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## The Black Sea - the Geopolitical Springboard of the Region

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### Abstract

Security and stability are essential for stable development, successful integration into global political and economic systems, and sustainable economic growth in the Black Sea region and Black Sea countries, including Georgia. During the Cold War, the Black Sea was "divided" into the Republic of Turkey (as a member of NATO) on one hand, and the countries of the former Soviet Union on the other. After the end of the Cold War, the strategic balance in the Black Sea region has undoubtedly changed - the role and geopolitical-economic importance of the Black Sea has noticeably increased. The Black Sea coastal states, including Georgia and Ukraine, have been given a new geopolitical role, new opportunities, and new challenges.

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**Keywords:** Black Sea, geopolitics, security, transit hub

### Introduction

The Black Sea region has always been a place of intense socio-economic relations, and it has increasingly transformed into a center of attraction for the growing political and economic interaction of various parties. Unfortunately, the political interest in creating dividing lines and zones of

influence has a negative impact on the political and economic situation of the region, as well as on the overall picture of society-to-society relations.

The aggression carried out by Russia against Georgia and Ukraine dramatically changed the political and security balance in the Black Sea region and in the long term posed a serious threat to the stability and insurance of Europe. Therefore, NATO's involvement in the process of strengthening the security of the Black Sea is extremely important.

Despite the fact that the safety of the Black Sea region is becoming more and more relevant and it is one of the important challenges for global security, this issue is little studied from an academic point of view, and the interests and policies of the states towards this region are often not clear and consistent.

### **Main Part**

From a geographical point of view, the Black Sea is the only contact point for Georgia with the Euro-Atlantic space, therefore integration with the Black Sea is Georgia's unwavering demand. In addition, the security of the Black Sea region has a particularly sensitive impact on Georgia's trade, transit, and economic opportunities. After Georgia expressed its desire to join the Silk Road project and become a kind of „transit hub“, the safety of the Black Sea became an even greater priority for the country. However, the security issue of the Black Sea region is extremely important for Georgia. Especially in the context of NATO integration and the deepening of relations with the Alliance.

Recently, the role of Georgia in the security of the Black Sea has been quite relevant. Here, the question arises - what role should Georgia play in the security of the Black Sea, when the country, among other things, wants to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? - If there is a unified NATO proactive strategy, Georgia should have a decisive role, although it should work more actively for it.

First of all, the most important thing is how active Georgia will be in strengthening the security of the Black Sea. Strengthening the surety of the region should be primarily in the interest of the local states, and they should offer their partners a way out of the most difficult situation the region is currently in (Chitaladze, A. 2017).

It is also noteworthy that Georgia and Ukraine do not stand together in this matter and these two countries do not speak the same language. We support each other with "words" that we are partners, although no one can name any specific actions that Ukraine and Georgia have jointly implemented for the security of the Black Sea.

The second main shortcoming, in the context of expressing the role of Georgia, is the suspension of the construction of the port of Anaklia, which raises questions in the partnership. This project should not be considered only

from an economic point of view but was a test of how ready Georgia is to play its role in strengthening the security of the Black Sea. Unfortunately, Georgia failed this test and could not choose the right path. Probably, because of the Russian factor, Georgia refused very important opportunities.

The recent state of war opens up a new window of opportunity. After the Karabakh war, the West actually saw the danger of losing the region, as Russia further strengthened its influence in the region, and Georgia remained the only hope to protect Western interests and values (Margvelashvili, Z. 2019).

Russia's interest in establishing control over the Black Sea is important in several directions, including:

- Access to "overseas" or "innersea" conflicts and spaces

The importance of the Black Sea has increased along with Russia's military actions in the Middle East and Africa. The Kremlin uses the sea to support its own activities, which includes using ports in the Black Sea (including Crimea) to supply Russian forces involved in conflicts beyond the sea.

- Confrontation with NATO

The presence and strengthening of NATO members at sea are against Russia's interests. Currently, three NATO countries are represented on the Black Sea, including Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The first two are less capable of counterbalancing Russia's influence, the only one that has more or less this ability is Turkey, although it, despite being a member of NATO, has often been inclined to take an agreed position with Russia, rather than contribute to the strengthening of NATO's forces at sea.

- The Black Sea as part of the Russian space

Russia's actions clearly show its desire to control the Black Sea on its own. If we recall the Cold War period, only Turkey was a member of NATO, the rest were either Warsaw Pact countries (Romania, Bulgaria), or the Soviet Union. Practically, the largest part was controlled by Russia. Today's goal to regain control of the sea has not changed (Stronski, P. 2021).

In the political arena of the modern period, relations between states and their effective development are important and noteworthy. In particular, several factors affect everything mentioned in a complex way - geographical area, historical development, neighboring countries, etc. But attention should also be focused on the leading subjects of the state's policy and their attitude. Yes, the leader is the most important factor in relations between states, of course, along with other factors as well.

### **Istanbul Canal and Montreux Convention**

In 2021, more than a hundred ex-servicemen signed a public statement criticizing the government's plan to withdraw the Istanbul Canal. According

to the servicemen, this project was against the interests of Turkey - by taking out the canal, the Montreux Convention might be violated and the situation in the Black Sea region would become tense. The Turkish government was very strict about the situation, arresting some of the signatories for trying to interfere in the affairs of the democratically elected government.

Of course, Turkey will try to change the Montreux Convention in such a way that neither Russia nor the West will be able to gain control over it in the region. It is possible that the Istanbul canal, at least on a small level, will indeed become a lever to stop Russian influence in the region.

If at the beginning of the 21st century, the Black Sea received relatively less attention from the West, after the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the situation has changed dramatically: Domination of the Black Sea has become one of the main components of the conflict between Russia and the West, which has a very valuable geostrategic value for both parties (Tsikarishvili, G. 2021).

### **Black Sea - the end of Russian hegemony**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia strongly believed that it would retain full control over the Black Sea. However, over time it turned out that Russia did not have enough political and economic power to fully implement its goals. A clear example of this is the so-called color revolutions (the 2004-2005 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution in Ukraine), which were previously led by strongly pro-Russian leaders, and after the revolutions, power was seized by pro-Western forces. In the same period, Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO, as a result, 3 (Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania) of the 6 countries bordering the Black Sea became NATO members, and 2 (Georgia and Ukraine) became NATO partner countries.

It was these events that became the main factor of Russia's irritation, after which the Kremlin began to pursue a particularly rigid regional policy. This was manifested in the large-scale military operation launched against Georgia, which was close to granting the MAP in 2008, as a result of which Tbilisi lost control over the Tskhinvali region.

For Russia, the Black Sea is a platform from which it will conduct destabilizing operations in the Middle East and North Africa. Domination of the Black Sea allowed the Kremlin to launch support operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. It should be noted that with the help of the Black Sea Fleet present in Crimea, Russia was able to provide military and humanitarian operations in Syria in support of the Assad regime.

## **NATOs strategy and interests in the Black Sea**

Although the Euro-Atlantic Alliance has had partners in the region for a very long time, NATO's main interest in the Black Sea region began only after seeing a real threat in the form of the annexation of Crimea from Russia. However, even in this case, the alliance considered the Baltic Sea as a priority over the Black Sea, which was affirmed by the deployment of reinforced units in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to stop Russian aggression.

It is interesting that Romania and Bulgaria are active in the issue of giving geopolitical importance to the Black Sea. They are members of NATO and the European Union and are actively trying to establish close relations with the USA. That is why Romania especially supports the US in strengthening its position in the Black Sea region, which is joined by countries like Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Georgia. With this, Romania is trying to become the main representative of the European Union in the Black Sea security issue.

Despite the efforts of NATO and its allies, the Kremlin continues to act threateningly and is likely to continue until the West makes a clear decision to restore the balance of power in the Black Sea region, which should end with the accession of such Black Sea countries that have clearly stated their political course to the North Atlantic Alliance. Concludingly, the stated above will be the main motive of the multifaceted economic and political opportunities of the Black Sea.

The geopolitical springboard of the Black Sea unites the most complex and tense regions, it is the crossroads of European and Asian cultures, where the area of redistribution of influence arose. A political leader is a figure on whose correct diplomacy a lot depends, and it was the mistakes made by them in the past that led this part of Eurasia to a hot conflict zone today. In many cases, an idea can be created that the geopolitical situation of the Black Sea is dominated by a single, subjective influence, for which all those internationally recognized values, which have become the constitutionally recognized value of the individual state since the second half of the twentieth century, are equal to zero (Abramidze. T. 2021).

Thus, today, the stability of the geopolitical situation of the Black Sea, together with all the above-mentioned issues, is important to be developed by the political elite and leaders of the respective country:

- Correct political course;
- Internal political stability of the country;
- Effective foreign policy.

These are the three main directions, the effective development of which depends on the proper integration of Georgia, and European progress, which is a guarantee of peace and security. Directing these three main

directions is the prerogative of the political leader and it depends on his wisdom and ability to properly implement it.

## **Conclusion**

For effective action in the face of challenges and new opportunities, the Black Sea region needs a comprehensive approach and close cooperation between NATO and the EU in political, military, and economic directions. Such a strategy should take into account the achievements of the Black Sea countries on the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and also ensure greater involvement in the conflict resolution process while building regional partnership capacities and supporting regional and global projects.

Based on the above, it is possible to make a logical conclusion that, over time, the Black Sea region will become more and more dynamic and more important in terms of regional and international security and further economic growth and development in the region.

Georgia should continue to contribute to the security and stability of the Black Sea region, in accordance with a balanced and pragmatic approach. Despite the above, in today's interdependent world, it would be more and more difficult for a small and vulnerable country like Georgia to protect its legitimate interests without strong partners and allies. Accordingly, the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, along with peaceful de-occupation and conflict resolution, with the active involvement of the international community, has no alternative for Georgia. Therefore, full membership in NATO and the European Union will be the most appropriate response to the country's political and economic challenges.

For the security of the Black Sea, it is necessary to create a common command of the Black Sea. NATO's current defense and rapid response strategy cannot respond to the security challenges of the Black Sea, which is why it is necessary to create a new joint command in relation to the Black Sea.

Due to the fact that today most of the military activities in Europe are carried out in the Black Sea region, I think that it is necessary to create a joint command of the Black Sea, which will combine land, sea, and air components.

It is clear that, in addition to the Black Sea countries, other countries also participate in the said command. Forces, capabilities, and bases should be redistributed on the perimeter of the Black Sea in order to control the Black Sea water area.

Unfortunately, in the 21st century we have to contend with a country with a 19th-century mentality, and delaying action gives a hand to a potential adversary, so immediate action is needed. More NATO in the Black Sea is a guarantee for the security of the Black Sea.

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