

THE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS OF STABILITY IN THE BLACK SEA

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1. The Montreux Convention: A Cornerstone of Maritime Stability

The Montreux Convention, signed in 1936, grants Türkiye control over the Turkish Straits and regulates naval passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Its provisions are designed to balance the interests of littoral states while preventing militarization by non-regional powers. Non-littoral states face restrictions on warship tonnage and duration of stay in the Black Sea, ensuring that regional powers maintain dominance.[1]

Türkiye possesses the authority to close the straits during wartime or when threatened, a mechanism that has been pivotal in preventing escalation during conflicts like Russias invasion of Ukraine. [2]

Türkiyes unwavering commitment to implementing Montreux has been instrumental in maintaining stability. During the Ukraine war, Türkiye blocked Russian warships from accessing the Black Sea unless returning to their home ports.[3] By limiting external naval presence, Türkiye prevents undue interference from non-littoral NATO members while balancing its relationships with both NATO and Russia.[4]

Implications for Regional Powers

Russia must respect Montreuxs provisions to avoid provoking tensions with Türkiye or NATO allies. Similarly, EU-led initiatives in the Black Sea must align with this framework to ensure their activities do not undermine regional stability.

2.The Organization of The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC): Promoting Economic Cooperation for Peace

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), established in 1992 through the Bosphorus Declaration, emerged as a Turkish-led initiative to foster multilateral economic collaboration amid post-Cold War geopolitical shifts. It is a fact that the Wider Black Sea Basin is a region that includes the Balkan Peninsula, the Caucasus and the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea linking the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas as well as the Middle East and Southeastern Europe. Located at this strategic spot, it was natural for Türkiye to take the initiative in the early 1990s and propose a regional cooperative arrangement that would ensure that the Black Sea becomes a region of peace, stability and cooperation.[5] Its principles emphasize mutual respect, dialogue, and development across various sectors such as trade, energy, and transportation.[6] It must be acknowledged that Türkiyes leadership, particularly under President Turgut Özal, played a pivotal role in overcoming regional hostilities and historical grievances to create a platform emphasizing mutual respect, dialogue, and development. [7]

The organizations founding principles aimed to transform the Black Sea into a "zone of prosperity" by leveraging economic interdependence to mitigate conflicts, a vision rooted in Türkiyes strategic calculus to enhance regional stability while positioning itself as a key actor in Eurasia.[8]

Türkiyes Strategic Motivations and Institutional Design

As underlined above, Türkiye played a central role in establishing BSEC and continues to advocate for its principles. BSEC provides a platform for dialogue even among adversaries like Russia and Ukraine.[9] Türkiyes active participation underscores its belief in regional cooperation as a pathway to peace.[10]

By capitalizing on its unique position bridging Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye sought to solidify its role as a regional power. The initiative provided a framework to engage post-Soviet states transitioning to market economies, thereby expanding Ankaras diplomatic influence[6][9].

BSECs focus on trade facilitation, infrastructure projects, and energy cooperation aligned with Türkiyes goal of modernizing its economy and integrating into global markets. Efforts to eliminate non-tariff barriers and establish a BSEC Free Trade Area (FTA) aimed to harness the regions $320 billion intra-trade potential, though divergent EU affiliations among members complicated implementation.[11]

By including adversarial states, BSEC became a rare forum for dialogue, indirectly addressing frozen conflicts through economic confidence-building measures.[12]

Operationalizing Cooperation: Challenges and Achievements

BSECs institutional evolution □□□□ a declaratory initiative to a charter-based organization in 1999—reflects Türkiyes sustained commitment.

The 2012 Economic Agenda prioritized visa facilitation, statistical data sharing, and SME development. Türkiyes chairmanship in 2012 advanced projects like the BSEC Trade Center in Bursa and revived the Coordination Center for Statistical Data, enhancing transparency in regional commerce.[13]

Initiatives such as the Green Energy Development Task Force promoted renewable energy collaboration, while Türkiyes mediation in the Black Sea Grain Deal (2022 □□□□□ underscored BSECs role in addressing global food security amid the Russia-Ukraine war. [14]

Beyond economics, BSECs working groups on organized crime, environmental protection, and youth involvement broadened its mandate, aligning with Türkiyes "comprehensive vision" for regional resilience.

3. Geopolitical Dynamics: Balancing Power Without Destabilization

The Black Sea serves as a strategic gateway connecting Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. This unique geographical positioning has made it a focal point for competing interests among regional and global powers, heightening instability in recent years. The interplay of military strategies, economic initiatives, and diplomatic maneuvers by key actors such as Russia, the European Union (EU), and Türkiye underscores the complex dynamics shaping the region.

Russias Assertive Policies

Russia views the Black Sea as critical to its geopolitical ambitions. Over the years, it has significantly bolstered its military presence in the region, deploying naval assets and employing hybrid warfare tactics targeting littoral states like Ukraine and Georgia. For instance, Russia's expanded military footprint in Crimea since 2014 has enabled it to establish an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) zone that covers almost the entire Black Sea. This strategy combines ground-based and ship-based missiles with electronic warfare capabilities to restrict military movement and deny freedom of navigation to adversaries. Dmitry Gorenburg notes that this interlocking air defense system effectively inhibits military action against Russia's forces in the region. [15]

In addition to militarization, Russia has pursued coercive measures such as naval blockades and grain export restrictions to strengthen its grip on the Black Sea. Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Moscow imposed blockades on Ukrainian ports, crippling Ukraine's maritime trade while signaling its dominance over critical sea routes. Furthermore, Russia's plans to establish a permanent naval base in Ochamchire, Abkhazia □□ move that could host ships equipped with cruise missiles □□□□□□□□□ its intent to solidify control over strategic coastal territories.These actions not only threaten regional security but also disrupt global trade routes, including those connecting Asia and Europe.

The EUs Strategic Vision

The EU has recalibrated its approach to the Black Sea following Russia's aggressive policies. Recognizing the region's strategic importance as a hub for energy and transport flows, the EU has launched initiatives aimed at fostering resilience among post-Soviet states such as Moldova and Georgia. One notable example is the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which seeks to promote democratic reforms, economic development, and security cooperation in Eastern Europe.[16] Additionally, the EU's focus on economic corridors like the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor) underscores its interest in reducing dependence on Russian-controlled routes.[17] This corridor offers an alternative trade pathway connecting Central Asia to Europe via Türkiye and Georgia, bypassing Russian territory.

Despite these efforts, the EU faces challenges in implementing cohesive policies due to unresolved conflicts in the region and competing interests among member states. The Black Sea Synergy initiative exemplifies the EU's attempt to address these issues by promoting regional cooperation in areas such as energy security, environmental protection, and conflict resolution.[18] However, its effectiveness remains limited by geopolitical tensions and Russia's resistance to multilateral frameworks.

Türkiyes Balancing Act

Türkiye occupies a unique position in the Black Sea region by maintaining regional ownership while cooperating with both NATO and Russia. This balancing act is evident in Türkiye's diplomatic initiatives such as the Black Sea Grain Deal, which facilitated grain exports from Ukrainian ports despite ongoing conflict. [19] By mediating between Russia and Ukraine, Türkiye demonstrated its ability to address global challenges like food security while preserving regional stability.

Moreover, Türkiye's defense ties with Ukraine highlight its strategic autonomy without provoking escalation. For instance, Türkiye has supplied Ukraine with Bayraktar TB2 drones □□□ action that bolsters Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression while maintaining Türkiye's credibility as a NATO ally. [20] At the same time, Türkiye adheres to frameworks like the Montreux Convention to regulate naval passage through the Turkish Straits. This commitment ensures that external powers do not militarize the Black Sea beyond permissible limits, thereby preventing further destabilization.[21]

Concluding Remarks

Türkiye has been one of the countries that has felt the global upheavals most severely in the last few years. When the negativities around Türkiye are examined, it is possible to say that it is virtually caught in a ring of fire. In the north, the Russia-Ukraine war, which

has had a profound effect on European security, has emerged. In this war, Türkiye has undertaken the heavy responsibility of maintaining security in the Black Sea region and has effectively fulfilled this responsibility. In the south, Israel-Palestine, the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in Lebanon, the new situation in Syria, terrorist organizations nestling along the southern border, the Azerbaijan-Armenia ceasefire status in the east, which has still not been concluded with a peace agreement, developments that may have global consequences in case of Iran, remain current.

While Türkiyes heavy responsibilities not only in terms of regional security and stability but also in terms of security and stability at the global level are evident, it seems impossible to understand why the EU is engaging in initiatives that could create not only damaging security and stability in the Wider Black Sea Region, but also create unrest in Eurasia. The latest example of this short-sided approach is the irrelevant and biased reference to the island of Cyprus at the European Union (EU) Central Asian Countries Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on April 3-4, 2025. There is a detailed information on this subject in the AVİM analysis that we reference below.[22]

The EU's "bribery policy" towards Central Asian countries under the guise of financial aid and investment, is an approach that will ultimately harm the EU. If the EU wants to maintain security in Europe, it should stay away from these short-sighted approaches.

*Picture: *SWP*, *AVİM*, *AVİM*

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