiness Action Plan".¹⁰

A second decisive measure was taken in July 2016, when the Heads of State and Government of member countries gathered in Warsaw. There, they declared NATO's commitment and resoluteness to strengthen the security of NATO countries in the Black Sea by developing a "tailored forward presence in

7. Stephen J. Flanagan, "Introduction", in *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*, ed. RAND Corporation (Santa Monica, California, 2020), 19.

8. Neil J. Melvin, "Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region", SIPRI Policy Paper, no. 50 (December 2018), 19.

9. Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "Black Sea Imperatives. Ensuring NATO Security and American Interests for the Incoming U.S. Administration", Center for European Policy Analysis, Strategic Report no. 3 (November 2016), 22.

10. Ibid.

the southeast part of the Alliance territory”.¹¹ The “tailored forward presence” included the Romanian initiative to establish a multinational framework brigade to help improve integrated training of Allied Units under Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast. As stated in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, this move “will contribute to the Alliance’s strengthened deterrence and defence posture, situational awareness, and peacetime demonstration of NATO’s intent to operate without constraint”.¹² The multinational framework brigade started operating in March 2018 under the control of Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast (HQ MND–SE). Made of a 5,000-strong brigade, it “still consists mainly of Romanian troops, but they are supplemented by Bulgarian and Polish troops and headquarters staff from various other NATO states”.¹³

Alongside all NATO’s activities, the US is playing an increasingly active role in the region. For instance, “the U.S. Navy has been allocated \$5 million for Black Sea engagements, with a focus on multinational exercises”.¹⁴ It is also seeking to boost interoperability in the area, and “U.S. and NATO training exercises have become more regular”.¹⁵ Among all American initiatives, the Sea Breeze needs special mentioning. The Sea Breeze is a multinational Partnership for Peace (PFP) maritime exercise held annually in the Black Sea involving Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 and other PFP navies. NATO started to

participate in 1997, and since then, it has demonstrated its steadfast commitment to the Allies and Partners for over 20 years, to provide “unique training opportunities, [...] to enhance readiness, improve collaboration, and interoperability in the Black Sea region”.¹⁶ NATO warships usually patrol the Black Sea for two-thirds of the year, but they also regularly participate “in both NATO and national exercises in the Black Sea to enhance interoperability, demonstrate the presence and assure Allies of the maritime commitment to collective defence”.¹⁷ The Sea Breeze exercise represents a valuable example of cooperation and interoperability among NATO countries, given the fact that its popularity has grown considerably over the years, especially after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, when NATO decided to increase its presence in the region. The last exercise, SB 2021, hosted “the largest number of participating nations in the history of the exercise with more than 30 countries from six continents providing 5,000 troops, 32 ships, 40 aircraft, and 18 special operations and dive teams scheduled to participate”.¹⁸ The actors involved improved their abilities by conducting a full range of naval and land operations, reflecting “Allies’ fundamental commitment to the principles of collective defence, transatlantic unity, and interoperability in order to maintain peace and preserve security”.¹⁹ Finally, when it comes to missile defence, Romania is on the front line since it has de-

11. Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016. “Warsaw Summit Communiqué”. [online] Available at: https://www.nato.int/eps/en/attachofficial_text_133169.htm

12. *Ibid*

13. Coffey and Kochis, “NATO Summit 2021: Black Sea Strategy Needed”, 4.

14. Bugajski and Doran, “Black Sea Imperatives”, 21.

15. *Ibid*

16. SHAPE Public Affairs Office. ‘NATO Allies and Partners Ready for Exercise SEA BREEZE 21’. [online] Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2021/nato-allies-and-partners-ready-for-exercise-sea-breeze-21>

17. *Ibid*

18. *Ibid*

19. *Ibid*

voted its efforts to protect Europe from ballistic missile proliferation. Indeed, Romania became the first Black Sea country “to host one of the U.S. Navy’s Aegis Ashore missile defence facilities”,²⁰ taking part in the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). The site, located at Deveselu air base, began to operate in May 2016 and joined “an ever-widening missile defence network that includes a forward-based radar in Turkey, a command-and-control centre in Germany, and Aegis-equipped cruisers in the Mediterranean Sea”.²¹ That said, EPAA is important for three reasons. First, it gives NATO’s European countries a high degree of protection from potential ballistic missile threats from the Middle East. Second, a permanent US presence provides the Allies with strategic and psychological support since it testifies to the American commitment to the stability of the Black Sea. Lastly, from a strategic perspective, NATO was able to “integrate the U.S. Aegis Ashore system into Europe’s combined missile defence architecture, [bolstering] allied interoperability while increasing opportunities for joint training and exercises”.²²

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the world’s largest security organisation. Established in 1973, today, the OSCE includes 57 member states in North America, Europe, and Asia, that work to promote stability, peace, and democracy for more than a billion people.

Since its foundation, the OSCE has always represented “a forum for political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for joint action to improve the lives of individuals and communities”²³ by using a comprehensive approach to guarantee security on the economic, human, and politico-military dimensions.

Although at the beginning it was mainly used as a forum to mitigate Cold War tensions, the OSCE increased its activity during the 1990s, after the collapse of Yugoslavia and the USSR itself, when several local conflicts arose. Indeed, just at that time, the Organization started to be operative in the Black Sea region. The first mission in the area was established in November 1992, with its headquarters in Tbilisi, and ended on 31 December 2008. Throughout these 16 years, the OSCE assisted the Georgian government with conflict settlement, democratisation, human rights, and issues with the rule of law. A few years later, another mission in the area became operational, the OSCE Mission to Ukraine. It started on 24 November 1994, and its mandate expired on 30 April 1999. Unlike the previous mission, Ukraine’s mission aimed at supporting “the work of experts on constitutional and economic matters to Ukraine itself, and reporting on the situation in Crimea”.²⁴ Once concluded, a new mission was established in Ukraine, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, “for the purpose of carrying out tasks related to the new form of co-operation between Ukraine and the OSCE”.²⁵ Throughout these years, the OSCE Project

20. Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, “Black Sea Defended. NATO Responses to Russia’s Black Sea Offensive”, Center for European Policy Analysis, Strategic Report no. 2 (July 2016), 13.

21. *Ibid*

22. *Ibid*.

23. OSCE, ‘Who we are’, [online] Available at: <https://www.osce.org/who-we-are>.

24. OSCE Secretariat, ‘OSCE Mission to Ukraine (closed 1999)’, [online] Available at: <https://www.osce.org/mission-ukraine-1999-closed>.

25. *Ibid*

Co-ordinator has supported the process of reforms in Ukraine, helping “the country meet crisis-related challenges”.²⁶ Moreover, the multi-dimensional approach has been useful to cover several crucial issues, such as constitutional reform, criminal justice reform, the fight against crime, and human trafficking. However, the Russian annexation of Crimea took a toll on the OSCE’s mission in Ukraine as well, since it destabilised an already precarious region, especially in terms of identity and nationality. Due to the increasing instability in the area, another OSCE mission was deployed in Ukraine on 21 March 2014, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). Differing from the other missions in Ukraine, it has devoted its efforts “to observe and report in an impartial and objective way on the situation in Ukraine; and to facilitate dialogue among all parties to the crisis”²⁷, trying to mitigate outcomes of the conflicts in Donbas as well as Crimea.

BSEC

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is the Black Sea’s largest economic and political organisation, representing a region of more than 340 million people on two continents. Established on 25 June 1992, it is now comprised of thirteen Member States. The BSEC primarily devotes its effort to foster “interaction and harmony among its members, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity, encouraging friendly and good-neighbourly relations in the Black Sea”.²⁸ Over the years, the organisation has expanded the fields of co-

operation, including agriculture, banking and finance, environmental protection, energy, institutional renewal, and good governance, as well as trade and economic development. However, despite the numerous fields of co-operation, so far, the most important areas are energy, combating crime, and trade and economic development. Regarding energy, activities in this sector are led by the BSEC Working Group on Energy, which aims to promote regional cooperation among littoral states and develop “a competitive regional market through supporting investments in energy infrastructure, with the view to increase energy security, interconnectivity and further diversify sources and routes”.²⁹ Lately, the Working Group has intensified its efforts towards Green Energy, and indeed, a Task Force on Green Energy Development has been set up within the Group. On 27 June 2018, the Task Force finally launched the BSEC Green Energy Strategy, previously approved by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States. In this document, the Council invited “the Member States to take into account this BSEC document [...], in the elaboration and adoption of their Green Energy policies and in strengthening regional cooperation in the field of Green Energy”.³⁰ Regarding combating crime, the BSEC Working Group on Combating Crime oversees managing cooperation in this area. It has mainly focused its efforts on enhancing “co-operation among the BSEC Member States, in combating organised crime activities, such as the trafficking of human beings, drugs,

26. OSCE. ‘OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine’. [online] Available at: <https://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-ukraine>.

27. OSCE. ‘OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine’. [online] Available at: <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine>.

28. BSEC. ‘BSEC at a glance’. [online] Available at: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/bsec-at-a-glance>.

29. BSEC. ‘Areas of Cooperation, Energy’. [online] Available at: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/energy>.

30. Ibid.

weapons and radioactive materials, corruption, smuggling of motor vehicles and cyber-crime, as well as money laundering and illicit financial activities”.³¹

Finally, another relevant area of cooperation is trade and economic development. As for the previous sectors, the BSEC Working Group on Trade and Economic Development carries out all the necessary activities “to promote regional cooperation in the field of trade and economic development,”³² as well as to find

“further ways for facilitating trade in the BSEC Region, establishing a proper mechanism for closer cooperation among the Member States in the respective area.”³³ The Working Group is currently involved in several projects and proposals to further integrate the economics of member states, including the “setting up of an Information Exchange Mechanism on trade and economic issues in the BSEC Region,”³⁴ which will simplify the procedures for electronic commerce in the region.

BLACK SEA ACTORS

Within the Black Sea region, a range of actors vies for control and objective aim securement. The tumultuous geopolitical nexus offers a range of security challenges and impediments towards regional consensus building. As these actors’ manoeuvre to secure holdings, these challenges are unevenly heightened with regional tensions. Both nation states and multi-lateral entries aim to achieve oftentimes contradictory or divergent goals, which reflects in rising security challenges faced by conventional militaries operating within the region. Through a case study breakdown of analysis, these pivotal actors will be assessed in accordance with their aims, strategic capabilities, and regional political stance.

Turkey is the first of these key regional actors operating a unique form of power projection in the Black Sea. Geographic strategic control forms the core of the Turkish objective and

forms the basis for legitimation and claims in the region. The central factors in this regard are the Istanbul Canal and the Montreux Convention, which grants national waterway entry control, and provides both economic and security strengths to the nation state.³⁵ Beyond geographic factors that play a more significant contentious issue for various actors in the region, the Turkish state operates a significant presence as a Black Sea security actor. Militarily, Turkey operates the second-largest consistent military presence in the region and could be considered a regional hegemon, along with Russia.³⁶ Turkey considers the Black Sea a vital defence periphery region, and Ankara has promulgated a policy direction to ensure that a security umbrella is established throughout the Black Sea. The Turkish state has planned a modernisation initiative within this security umbrella, with expansions

31. BSEC. 'Areas of Cooperation, Combating Crime'. [online] Available at: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/combating-crime>

32. BSEC. 'Areas of Cooperation, Trade and Economic Development'. [online] Available at: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/trade-economic-development>

33. Ibid

34. Ibid

35. Richard Ulyett, "Canal Istanbul – the largest construction project in the world for a decade," PortSEurope, May 2, 2019.

36. Dan Dungaciu, *The Geopolitical Black Sea Encyclopaedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 261.

planned for naval, land and air defences.³⁷ The military balance in the region is tipped in Turkish favour in tandem with Russian power projection due to these core factors.

The intermobility of cross-sectional forces of the Turkish state allows for a substantial level of hard power projection. In terms of naval capacity, Turkey possesses a formidable range of naval craft operating in the regional theatre. These include 16 frigates, 12 submarines, 35 patrol vessels, and 11 mine-laying vessels. This capacity allows for a substantial presence of naval spread and regional security projection. The air force consists of 206 fighters and 104 attack helicopters, bolstering offensive capabilities. In tandem with modernisation, this strength is further advanced in overall Turkish power projection. Turkish manpower force projection compliments this strengthened regional hegemonic position, with total manpower consisting of 355,000 standing active personnel, 380,000 reservists and 160,000 paramilitary auxiliaries.

The core Turkish bases providing security umbrella coverage in the Black Sea consists of a naval chain belt of Karadeniz Ereğli on the southwestern shore, the newly built base at Sürmene town in Trabzon in the south-eastern shore, and Bartın Naval Base located between the two southern flanks. These bases provide much needed naval cover, protecting the Istanbul Canal and Turkish defensive sphere from encroaching regional rivals. The submarine base at Bartın strengthens the effective capabilities of rapid striking, effective military deterrents protecting the Anatolian core.³⁸

Russia plays the role of a regional hegemon in terms of military hard power capabilities. Enabling a defensive umbrella in the northern sphere of the Black Sea, these geographic strategic defensive points offer Russian forces an invaluable deep sea warm water port for their naval base at Sevastopol. The Crimean Peninsula has supplied this regional actor a bulkhead territory to effectively project hard power aims in the Black Sea. Russian naval capabilities remain the most formidable in regional security; these include one aircraft carrier, 15 destroyers, 11 frigates, 85 corvettes, 65 submarines, 55 patrol vessels and 48 mine warfare vessels. Current air force strength consists of 789 interceptors, 742 dedicated attack fighters and 538 attack helicopters. Russian total manpower has grown in recent years and strengthened combat experience, training, and interoperability. This total includes 1,014,000 active personnel, 2,000,000 reserve personnel, and 555,000 paramilitary auxiliaries.³⁹

Russian bases in the region cover a security umbrella with a central scope located at Sevastopol, which hosts the Black Sea Fleet headquarters of the Russian Federation.⁴⁰ Order of battle groups strengthens this overall umbrella reflected in the order of the regional forces' strategic structure. The Southern Military district consists of the 30th Surface Ship Division, 4th Independent Submarine Brigade, 197th Assault Ship Brigade, 68th Coastal Defense Ship Brigade, 41st Missile Boat Brigade, 184th Novorossiysk Coastal Defense Brigade, 519th Separate Squadron. Infantry, aviation, and aviation defence brigades primarily lo-

37. Benjamin Brimelow, "Turkey is building new ships, tanks, and missiles to boost its military and send a message to the rest of NATO," *Business Insider*, August 6, 2021.

38. "A New Naval Base In The Black Sea," *Bosphorus Naval News*, last modified February 3rd, 2019, <https://turkishnavy.net/2019/02/03/a-new-naval-base-in-the-black-sea/>.

39. "2021 Russia Military Strength," *Global Firepower*, last accessed October 29th, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=russia

40. Zbigniew K Brzezinski, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 288.

cated at Simferopol and Sevastopol offer a mobile security task force able to effectively project power and control in the Black Sea.⁴¹ Ukraine plays a critical role as a buffer state actor, unaligned and isolated in the Black Sea. The loss of the Crimean Peninsula has negatively affected Ukrainian capabilities to project hard military power in the region, mainly due to the loss of strategically important warm-water ports and defensive stations for surface-to-surface missile batteries. Its naval forces remain poorly equipped and lacking modernisation and consist of one frigate, 11 patrol vessels and one mine-laying vessel.⁴² The core strategic bases along the Black Sea shoreline for the Ukrainian Armed Forces

include the western naval base at Odessa, Azov Naval base at Berdyansk with mooring stations at Mariupol and Mykolaiv naval base, which is sheltered by the mouth of the Pivdennyi Buh river.⁴³ These bases provide a semblance of defensive cover to the southern Ukrainian flank yet leave them vulnerable to assault from hegemonic power actors possessing a more dominant position. Airforce cover provides 42 interceptors, 25 dedicated attack fighters and 34 attack helicopters. Infantry capabilities are a vital factor of Ukrainian force projection with 255,000 active personnel, 900,000 reserve units and 90,000 paramilitary auxiliaries.⁴⁴ Greece plays a support role to more exten-



War ships of the NATO Standing Maritime Group-2 take part in a military drill on the Black Sea, 60km from Constanta city.

March 16, 2015. Daniel Mibailescu

41. Grzegorz Kuczyński, "Mare Nostrum Strategy: Russian Military Activity in the Black Sea," Warsaw Institute, last accessed March 21, 2019.

42. "2021 Ukraine Military Strength," Global Firepower, last accessed October 29th, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=ukraine

43. "The Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine", Ukrainian Ministry of Defence mil.gov.ua. Last accessed August 17th, 1996, <https://archive.ph/20120805142907/http://www.mil.gov.ua/index.php?lang=en&part=structure&sub=navy>

44. "2021 Ukraine Military Strength," Global Firepower, last accessed October 29th, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=ukraine

sive NATO-led bloc operations, most notably during the recent exercise Breeze 2021. It is, however, a more diminutive actor in the region and plays a support role to larger NATO alliance operations. The modernised naval capacity of the Hellenic fleet consists of 13 frigates, 11 submarines, 35 patrol vessels, three mine warfare vessels. Airforce capabilities contribute towards Greek defensive flanks and potential for directional front assault pivot if needed. This includes 187 fighters and 29 attack helicopters, all of which are operationally ready and modernised for effective combat aim securement in the region. The infantry consists of 200,000 active personnel, 220, 500 reserve personnel, and 4,000 paramilitaries.⁴⁵ For the Greek position, the location of the Souda Bay naval base provides the Greek navy with the potential to disembark to the Black Sea along with other NATO allies, which the actor supports.⁴⁶

The United States of America maintains a vital role in balancing hegemonic power projection in the region through maintaining a global military presence. This global presence, however, possesses a weakness in the permanency of presence within the Black Sea. The military footprint, in this case, exists as a rotational basis, bolstered through NATO alliance operations. Due to this global military presence, quantifying the US's regional strength of military capacity is inapplicable in this case. However, assessing rotational or proximate force presence reflects an accurate view of the military footprint in the Black Sea. Proximate presence includes an infantry

unit of Tennessee National Guard's 278th Armoured Cavalry Regiment based in Ukraine at the Yavoriv Combat Training Centre. The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, 1st Armoured Brigade Combat Team and 1st Infantry Division maintain a rotational basis within Bulgaria at Bezmer Air Force Base. The 4th Combat Aviation Brigade and 4th Infantry Division also base themselves at Mihail Kogălniceanu airbase.⁴⁷

Marine units operate within a rotational structure like the Black Sea Rotational Force. This force consists of a powerful alliance of Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Slovenia, Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Serbia, Estonia, Kosovo, Georgia, Lithuania, Hungary, Armenia, Czech Republic, Poland, Moldova, Albania, Macedonia, and Bosnia. Novo Selo Range in eastern Bulgaria plays a central strategic focus in hosting this rotational alliance force. Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment also rotates out of Ukraine in training operations. This Ukrainian connection continues within air force capabilities with the California Air National Guard operating close air support training out of Vinnytsia Air Base. The Naples-based US 6th Fleet provides naval capability support also on a rotational basis, with mooring stations being utilised at Odesa, Ukraine, Constanta, Romania, and Poti, Georgia.⁴⁸

The EU maintains a soft power projection in the region, differing from nation-state actors. This exists in the form of the EU's Strategic Compass initiative, which lays a promulgated basis for executing a politico-strategic direc-

45. 2021 Greek Military Strength," Global Firepower, last accessed October 29th, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=greece

46. "In Focus: the Souda Bay Naval Facility," Navy Lookout, last accessed July 1, 2021.

47. Michael Mulqueen, *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 164.

48. Kyle Rempfer, "Here's the US military footprint in the Black Sea region," *Military Times*, November 27, 2018.

tional basis of peaceful security cooperation. Maritime security forms a vital component of this initiative basis, which the EU wants to aid in enhancing threat response in the periphery neighbourhood regions. This threat response focuses primarily on combating

cyber threats and disinformation. Alliance work also exists with NATO in joint exercises combating human trafficking. Member States such as Bulgaria and Romania play a vital role in geostrategic value for tackling these aims.⁴⁹

MAIN ISSUES IN THE BLACK SEA

Frictions in the region depend mainly on the unique geostrategic spot, as it is collocated between Europe and Asia. Taking control of the Black Sea is fundamental for access to the Caspian Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East.⁵⁰ As it represents the maritime border between the Western countries and Russia, the Black Sea is a playground for numerous interests, and therefore presents a variety of securitisation dilemmas. This section will focus on the main economic and military issues, analysing the motives that create both hostile and cooperative trends in the region.

Military access and geopolitical strategies

Security strategies: military access

The Black Sea gives Russia access to the Mediterranean Sea countries of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Libya, and Turkey. Concerning its military access, Russia has a comparative advantage to military operations in the Black Sea, together with Turkey. Through the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's intentions in the

region became clear: the establishment of a route for military activities, the willingness to counter the Western countries' presence in the area, and the economic revenue from gas supply to the littoral country of Turkey plus the Balkans and some part of Europe.⁵¹

Russia's offensive military capability development in April 2021 is a recent example of increased military activity in the area. These large-scale military exercises involved 100,000 Russian battalions along the border with Ukraine and Crimea and they led the international community to be afraid of a new offensive in the Donbas. Furthermore, Russia has deliberately violated international law in 2021 by unilaterally stopping access to foreign state vessels in the Sea of Azov and Kerch Strait.⁵² In general, anti-Ukraine military and commercial actions are threatening the security of all littoral countries.

Securing the region of the Black Sea is not an easy task for NATO. The 1936 Montreux Convention limits NATO military presence as restrictions are placed on the size, type, and length of time allowed in the Black Sea

49. Amanda Paul, Ionela Ciolan, "Kremlin's quest for mare nostrum: Enhancing Black Sea security to stop Russian encroachment," European Policy Centre, June 8, 2021.

50. Marsili, 'La Geopolitica Del Mar Nero e Il Ruolo Della Romania'.

51. Amanda Paul and Ionela Ciolan, 'Kremlin's Quest for Mare Nostrum: Enhancing Black Sea Security to Stop Russian Encroachment', European Policy Centre, 2021

52. Paul and Ciolan, 'Kremlin's Quest for Mare Nostrum', 2021.

for non-littoral states.^{53,54} “From a legal standpoint, Montreux covers the Turkish Straits, Bosphorus, and Dardanelles as one single system, a 164-mile maritime transit route from the Aegean to the Black Sea. There is no legal basis for bypassing Montreux unless separate canals were to be constructed to bypass both the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles”.⁵⁵ There is an awareness that coordination and information-sharing among NATO and its members Romania, Bulgaria, plus its allies Ukraine and Georgia, is essential. Although NATO presence in the area has significantly increased after the invasion of Crimea, it lacks sufficient military capability to consolidate its engagement in the region. NATO’s approach is one of tailored presence, meaning that during the Warsaw and Brussels summits (2014 and 2018), the member states decided to strengthen land, air, and maritime defence units, especially in Romania, by creating a multinational training detachment.⁵⁶

Romania is the most active country among those in the Alliance, as well as the most determined to have a stronger NATO response in the region. Accordingly, Romania has implemented various military activities, such as the first NATO surface-to-air missile system and multinational NATO exercises codified as Sea Shield 21 (19 to 29 March 2021).⁵⁷ Bulgaria is a NATO member, but its military capability is way less modernised if compared to Romania. The modernisation of these countries’ warfare capabilities is not a priori

ity for NATO if compared to the Baltics.⁵⁸ Since Bulgaria is still too dependent on Russia, the latter takes advantage of its weakness, as it regularly manifests by penetrating the security system of Sofia’s defence sector. As a post-Soviet country, Bulgaria has remained in the political orbit of Russia and its economic influence through the gas sector is weighing on political decisions. Bulgaria’s army is in a tough situation, and it would therefore require NATO’s presence to build its resilience and deterrence vis-à-vis the Russian hybrid war.⁵⁹

Turkey is the most important player for NATO and the EU in the Black Sea area due to its geostrategic position and because it aids Ukraine and Georgia’s military sectors. Moreover, together with Romania, it advocates for a maritime patrol mission in the Black Sea.⁶⁰ However, Turkey is not constant in its relationship with NATO as “its foreign policy engages in an ambiguous neutrality: it plays different games depending on its national interests”.⁶¹ In this regard, Turkey has the opportunity to strengthen its military and technological capabilities through its relations with Russia, whose partnership is very valuable in the energy sector as well. The debate around the Black Sea military access is indeed much depending on the role of Turkey having an interest in both a defence industrial cooperation with Russia and a more assertive position within NATO.

The European Union security strategy in the

53. Yürük Işık, ‘Canal Istanbul: Don’t Believe the Hype’, Middle East Institute, 2021

54. Luke Coffey, ‘Russia in the Black Sea’, Middle East Institute, 2020

55. Yürük Işık, ‘Canal Istanbul’, 2021

56. Paul and Ciolan, ‘Kremlin’s Quest for Mare Nostrum’, 2021

57. *ibid*

58. Gustav Gressel, Radu Magdin, *Waves of Ambition: Russia’s Military Build-up in the Black Sea – European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2021

59. Paul and Ciolan, ‘Kremlin’s Quest for Mare Nostrum’, 2021.

60. *ibid*

61. Gustav Gressel, Radu Magdin, *Waves of Ambition*. 2021.

region is wholly connected to the efforts of stabilisation of the eastern neighbourhood, and therefore its interests to secure the Black Sea region reflects the economic involvement the EU has in the Caucasus, especially in Georgia and Ukraine. However, “the European component in taking care of security issues in the Black Sea is strikingly low”, as its explicit goal pertains more to the sphere of soft security co-operation, including measures against hybrid conflicts and disinformation.^{62,63} As 75 per cent of imported goods travel via maritime routes, the European Union has approved a security programme called “Strategic Compass” that enhance the presence of its commercial and military naval ships in the Black

and Mediterranean Sea, among other places. The legal framework of the Strategic Compass would give Member States a unified strategy and the EU a role of the maritime security provider.⁶⁴

The energy economy of the region and its consequences on military strategies

As Russia is the main energy provider among littoral countries and also to the wider international community, the Black Sea securitisation is entangled with the issue of energetic dependence. There are concerns about the rising tensions among Russia and Ukraine and NATO member Romania as the West tries



Figure 1: Map of Gas Pipelines in the Black Sea

Russia's Interests in the Black Sea, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021.

62. *ibid*

63. Paul and Ciolan, 'Kremlin's Quest for Mare Nostrum'. 2021.

64. Daniel Fiott, 'The Strategic Compass and the EU's Maritime Presence', Brief (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2021).

to exploit resources in the area while Russia has created “an exclusive economic zone rich in offshore gas” after Crimea Annexation in 2014 and it seeks economic primacy through expanding its gas pipelines through Turkey [Figure 1], Ukraine, and Bulgaria.^{65 66}

From the EU perspective, ensuring that the economy around gas and oil does not lead to escalations or even new hybrid conflicts conducted by Russia in Ukraine and Georgia is of utmost importance. Not only do Georgia and Ukraine still depend on Russia as the main gas provider, but also they represent energy transit countries for the Western countries. The role of the EU in securitising the Black Sea is therefore challenged by the economic primacy that Russia has on the region, considering the previous annexation of Crimea as a way to expand its control on the gas trade and extraction. Russia is a constant threat to the stability of the eastern neighbourhood, and new hybrid conflict may be caused by escalations in the energy sector.⁶⁷

Romania’s provision of gas provides for the sustainability of the whole country, and its oil supply meets half of its needs, making it very attractive for European investors. As one of the largest Eastern Europe suppliers of oil and gas, the introduction of a new regulation by the national government in 2018 establishing that the extraction business would be state-controlled has strongly penalised its trade with the EU.⁶⁸ This surely represents an ideal situation for Russia, whose main goal is to limit external involvement in the area, while geostrategic interests remain a source of

threat for the political stability of Romania as Russia may take deliberate actions to further discourage foreign investments and therefore increase the risks of confrontations.⁶⁹

In regard to energy trade, the newly negotiated corridor linking Poland and Ukraine represents an interesting turn in gas transportation in the Black Sea area, as it will consistently speed up the flow to Northern Europe. The expansion of the trail infrastructure is undergoing in Poland and the project seems to concretize. The corridor will extend from Odessa to the Port of Gdansk, and the scope of the transportation will also include Scandinavia and other Baltic countries. If the “missing link” (Figure 2) of trail infrastructures in Ukraine will be addressed with proper investments solutions and the project will see light, it could substantially facilitate gas trade within the Eastern European countries. The geopolitical implications of this ambitious project may be revealed in the future, especially in relation to eventual Russian attempts to further control the Ukrainian resources and infrastructures.

The main question in regard to how the energy sector impacts military strategies is dependent on whether the main actors Russia, Turkey, NATO, and the EU, are willing to cooperate or whether the competition around the gas supply and extraction will exacerbate. The trade partnership between Russia and the EU is still strong as it represents one of the main sources of gas provision for the EU and an enormous share of GDP in Russian annual exports. The academic debate is still

65. Iulia-Sabina Joja, ‘Three Conflict Scenarios for the Black Sea in 2020’, 2020.

66. Stronski, ‘What Is Russia Doing in the Black Sea?’, 2021

67. Gareth Winrow, ‘Geopolitics and Energy Security in the Wider Black Sea Region’, 2007

68. Matthew Farmer, ‘Everything you need to know about Romania’s oil and gas industry’, 2021

69. Arnaud Dubien and Fanès Jordi Vaque I, ‘Security and Energy Security in the Black Sea Region - Think Tank’, European Parliament, 2010

open as to whether hostility or reconciliation will be the key feature of Russia and the EU's foreign policies in the Black Sea, as the EU is committed to diversifying its gas suppliers as much as possible, while Russia tries to ensure control of the main supply routes.⁷⁰

According to different experts' views, a possible scenario will see the EU, Russia, and Turkey involved in a project whereby both the stability of the region and main interests are envisioned. This is likely to entail the confirmation of Russia as the primary supplier and the establishment of Turkey as the second major hub able to control the European access in exchange for a thick stake in the project. The annexation of Crimea confirms this trend

as an act to control the Ukrainian provision of gas, by the North Stream 2 project with Germany, and by Turkey seeking its commercial independence from Russia as it increases drilling activities in the Black Sea and acting as a key transit country for most European countries.^{71 72}

Security issues derived from the economic and military interests

The following paragraphs will clarify the most important aspects of securitisation in the Black Sea by breaking down the main military and geostrategic issues. Security issues are mainly based on military access and economic



Figure 2: The missing connection between the Black and the Baltic Sea. *Russia's Interests in the Black Sea, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021.*

70. Dubien and Jordi Vaque I. 'Security and Energy Security in the Black Sea Region - Think Tank'

71. *ibid*

72. Bojan Lepic, 'Turkey Starts Drilling Second Well in Black Sea'.

interests: warm water ports, strait control, and naval supremacy.

Warm-water ports

Warm-water ports are essential for securitisation. Russia owns the Crimean Sevastopol port, which is important for its security policy because, according to the academic Chauhan, Russia cherishes the possession of this port for several reasons: sea control, power projection, good order at sea, and maritime consensus.⁷³ 'Good order at sea' means protecting the status quo, if this is beneficial to the possessor of the port, and contrasts new military threats taking advantage of the direct position on the sea. 'Maritime consensus' refers to the persuasion exercised so that other countries cooperate in maritime exercises and ally against common threats.⁷⁴ Commanding part of the Black Sea is part of the security strategy conducted by Russia since by controlling a port, the country secures itself a buffer zone that pushes away the undesired actors and locks in the conquered hinterland.

Strait control

The Kerch Strait, connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, is the most important strait in Eastern Europe. Russia and Ukraine agreed to guarantee freedom of navigation for ships of both nations in the 2003 naval treaty, recognising the importance of the economic development of both countries.⁷⁵ However, since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia forcibly took absolute power and control over the strait. The conflict is further complicated by Russia's illegal construction of the Kerch Bridge in 2018, which connects Russian terri-

tory with the Crimean Peninsula and remains under Moscow's control. As a response, the European Union has denounced the illegal construction of the bridge, and consequently, in April 2021, they imposed sanctions on Russian entities.⁷⁶ As the access to the Kerch Strait and freedom of navigation for European states is crucial in maintaining relations and a certain level of security, the EU is increasingly confronted with tensions that limit cooperation and development in the West. With Russia violating international law and agreements regarding Ukraine's sovereign territory, European states need to enhance their military and defence capabilities.⁷⁷

The Russian-Ukraine dispute in the Azov Sea is an important example of the Russian security strategy in the Black Sea, being confrontational and despising previous international agreements. The escalation of tensions with Ukraine in 2014 and 2018 are part of the same mission aiming at subjugating Ukraine as a means of strategic control of the strait and natural resources.

Naval supremacy

Russian maritime dominance in the Black Sea has a long and outstanding history, following a shift in Moscow's seizure of Crimea and the build-up of combat and maritime law enforcement capabilities in 2014. As Moscow has shifted almost all military capabilities to Crimea to reinforce its naval forces, the growing disbalance in the region on the European side has tipped in Russia's favour. In 2015, after a six-year military reform, Russia

73. Chauhan, 'Why Are Warm-Water Ports Important to Russian Security?', page 58.

74. *ibid.*

75. Naja Bentzen, 'Russia-Ukraine Conflict Flares up in the Azov Sea' (European Parliament, 2018).

76. Paul Goble, 'Russia Effectively Seizes Control of Sea of Azov, Threatening Ukraine', The Jamestown Foundation, Global Research & Analysis., 2021.

77. Cynthia J. Parmley and Raul 'Pete' Pedrozo, 'Russia's Illegal Restriction of Navigation in the Black Sea'.

began placing new, advanced surface combatants and submarines in the Black Sea, along with a vast build-up of air defence and coastal defence cruise missiles. Three years later, in 2018, Russia still has the major maritime power over the Black Sea region, trying to fulfil its strategic goal of “reshap[ing] the geographical and geo-economic balance of the Black Sea region”.⁷⁸ The ongoing rivalries in the Black Sea do not come without a cost. European states need to increase their militaries’ interoperability with Black Sea states’ armed forces and improve the infrastructure they use to deploy reinforcements in the region. By establishing an international naval presence in the Black Sea, the European Union can respond quickly and effectively towards a Russian threat while increasing potential risk for Russia.⁷⁹

With the annexation of Crimea as the most recent case outside the European borders, the EU is facing Moscow’s increasing military strength and the intense broadening military capabilities in the Black Sea region.⁸⁰ NATO and EU have dramatically increased their maritime presence as part of their strategy to emphasise that the West is facing a serious security threat coming from Russian militarisation efforts. International and European cooperation towards naval patrols aims to underscore Ukraine’s right to access its ports.

Dilemmas of Black Sea security

Depending on the actor involved, the Black Sea security issues are addressed using different approaches reflecting their core interests.

The Black Sea region is addressed as a “wider Black Sea Region” by the US and the Transatlantic Community; “European Neighbourhood Policy” by the EU as Russian hybrid tactics represent a threat for Ukraine and Georgia; and Black Sea Synergy of 2007 indicating the EU’s main interests in the area.⁸¹ While the previous sections have analysed main security issues by distinguishing sectors and motives, this chapter will report the main security dilemmas discussed by experts in a way that explains how the variety of geopolitical domains will shape the future of the Black Sea.

Experts agree about NATO’s uncoordinated diplomatic strategy toward building tensions and too few capacities or troops deployed. It is not keeping up with the pace. The Russian foreign policy values based on aggressive military actions are hard to change, but its security strategy is, in a way, predictable, as it points to the occupation of geostrategic littoral countries. A way into the solution, according to experts, would be to have a unified Western military engagement that may increase the possibility “to spark the unpredictability that Russia is trying to avoid”.⁸² To counter Russia, building a robust and unpredictable response is, from this point of view, as important as building and deploying a stronger military capability.

The EU Black Sea Synergy document is not recent, but it supports valuable and current issues, complementing the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The strategy entails stability,

78. Michael Petersen, ‘The Naval Power Shift in the Black Sea’.

79. Dettmer, ‘NATO Boosts Black Sea Naval Presence’, 2021

80. Gressel, ‘Waves of Ambition’, 2021

81. Mitat Çelikpala, ‘Security in the Black Sea Region’.

82. Gustav Gressel, Radu Magdin, *Waves of Ambition*.

economic growth, and feasible projects for the resolution of the conflicts between Russia and Georgia and Ukraine.⁸³ The European perspective also engages directly with Romania and Bulgaria on the economic level, aware of the impact it may have on their prosperity and consequent securitisation. The role of the EU is focused mainly on its economic power, whose trade partnership constitutes a valuable source of independence from Russia. Experts suggest that the EU might approach Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Ukraine with a multi-layered strategy in tandem with NATO, meaning economic cooperation in the region and military consolidation of the Alliance in the region.⁸⁴

Does establishing a future Istanbul Canal mean the end of the strait regime in the Black Sea? This represents a dilemma because it would open a new commercial way for Turkey to collect fees (as it is not allowed to collect fees for commercial vessels crossing the Bosphorus canal). But again, this may have effects on global energy security as well, as it may open a new contested way for energy to the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, will the canal give full access to non-littoral countries' navy ships representing an end to Montreaux limitations? According to Gressel, there are issues of "unfinished intelligence reform, unfinished rule of law prosecutorial judicial reform, still unstable institutions, and unfaltering fight against corruption are as problematic as a military imbalance in the region".⁸⁵ Finally, NATO does not intend to weaken Turkey's symbolic position vis-à-vis Russia, and Turkey does not like the idea of seeing an increment

of US presence in the region as an increased Western presence may bring along a Western imposition a different rule of law in the region.

For Western actors, formulating a coordinated security strategy in the Black Sea is difficult as Turkey's foreign policy is not delineated, especially regarding Russia. As the last two years have marked stability in the relation with Russia, their partnership flourishes around the energetic and military sectors.⁸⁶ Reinforcing its security strategy is a priority for Turkey, especially in light of Russian zero-sum logic. Having lost its naval superiority and being surrounded by post-Soviet countries with fragile governance or even declared pro-Russian attitudes, Turkey needs an alliance with NATO and a military presence in the region. The dilemma consists of precisely coordinating multilateral relations with Turkey, as Ankara is disincentivised in taking a clear position in alliance with external actors.

To sum up, the relevant dilemmas underlined in this section are:

how to limit Russia's territorial and hybrid incursions toward NATO and EU partner countries like Ukraine, Georgia, Romania, and Bulgaria;

how to include Turkey in multilateral relations ultimately aiming at providing maritime security; and

how to mitigate Russian intrusion in Turkey's new energy projects in the Black Sea.

Suggestions made by experts for NATO security strategy are:

establish a mission consisting of rotating ships

83. Mitat Çelikpala, 'Security in the Black Sea Region', 2010

84. Aura Sabadus, 'Why the Black Sea Could Emerge as the World's next Great Energy Battleground', Atlantic Council, 2021

85. Gustav Gressel, Radu Magdin, *Waves of Ambition*.

86. Aurine Armonaite, 'The Black Sea Region: Economic and Geopolitical Tensions' (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2020), 035 ESCTD 20 E rev.2 fin.

in line with the Montreux treaty's time limitations⁸⁷. There is already proof of efficiency in introducing a petrol mission from the previous successful Baltic Air Policing mission.⁸⁸ build a common security project between Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey following the same structure of the existing trilateral plat-

form Romania-Poland-Turkey. Building trust and resilience are of utmost importance to implement both national interests and securitisation in the region.⁸⁹ boost technological improvements in Georgia and Ukraine's military capabilities.⁹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the countries implicated in and around the Black Sea face some significant challenges. Yet, the region also presents many opportunities for cooperation and development that are potentially highly beneficial for all parties involved. For the EU, at least, the potential in the Black Sea is not only important for its two Member States Romania and Bulgaria, but also for the Union as a whole, especially considering that the Black Sea could play an integral part in this Commission's strive for green renewable energy and energy independence. As for the regional and international organizations in the region, the one that seems the most relevant to security is NATO. It is by far the most important and active organisation in the region, though it started to increase its presence just after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The first step to balance Russian assertiveness was to establish the Bucharest HQ of NATO'S Multinational Division Southeast, including two Force Integration Units (FIUs) attached to it. This necessary action was important be-

cause it allowed the Organization to enhance the security of its south-western flank, and at the same time, it paved the way for the second step, namely the creation of a multinational framework brigade under the HQ MND-SE. It contributed to increasing the deterrence, defence, as well as posture of the Organization in the Black Sea region. However, NATO has not exclusively oriented its efforts to the land domain, but it has also intensified its position in the sea domain, with the Sea Breeze exercise, which takes place every year in the Black Sea. Alongside the Sea Breeze, NATO's vessels contribute to strengthening security by patrolling the sea for two-thirds of the year. Finally, the growing importance of the Black Sea region is confirmed by the growing presence of the US as well. The decision to deploy Aegis Ashore missile defence facilities in Romania signals US willingness to contribute to the protection of its Black Sea allies as well as European ones. Finally, the main issues and dilemmas derive from how the actors involved decide to

87. Yörük Işık, 'Canal Istanbul', 2021

88. Paul and Ciolan, 'Kremlin's Quest for Mare Nostrum', 2021

89. *ibid*

90. *ibid*

cooperate or to compete for the economic and security domain of the Black Sea. NATO and the EU remain interested in economic and political stabilisation while Russia seeks to develop its economic and military hegemony in Eastern Europe. Turkey is in the middle as it meets the demands of both parts where it sees potential benefits for itself. The foreign policies adopted by the concerned parties will undoubtedly seek to achieve their objectives, even though these policies might lack cohesion and coordination even amongst allies. Accordingly, NATO and the EU have security policies most centred on a “tailored approach” (Warsaw and Brussels Summits 2014 and 2018) but still lack coordinated and engaging activities with Romania and Bulgaria. Therefore, experts agree the securitisation of the area must become

a priority for these actors (i.e. building military capabilities in Romania and Bulgaria, plus modernising existing infrastructures). Russia still demonstrates a vivid interest in warm-water ports, strait control, and naval supremacy at the expense of Ukraine's state sovereignty and disregarding the international law, thereby posing a concrete threat to the stability of the region. Solutions for these issues again depend on the extent to which the Western and Eastern actors will decide to co-exist and cooperate in the region. Both energy and military sectors are platforms of national confrontation, but, seen from a constructive perspective, national interests can still be fulfilled in the context of common security projects.

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