

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S NEW STRATEGY REGARDING BLACK SEA REGION SECURITY ISSUES

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Abstract. The aim of the work is to research the essence of the new action strategy of the European Union regarding the security of the Black Sea region. Against the background of the changed geopolitical environment in the region (especially after the 2022 Russia-Ukraine events) and the transformation of the balance of power, the work also explores the revision of security policy instruments by the European Union and the real perspectives of strategic involvement.

The research analyzes the main directions of the EU's new strategy toward the Black Sea region, including the possibilities of:

- Strengthening maritime infrastructure
- Protecting critical infrastructure
- Promoting energy diversification
- Developing mechanisms to combat hybrid threats
- Supporting the institutional resilience of partner states

The aim of the work is to evaluate the effectiveness of the new strategy in terms of ensuring regional stability, strengthening deterrence policies, and forming a collective security architecture. The research is based on a critical synthesis of official documents, strategic concepts, and expert assessments. The results of the research demonstrate the EU's growing ambition to form itself as the creator of the structural security architecture in the Black Sea region and to define its long-term geopolitical role. The research results also highlight the expected flaws of the EU strategy and the potential reasons for the strategy's possible ineffectiveness. The research relies on methods such as document study and content analysis, as well as scientific literature, internet resources, and reports published by various research centers and government agencies.

Keywords: Black Sea region; European Union; EU security; Security policy; Maritime security; Russia-Ukraine war; Hybrid threats.

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Introduction. The Black Sea region has always represented a strategic battlefield for hegemon states. This became especially clear during the so-called "Cold War" period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a period of political calm was established in the region for some time, caused by the shift of geopolitical focus to other hotspots – the Middle East and the South China Sea.

Against the background of geopolitical changes implemented in the recent past (referring to the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the full-scale invasion carried out by Russia in 2022), the region and its importance for the European security architecture have gradually

returned to the agenda of EU and United States policymakers. In recent years, a readiness has formed between the EU, NATO, and the United States that it has become an essential necessity to update and reset the long-term fundamental strategy for the Black Sea region.

Considering the above, the European Union, which has repeatedly expressed a desire to become a more active geopolitical actor, published a new Black Sea security strategy on May 28-29, 2025. The goal of the new Black Sea strategy presented by the EU is to ensure security, stability, and sustainable development in the Black Sea region. According to the European Commission, the main goal of the strategy will be to strengthen the EU's geopolitical role in the region, especially against the backdrop of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Information released by the European Commission notes that within the framework of the new strategy, the EU will strengthen cooperation with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The main goal of this strategy is to obtain political benefits for the European Union and its partners, which will be based on a mutually beneficial partnership between the aforementioned states and the EU in the Black Sea region. The specific strategy for the Black Sea region is a promise from the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, which she made at the end of 2024 after being re-elected as President of the European Commission. It is important that the EU has for the first time adopted a document of this type that is entirely focused only on the security of the Black Sea region, and the document discusses all the important topics that will, on the one hand, strengthen the strategic partnership between the member countries of the region and the EU, and on the other hand, ensure the development of each country in various directions that will be beneficial for the EU, which wishes to increase its function in the region.

Russia's annexation in Ukraine has placed the Black Sea region at the center of main transatlantic security concerns. Russia's war against Ukraine has turned the Black Sea into a security hotspot. Crimea has turned into a heavily militarized Russian operational base for air and naval strikes, which directly threatens other countries of the region and not only Ukraine. Against the backdrop of Russia's factual naval blockade of Ukraine, a large part of the Black Sea has become dangerous for safe navigation, which has seriously affected commercial shipping and Ukrainian grain exports. This given situation threatens commercial navigation and causes the destabilization of the region's economy.

Despite the fact that in response to all this, NATO deployed combat units in Bulgaria and Romania (NATO member countries on the European continent), activated military exercises, and increased mine-clearing training and operations, all this is still not enough for the Black Sea region to be safe in the future against new Russian aggression (Shonia, 2025). By invading Ukraine and cutting off gas supplies to a number of states (Ukraine and Moldova) in 2022, Russia has already shown readiness to turn important oil and gas transit infrastructure, untapped energy resources, critical pipelines, and underwater cables at the bottom of the Black Sea basin into possible targets in case of another regional conflict (Realpolitika, 2025). It is also entirely possible that Russia will use hybrid tactics to disrupt energy projects, involving the encouragement of local resistance through disinformation (European officials in the recent past suspected that Russia was secretly funding protests directed against energy investments in Eastern Europe).

In the process of talking about hybrid threats, we must definitely mention the disinformation and interference in electoral processes used by Russia to destabilize governments in the Black Sea region and to shake the population's trust in the EU and NATO. For example, in Moldova and Georgia, Kremlin-supporting media and social platform internet-influencers spread a narrative that integration into the EU threatens traditional values. Russian hybrid attacks are also recorded in NATO member countries Romania and Bulgaria, where during the last presidential elections, the far-right candidate Călin Georgescu rapidly increased his

rating among the population through a disinformation campaign conducted on social networks. In Bulgaria, old pro-Russian elites still maintain strong positions as a result of corruption and oligarchic influences.

It is noteworthy that in terms of developing energy, transport, and digital infrastructure, the European Commission has already included the Black Sea transport corridor in the plans for Trans-European transport networks, and in 2023, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and the EU signed a flagship initiative of the EU Global Gateway on the Black Sea underwater cable project, which envisages the improvement of data and logistical connections. According to the new strategic document presented by the EU for the stability and security of the Black Sea region, the goal of the strategy is to obtain real political benefits for the partner countries of the Black Sea region and the EU, which should be achieved by strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships and deepening investments.

The future cooperation of the EU and the Black Sea region includes three pillars:

- Strengthening security, stability, and sustainable development
- Promoting economic growth and prosperity
- Promoting environmental protection, readiness for climate change, and developing a common policy

According to the strategic document, the EU, together with regional partners, will implement 3 main initiatives in each pillar, thereby helping the region to respond to security challenges with maximum readiness (European Union, 2025). The initiatives voiced in the cooperation pillars will find practical application in the following directions according to the document:

- **Initiative for creating Black Sea maritime security and a corresponding innovation hub** – the aim of which will be to centralize information sharing, support mine neutralization, monitor naval navigation, and protect critical underwater infrastructure. This directly responds to increasing the effectiveness of maritime security, which will provide maximum monitoring of the existence of the so-called "shadow fleet" and the passage of sanctioned cargo in the Black Sea region bypassing sanctions.
- **Development of a special connection and communication agenda and protocol** – the development of transport, energy, and digital networks to maximize the use of the Black Sea region's potential as a vital corridor connecting two continents, Europe and Central Asia, through the South Caucasus.
- **Strengthening the readiness of Black Sea coastal societies and so-called blue economy sectors** – this will help Black Sea countries eliminate war-related ecological damage, as well as react quickly and effectively to risks related to climate change.

This strategy, in the EU's view, will unite all relevant instruments and policies and mobilize investments. All the above, in the EU's view, is directed toward and aims at promoting long-term security in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea, with its unique geographical location connecting Europe, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean, can turn into a main node of stability, sustainable development, and maritime communication based on common partnership interests.

Research Methodology. The research is based on a qualitative research design, which combines document analysis, discourse analysis, and content analysis methods. The main source of research is official documents of the European Union, strategic statements, policy framework documents, and institutional reports, which are analyzed based on the principle of primary sources. Within the framework of the research, the Purposive Sampling method was used, according to which print and online media publications, analytical articles, and reports of research centers were selected. The criteria for selecting sources were defined as their institutional reliability, academic and expert authority, chronological relevance, and thematic relevance. A comparative approach was also used in the research process, which gave us the opportunity to evaluate the evolution of EU policy and strategic changes in the context of regional security.

Discussion. The Black Sea region has become one of the most strategically contested spaces in today's European security architecture. Its importance increased sharply after Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine, which turned maritime infrastructure, regional stability, and strategic communication into urgent security priorities. Discussion continues on how the region's security can be strengthened under the conditions of the continuation of Russian aggression and also on what can be done for regional security in the more distant post-war period (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Several actors have the interest and potential to influence the security situation of the Black Sea, and the EU represents one of the main supports. The EU's response to the security challenges facing the region coincided with the period when a new strategic approach was adopted in May 2025. Formally, its goal was to transform the Black Sea region into a space of stability, resilience, and cooperation. The document establishes a more ambitious vision than previous frameworks, although its final success will depend on overcoming the significant obstacles caused by regional instability and political complexities. Several months have passed since the adoption of the strategy, which allows for some initial conclusions to be made about its success perspectives (Austrian Institute for International Politics, 2025).

As mentioned, the strategy is structured into three pillars, in which a significant conceptual change and innovative element is presented – in terms of creating a Black Sea maritime security hub, which envisages the centralization of the exchange of operational information in the field of maritime security among strategic partners in the future. With this initiative, the EU hopes that in the period following the post-Ukraine-Russia war, it will be able to create a "Black Sea Maritime Security Center" to fight against Russia's actions in the region and to protect critical maritime infrastructure. Also, in response to the challenges existing in terms of energy security, the EU declares with the new strategy that the Black Sea can become a guarantor of stability and sustainable development, and that is why it comes out with an initiative to create a "Black Sea Maritime Security Hub," which will strengthen the region's maritime security and protect critical infrastructure and the maritime environment.

This confirms that the EU fully realizes the strategic importance of the region, although the operational details of creating the security hub are vague at this stage. In this direction, an active discussion is going on among experts in the field regarding where the center of the aforementioned Black Sea maritime security hub should be located, or which countries will enter it, and who will lead the coordination of the exchange of operational information (Anghel, 2025). The strategic document announced by the EU does not provide answers to these questions at this stage, which makes not only the creation but also the practical success of the maritime security hub more vague.

The EU also states that it will implement the Black Sea strategy "in synergy with the expansion process and the Eastern Partnership policy". This may be effective when working with Moldova and Ukraine, but may prove less flexible in the case of Turkey, whose role in the Black Sea requires a special, tailored approach (EU Delegation to Georgia, 2025). The discussion regarding Turkey's role and involvement in the strategic document is also deepened by the fact that Great Britain and France have long been coming out with initiatives to deploy military forces in the Black Sea region and take responsibility for creating security guarantees there. However, according to information from individual media outlets (Jozwiak, 2025), Turkey has already stated that it wants to lead the naval component (flotilla) of such forces – specifically, the military forces that will be responsible for safe movement in the Black Sea and clearing potential mines.

Despite the fact that the document does not directly mention the deployment of forces in Ukraine, it emphasizes the necessity of strengthening cooperation with Ankara and ensuring peace in and around the Black Sea. Regarding Turkey, the document states that "Turkey can play a constructive role in the fight against Russia's shadow fleet and contribute to efforts to strengthen maritime security, energy security, and

connections in accordance with international law and other conventions" (EU strategic approach to the Black Sea region, 2025). In case of the successful implementation of the strategic document in practice, this very document may become the prerequisite for the start of a new stage of Turkey-EU relations and a reset of relations.

Conclusion and Results. Almost a year has passed since the publication of the new strategy for the security of the Black Sea region by the EU, which allows for some initial conclusions to be made about its success perspectives and likely productivity. In recent political history, we have seen similar documents many times that were eventually put on the shelf. In this case as well, the main question and challenge in this strategy lies in how effectively the EU will be able to implement it, how much political will there will be in the EU member countries to implement those important initiatives, and how ready the countries of the Black Sea region, especially the Eastern Partnership countries, will be to absorb all those benefits and take specific action steps that are reflected in the strategy (Sabanadze & Dalay, 2025).

Despite the fact that the EU's new strategic approach toward the Black Sea is more timely, comprehensive, and geopolitically considered than previous framework documents, it creates certain vague perceptions for field experts and sphere analysts in terms of the realistic perception and productivity of the strategy:

1. **First** – above all, it should be noted that the document officially represents a "strategic approach" and not a full-fledged "strategy". All this indicates the absence of targeted funding, as well as the absence of mandatory partnership obligations and a detailed action plan, which should have been given minimum space in the temporary framework document to create a foundation for a future action plan.

2. **Second** – the initiative to create an EU maritime security hub and its operational rationalization (operationalization) requires unprecedented cooperation between states with different political priorities and different degrees of trust toward each other. Deep regional tensions, especially those related to Russia, will prevent the sharing of intelligence information by the special services of partner states and the possibilities of conducting coordinated maritime operations.

3. **Third** – the strategy mostly relies on the progress of partner countries in terms of relations with the EU, which equally requires the implementation of democratic reforms, the fight against corruption, and an irreversible path toward democratic consolidation from partner countries. In the direction mentioned above, in the case of an internal political governmental crisis of any partner member state or a certain periodic political imbalance with the EU, the general goal of the unified strategic document in the part of maritime security cooperation becomes less reliable on the part of a number of partner countries.

4. **Fourth** – the Russian Federation's hybrid operations, deployment of mines, violation of maritime conventions by the navigation of sanctioned ships, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns pose a direct challenge to the implementation of EU initiatives and may weaken regional trust not only toward the EU institution in general but also toward other new cooperation issues announced by its initiative in the future.

5. **Fifth** – human rights are not mentioned in the document. It is oriented only on three fields: "strengthening security, promoting growth and prosperity, and promoting environmental protection, resilience to climate change and readiness".

6. **Sixth** – the EU is inclined toward cooperation with Turkey in security matters, but shows less interest in deepening economic ties, which creates a certain imbalance in the relationship with Turkey. It seems that the EU gives preference to connecting with Central Asia through the Black Sea rather than by land route through Turkey.

7. **Seventh** – although the EU previously expressed certain criticism toward regional partners Azerbaijan and Turkey – specifically noting the absence of fair and free elections and the shrinking of civil society space in the country – in the current strategy, Azerbaijan is mentioned in terms of energy cooperation and the fight

against climate change. Cooperation with Azerbaijan is considered a priority direction for the EU, as Azerbaijan's role is important for stopping the remaining import of Russian energy and accelerating the process of energy diversification.

8. **Eighth** – the emphasis in the EU's new strategy on war-related environmental damage, risks caused by climate change, and opportunities for sustainable growth may be perceived tonally inappropriately by politicians and citizens of Black Sea countries, who in recent years have been fighting war, refugee flows, energy crises, economic difficulties, and Russian interference in elections and other hybrid actions.

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