

The EU's Black Sea Strategy – Geoeconomic Power Without Military Dominance

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Introduction

The full-scale war launched by Russia against Ukraine in 2022 sharply increased the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea. Whereas before the war the region was often viewed as a space for energy, trade, and transit, after the war the Black Sea emerged as one of the central geopolitical spaces for European security, military mobility, energy diversification, food security, critical infrastructure, and East-West connections. Russia's war against Ukraine's ports, maritime infrastructure, and trade routes demonstrated that control over the Black Sea is no longer merely a matter of regional security but is directly linked to Europe's economic and strategic resilience.

On 28 May 2025, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, presented the EU's new strategic [approach](#) to the Black Sea region. The document views the region as a space connecting Europe with the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and broader Asian markets. The strategy brings together three main areas: (1) security, stability, and resilience; (2) sustainable growth and prosperity; and (3) environmental protection, preparedness for climate change, and the promotion of civil protection. Its main initiatives include establishing a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub and developing regional transport, energy, and digital connections.

This approach raises a central question: does the EU's new strategy signify its emergence as a central power in Black Sea geopolitics?

This article concludes that, under current conditions, the EU is not even attempting to become the Black Sea's principal naval power. In this sphere, Türkiye, which controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, continues to hold particular importance. It effectively possesses a veto and therefore has considerable influence over the scale of the naval military presence of external powers in the Black Sea, including the naval forces of EU member states, while the principal architecture of collective defence and deterrence remains within NATO. At the same time, the war has demonstrated that

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influence in the maritime domain is not determined solely by the strength of a military fleet. This has created additional opportunities for the EU to strengthen its own role. In this respect, the instruments at its disposal include infrastructure projects, trade and energy connections, sanctions, regulations, enlargement policy, and cooperation in maritime security. Accordingly, when assessing the EU's role, its naval capabilities must be distinguished from its broader political and economic influence, through which it shapes the regional order and strengthens connections between countries.

The Geopolitical Architecture of the Black Sea

The Black Sea region has distinctive geographical and political characteristics. It is simultaneously part of Europe's eastern border, a corridor towards the South Caucasus, a space connecting to Central Asia, and an important component of Russia's military strategy. The regional balance of power in the Black Sea is distributed among several actors. Russia remains an important military player, although the war against Ukraine has significantly altered its naval capabilities. Türkiye acts as an independent regional power and controls the straits. NATO provides the principal framework for collective defence, with the participation of Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye. The EU, meanwhile, acts as a political, economic, and institutional power whose capabilities are growing substantially, although they are of a different nature. Specifically, its growing influence rests on non-military instruments. These include deepening trade and economic ties with countries in the region, extending European standards, financing infrastructure projects, and supporting partner states' European integration.

The 2025 Black Sea strategy is a direct expression of this change. The European Commission no longer views the Black Sea merely as part of its neighbourhood policy; the region is presented as a space for European security, economic resilience, and global connectivity. Under the strategy, the EU will cooperate with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Türkiye, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which in itself demonstrates that the EU perceives the Black Sea as a regional system between Europe and Asia.

Türkiye's Structural Advantage: The Montreux Convention and the Black Sea Maritime Domain

The most significant constraint on the EU's Black Sea policy is Türkiye's distinctive geopolitical position. The 1936 Montreux Convention establishes the legal regime governing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. Since these straits connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, Türkiye's role in the region is exceptional. In peacetime, the Convention limits the presence of non-Black Sea states' naval forces in the Black Sea: the aggregate tonnage of their warships is limited to 30,000 tonnes, or up to 45,000

tonnes in exceptional circumstances, while the duration of their presence in the Black Sea is limited to 21 days. The Convention also prohibits the passage through the straits of aircraft carriers and submarines belonging to non-Black Sea states, while providing exceptions under certain conditions for submarines belonging to Black Sea states.

In wartime, the Montreux Convention establishes different regimes for the passage of warships through the straits depending on whether Türkiye is involved in the war. If Türkiye is neutral, Article 19 of the Convention generally prohibits belligerent states, including both Black Sea and non-Black Sea countries, from bringing warships into the Black Sea through the straits. An exception applies when a vessel seeks to return to its own base. Non-belligerent states, meanwhile, may send warships through the straits in accordance with the Convention's general rules. If Türkiye itself becomes a party to the war, or considers itself under an imminent threat of war, Articles 20 and 21 allow it to exercise more extensive control over the passage of warships through the straits. Thus, in wartime, the Montreux Convention particularly strengthens Türkiye's strategic role as the state controlling the straits.

In the event of a violation of the Montreux Convention, Türkiye's principal practical lever is its control over the straits: Article 24 obliges the Turkish government to supervise compliance with the rules governing the passage of warships, allowing Türkiye to deny passage to warships that do not comply with the Convention's requirements. However, the Convention does not provide for a separate international sanctions or enforcement mechanism.

The war made the Convention's practical significance even more apparent. On 27–28 February 2022, just a few days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye closed the straits to the warships of the belligerent parties on the basis of Article 19. This was the first time since the Second World War that this article of the Convention had been invoked. The decision included an important qualification: vessels of Russia's Black Sea Fleet that had already been in the Black Sea before the conflict were permitted to return to their own bases. At the same time, Ankara repeatedly [warned](#) all states, both Black Sea and non-Black Sea countries, not to send warships into the Black Sea through the straits until the war ended. This meant that no NATO member, including the naval forces of EU states, could bring its own fleet into the Black Sea to support Ukraine or Romania, even if the political will existed. This clearly demonstrates that Türkiye's control over the straits constrains not only Russia's military capabilities but also those of the West.

Analysts refer to this arrangement as “Montreux Plus” - an informal agreement under which Russia and NATO’s non-Black Sea countries unilaterally undertook not to intensify the naval militarisation of the Black Sea. According to Turkish officials, this approach serves both to de-escalate the conflict and to strengthen Ankara’s role as a potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine in achieving a ceasefire in the Black Sea. Russia acted according to a similar logic during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, when, citing the Convention’s tonnage restrictions, it refused entry into the Black Sea to two American military hospital ships.³

It is noteworthy that Türkiye’s exceptional position in the Black Sea does not, in itself, preclude an active EU role. On the contrary, Türkiye’s importance itself creates a need for the EU to engage with it. At the same time, Türkiye’s actions within the Montreux framework reveal a dual character: on the one hand, Ankara uses the Convention to restrict the entry of additional Russian forces; on the other, it uses the same instrument to limit the deployment of Western naval forces, thereby making itself an essential and irreplaceable mediator in the region. This is a form of power that no other Black Sea or EU state possesses.

Türkiye is simultaneously a NATO member, an important economic partner of the EU, a candidate country, a Black Sea state, and a central link in energy and transport corridors. Economic relations between the EU and Türkiye are particularly intensive: according to European Commission [data](#), bilateral trade exceeded a record €217.6 billion in 2025, while Türkiye was the EU’s fifth-largest trading partner. This trend continued in the second quarter of 2026.

Türkiye is not simply a strategic partner or competitor. It is an actor that adjusts the intensity of its cooperation with both Russia and the West according to its own interests. Accordingly, the EU’s strategic policy in the Black Sea region cannot be implemented by bypassing Türkiye. It can be viewed as a system of simultaneous competition and cooperation with Türkiye. For the EU, Türkiye represents both a constraint and an opportunity.

Trade between the EU and Türkiye does not depend solely on Black Sea shipping routes. Türkiye is also connected to the EU market by land through Bulgaria, and to Southern Europe through Mediterranean ports. However, this does not mean that the Black Sea is less important to EU-Türkiye economic relations.

³ Thomas de Waal (July 1, 2026), “Managing Montreux: Turkey and the Russia-Ukraine War in the Black Sea,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2026/07/managing-montreux-turkey-and-the-russia-ukraine-war-in-the-black-sea>

The EU's new strategy indicates precisely that the significance of the Black Sea is becoming broader. According to a European Commission [study](#) published in February 2026, trade along the Trans-Caspian Corridor has increased fourfold since 2022 and, with appropriate investment, could triple again by 2030.

In analysts' view, cooperation with the EU would allow Türkiye to further strengthen its leading role in the Black Sea security architecture, as Ankara possesses a strategic geographical location, control over the straits, and strong naval capabilities, while the EU can provide additional financial, technological, and intelligence resources. Such cooperation would also strengthen Türkiye as an energy and transport hub, since the EU's new Black Sea strategy envisages developing transport, energy, and digital connections towards the Black Sea, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. At the same time, closer cooperation with Europe would allow Türkiye to reduce its dependence on Russia, increase its importance for European energy security, and strengthen defence-industrial cooperation.⁴

What did the Ongoing War Change in the Black Sea

Before the 2022 war, almost all analyses of the military balance in the Black Sea proceeded from the assumption of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's clear superiority. The past few years have changed this assumption, and this change has directly affected how the EU's role in the region should be assessed. Ukraine, which had virtually no combat fleet before the war began, [inflicted](#) extensive damage on Russia's Black Sea Fleet through the use of maritime and aerial unmanned systems, including Magura V5 drone boats. The drone-boat attack on the Sevastopol base in October 2022, followed by the sinking of the cruiser "Moskva" in April 2022, heralded a new phase in which the traditional logic of naval warfare changed. During 2023-2024, repeated strikes on the Sevastopol base, including the destruction of a "Caesar Kunikov"-type landing ship and a "Tsiklon"-type missile ship, forced Russia to relocate its principal warships from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk and ports on the coast of Abkhazia. By the end of 2025, according to Ukrainian intelligence assessments, maritime drones had destroyed or severely damaged up to 15 Russian warships and other vessels, while analysts concluded that approximately 30% of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's combat potential had been destroyed or seriously damaged since 2022.⁵ Even in Novorossiysk, where the fleet had relocated in the expectation of finding

⁴ Atlantic Council Turkey Programs (September 13, 2024), "A sea of opportunities: Exploring cooperation between Turkey and the West in the Black Sea," Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/a-sea-of-opportunities-exploring-cooperation-between-turkey-and-the-west-in-the-black-sea/>

⁵ Harry J. Kazianis (May 27, 2026), "Putin's Unfixable Mistake: The Russian Navy Looks Like It Is 'Sinking' Fast Thanks to the Ukraine War," National Security Journal, <https://nationalecurityjournal.org/putins-unfixable-mistake-the-russian-navy-looks-like-it-is-sinking-fast-thanks-to-the-ukraine-war/>

a “safe” haven, successful strikes continued in 2025-2026, including attacks using unmanned underwater systems. This demonstrated that Russia effectively no longer has a genuinely safe port on the Black Sea.⁶

This change produced two important practical consequences. First, Russia’s naval blockade of Ukrainian ports, which posed a serious threat to the food supply chain in 2022-2023, had effectively collapsed by mid-2023. Ukraine was able to establish an alternative maritime corridor unilaterally, and commercial cargo traffic returned to nearly pre-war levels, despite Russia’s unilateral termination of the UN-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023. Second, the very concept of maritime power changed: gaining control in the Black Sea became possible not through a large surface fleet, but through inexpensive, mass-producible unmanned systems.

It is this latter change that is most important for understanding the EU’s role. If the naval balance can be altered without a traditional military fleet, then the EU, as an institution, does not need to create its own combat fleet to strengthen its position in the Black Sea. This task has already been partially addressed by Ukraine’s asymmetric capabilities and NATO’s collective deterrence. The EU is left with room to concentrate on areas in which it has a genuine comparative advantage: sanctions against Russia’s “shadow fleet”, which illegally transports oil through the Black Sea and the Turkish straits while circumventing the Western price cap; clearing naval mines to facilitate civilian shipping; and protecting critical underwater infrastructure, including cables and pipelines, from hybrid threats. In other words, the war has not only weakened Russia’s maritime position but also created a new environment for the type of influence in which the EU is strong.

NATO and the EU: Competitors or Functional Partners?

The security architecture of the EU member states Romania and Bulgaria has historically developed primarily within NATO, and this remains the case today. In 2026, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte reaffirmed Romania’s strategic importance on the eastern flank and in the Black Sea region. He noted that the Eastern Sentry initiative, launched in 2025 following incursions by Russian drones, would be further strengthened in response to Bucharest’s requests. This initiative encompasses air defence, military mobility, and deterrence on the eastern flank. In Bulgaria’s case, too, NATO

⁶ H I Sutton (April 9, 2026), “Russia’s massive Black Sea problem is worse than it looks,” Navalnews, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/04/russias-massive-black-sea-problem-is-worse-than-it-looks/>

emphasises the country's role in Black Sea regional security and its participation in NATO's multinational military arrangements.

NATO's principal advantages in the Black Sea are collective defence, military deterrence, military planning, and the integration of armed forces. The EU's strengths are different: sanctions, financial instruments, infrastructure investment, energy policy, border management, cybersecurity, the protection of critical infrastructure, regulations, and civilian resilience.

Analysts note that the coordinated use of EU and NATO instruments, including the involvement of Türkiye and Georgia, is a decisive prerequisite for establishing a credible collective security network in the Black Sea region.⁷ Accordingly, the future is more likely to bring a close functional division of responsibilities between NATO and the EU in the Black Sea than EU dominance. NATO provides military deterrence; the EU creates the economic, infrastructural, and institutional conditions that ensure the sustainability of military security.

Türkiye does not view Black Sea security solely as part of the Alliance's common security policy and seeks to preserve its own leadership role in the region. Ankara's approach rests on the principle of so-called "regional ownership," according to which the principal responsibility for Black Sea security should lie first and foremost with the coastal states themselves. For this reason, Türkiye is cautious about expanding the permanent naval presence of NATO's non-Black Sea countries in the Black Sea.⁸

This circumstance is also important when assessing the EU's role. EU members Romania and Bulgaria are Black Sea coastal states, and Türkiye, together with them, seeks to establish a regional security architecture that does not rely on extensive external military involvement. Accordingly, the effectiveness of the EU's Black Sea policy depends to some extent not only on NATO's institutional capabilities but also on how compatible its initiatives are with Türkiye's understanding of regional security.

⁷ Bogdan Cozma and Laurențiu Pleșca (June 2, 2025), "The EU's New Black Sea Security Strategy: Right Goals, Unclear Means," GMF, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/eus-new-black-sea-security-strategy-right-goals-unclear-means>

⁸ Thomas de Waal (July 1, 2026), "Managing Montreux: Turkey and the Russia-Ukraine War in the Black Sea," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2026/07/managing-montreux-turkey-and-the-russia-ukraine-war-in-the-black-sea>

The Black Sea as a Space for Bypassing Russia

Energy is an important component of the EU's interest. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reducing dependence on Russian energy supplies became one of the principal objectives of EU energy policy. In this context, the South Caucasus and Türkiye acquired particular importance.

The [Southern Gas Corridor](#) is approximately 3,500 kilometres long and runs from the Caspian region to Europe. Its principal components are the South Caucasus Pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). According to European Commission [data](#), gas supplies from Azerbaijan to the EU through the Southern Gas Corridor increased by more than 40% between 2021 and 2024. In early 2026, Azerbaijan also began exporting gas to Germany and Austria, further expanding the corridor's geographical reach.

Particularly interesting is the "Green Energy Development and Transmission" [project](#), initiated by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary, which envisages laying an approximately 1,100-kilometre high-voltage submarine cable across the Black Sea from Georgia to Romania. The European Commission considers it one of the most important of the EU's five flagship projects under the Global Gateway initiative. Approximately €2.3 billion has been earmarked for financial support for the project, while its total cost is expected to approach €3.8 billion. The cable is scheduled to become operational by 2032. Thus, for the EU, the Black Sea is no longer merely a transit space for oil and gas. It could become a platform for energy integration between Europe and the South Caucasus.

Western sanctions against Russia and the war in Ukraine have increased the risks associated with northern transit routes. Against this backdrop, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, which connects Central Asia to Europe through the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Black Sea, is acquiring particular importance.

The European Commission's February 2026 study [indicates](#) that trade along the Trans-Caspian Corridor has increased fourfold since 2022, and the corridor is already being viewed as an alternative route between Europe and Asia. The study emphasises the need to modernise transport, ports, customs procedures, energy, and digital connections. The initiative's political framework was agreed in Luxembourg in October 2025 and formally became operational in June 2026. Georgia's importance is growing particularly strongly in this process.

Georgia is not a military power in the Black Sea, but it can become an infrastructural link between the EU and Central Asia. This is precisely why Georgia was identified as one of the partner states in the EU's Black Sea strategy, despite the country's EU accession process being stalled because of political problems. Thus, the EU's geopolitical influence can grow in states that are not yet EU members but whose infrastructure is essential to the EU's strategic objectives.

From this perspective, EU enlargement is not the only means of increasing its influence. Connectivity policy may prove more important.

The EU already has Romania and Bulgaria on the Black Sea coast. Ukraine's possible accession would significantly change this geography.

In 2026, Ukraine made some progress in its EU accession negotiations: the "Fundamentals" cluster [opened](#) in Luxembourg on 15 June, followed by the [External Relations cluster](#) in Brussels on 14 July. This is the earliest stage of the negotiations, but the very fact that they have moved to the technical stage is an important political signal.

If Ukraine eventually becomes an EU member, the EU's Black Sea space will expand considerably. However, the significance of Ukraine's EU accession should not be assessed solely in terms of its naval capabilities.

The war has left Ukraine's maritime infrastructure and Black Sea coast in a severely damaged condition, but Ukraine's strategic importance extends far beyond traditional, conventional naval power. Ukraine is a large state on the Black Sea coast, with important ports, agricultural export capacity, transport connections, and a direct link to Europe's eastern flank. Enlargement should therefore be viewed not as a simple expansion of EU territory but as an instrument for changing the geography of European security.

Institutional Fragmentation as the EU's Principal Constraint

Despite the opportunities described above, expanding the EU's role faces significant structural constraints.

The first is that the EU is not a unified state. Member states may have different interests concerning the Black Sea. Their positions differ particularly regarding Russia, Türkiye, military expenditure, and energy security. The second challenge is that agreement among member states is generally required in EU foreign and security policy. This limits the speed of EU action. The third constraint concerns resources. The EU's strategy is highly ambitious: maritime security, protection of critical infrastructure, military mobility, digital connections, energy, transport, environmental protection, and countering hybrid threats. However, the existence of a strategic document does not automatically mean that resources of a corresponding scale are available.

Both of the EU's principal advisory bodies have confirmed this problem. In an [opinion](#) adopted in December 2025, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) noted that the strategy sets out a general direction but does not yet constitute a fully-fledged strategy with clear objectives, timelines, and allocated funding. It called on the Commission to provide sufficient resources promptly. In an [opinion](#) adopted in March 2026, the European Committee of the Regions similarly called for a "fully-fledged" strategy with measurable indicators and additional funding. This circumstance highlights the distinction between strategy and capability.

On 3 July 2026, the European Commission and the EU High Representative published the first joint [report](#) on the implementation of the EU's Black Sea strategy. Russia's war in Ukraine remains the principal factor shaping regional security. According to the EU's official assessment, Russian military and hybrid pressure continued throughout the first year of the strategy's implementation, including attacks on Ukrainian ports and critical infrastructure, as well as the activities of "shadow fleet" oil tankers and the threat posed by mines in the Black Sea.

Georgia's Place in the EU's Black Sea Policy

For Georgia, the EU's new Black Sea strategy acquires particular significance and, at the same time, most clearly illustrates the structural tension underlying the EU's entire model of "geoeconomic power": the need for infrastructure and transit can grow precisely when a partner state's political trajectory is moving away from European integration. For the EU, Georgia is simultaneously a Black Sea partner, a transport link in the South Caucasus, a space connecting Europe and Asia, and a country under Russian pressure.

The development of the Trans-Caspian Corridor increases the importance of Georgia's ports, railways, and transport infrastructure. The European Commission's 2026 study explicitly indicates that developing the Trans-Caspian route requires improvements to ports, railways, border management, and digital infrastructure, directly affecting Georgia as one of the corridor's principal transit links.

Georgia's foreign policy has departed from its traditional Western orientation. Formal diplomatic relations with Russia have not been restored, but economic and energy ties have expanded considerably. In parallel, economic and diplomatic ties with China have deepened, including through infrastructure projects such as the Anaklia deep-sea port, whose Western investment consortium collapsed and which attracted new Chinese investment. This trend creates a real risk for the EU's Trans-Caspian strategy itself: if Georgia's most important transit infrastructure-ports, railways, and border-crossing capacity-gradually falls under the influence of other geopolitical centres, EU-funded connectivity projects may ultimately benefit other geopolitical actors rather than the EU.⁹

Here, the most acute contradiction in the EU's Black Sea policy model becomes apparent. As this article argues, the EU's power rests not on military dominance but on infrastructural, economic, and institutional connections. However, this model remains sustainable only as long as the partner state's government pursues a Europe-oriented policy and is willing to fulfil the legal and institutional obligations associated with this process. In Georgia's case, it is precisely this prerequisite that has changed. The majority of society continues to support European integration, but the ruling party's political course runs counter to this aspiration. This means that the EU's geoeconomic levers - infrastructure funding, trade preferences, and the visa regime - are losing their traditional function of helping the government implement reforms. Instead, they are becoming instruments through which the EU seeks to maintain a direct connection with society, while its actual influence over the governing political force is currently minimal.

This also explains why the EU has chosen an approach of "selective engagement": a significant portion of direct financial support to the government has been suspended, while regional connectivity-oriented projects, including the Black Sea submarine electricity cable project, continue. This approach is logical in the short term, but it contains a weakness: most transit and infrastructure projects require active state cooperation, customs reforms, the modernisation of border management, and regulatory harmonisation. Securing these from a government in which political trust has effectively disappeared is becoming increasingly difficult.

⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung (2026), "BTI 2026 Country Report Georgia," https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_GEO.pdf

According to the EU's July 2026 report on the strategy's implementation, cooperation with Georgia continues to be affected by the country's democratic backsliding: the EU accession process is effectively suspended, and in March 2026 the EU suspended visa-free travel for holders of Georgian diplomatic and service passports. According to the document, Georgia's role within the strategy will largely depend on the extent to which government representatives demonstrate a genuine willingness to remedy the situation.

The EU might gain short-term geoeconomic benefits by deepening transit and infrastructure cooperation with Georgia while relaxing democratic requirements. However, Georgia's closer alignment with the EU's competing powers and their growing influence over the country's strategic infrastructure call the long-term value of these benefits into question. Under such conditions, European investment could even strengthen the positions of the EU's own competitors in the region. Accordingly, upholding democratic principles and institutional requirements in relations with Georgia is also part of protecting the EU's own long-term economic and strategic interests.

The EU's geopolitical power in the Black Sea differs from that of traditional major actors. Russia's power is largely military. Türkiye's power rests on geography, military capabilities, the status conferred by the Montreux Convention, and regional diplomacy. NATO's power rests on collective defence and military deterrence. The EU's power, meanwhile, depends more heavily on networks of transport, energy, digital, financial, legal, and institutional capabilities.

The EU is certainly not the region's principal naval power. NATO remains the central architecture of military security in the Black Sea, while Türkiye's geographical and legal position, particularly the regime governing the straits under the Montreux Convention, places significant constraints on the EU's capabilities. The examples of Romania and Bulgaria also demonstrate that EU membership does not automatically mean that their military security in the Black Sea is managed by EU institutions.

In this respect, NATO's role and Türkiye's position in the Black Sea cannot be replaced by the EU's institutional involvement. On the other hand, it would be unfair to characterise the EU's role as "secondary" on the basis of this fact alone.

The 2025 strategy and the first report on its implementation in 2026 demonstrated that the EU is seeking to develop a more integrated policy towards the Black Sea. Its focus encompasses maritime

security, protection of critical infrastructure, military mobility, energy diversification, transport corridors, digital infrastructure, environmental protection, and hybrid threats.

The EU's role should therefore be defined as a combination of limited military power and growing geoeconomic and institutional influence.

Within this model, Türkiye remains one of the Black Sea's key powers; NATO remains the principal architecture of military security; Russia remains a major military power and a source of destabilisation; and the EU is an increasingly important actor seeking to expand its influence in the region not through conventional military dominance but through networks, infrastructure, markets, energy corridors, enlargement, and regulations.

In this context, the EU's strategic capabilities depend largely on its ability to operate within the security framework shaped by Türkiye rather than bypassing it. The Montreux Convention and Türkiye's policy of "regional ownership" mean that the Black Sea security architecture cannot be solely the product of decisions taken in Brussels or in other NATO member states. Türkiye's position itself constitutes one of the defining factors of this architecture.

Therefore, the growth of EU influence in the Black Sea will depend in part on its ability to establish a model of cooperation with Türkiye that simultaneously promotes regional security, the economic viability of Ukraine's maritime sector, and the strengthening of Black Sea states' capabilities. In this respect, the EU's role may prove more effective not through expanding direct military involvement but through strengthening coastal states' capabilities, maritime security, mine clearance, port protection, and the resilience of critical infrastructure.