



THE SECURITY OF THE BLACK SEA: THE STRUGGLE IN THE BLACK SEA AND TURKEY'S POLICY IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

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ABSTRACT

During the Cold War, the Black Sea was not considered as the first priority for NATO states because of the supremacy of the Soviet Union in the region. The joining of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO in 2004, however, changed the balance of power in the region completely and the U.S. and NATO accelerated their efforts to contain Russia in the Black Sea. NATO's policies which aimed at including Georgia and Ukraine to the pact, however, encountered harsh reaction by Russia, which felt encircled by the West in 2008 and 2014 respectively, and provided Russia opportunities to annex Crimea and to access the coasts in the breakaway region Abkhazia. The new chess game in the Black Sea enabled Russia to strengthen its Black Sea Fleet (BSF) and 'Anti-Access Area Denial' (A2/AD) capabilities, while the U.S. increased its presence substantially in the region with new NATO bases in Bulgaria and Romania in addition to maritime exercises and freedom of navigation operations in the Black Sea. Turkey, on the other hand, as a NATO member closely cooperating with Russia in recent times, has been struggling to preserve peace in the Black Sea, focusing especially on preservation of the status established by the Montreux Convention.

Keywords: Black Sea, NATO, A2/AD, Montreux Convention, Maritime Security.

KARADENİZ'İN GÜVENLİĞİ: KARADENİZ'DEKİ MÜCADELE VE SOĞUK SAVAŞ SONRASI TÜRKİYE'NİN POLİTİKASI

ÖZ

Soğuk savaş döneminde Karadeniz, Sovyetler Birliği'nin bölgedeki üstünlüğü nedeniyle NATO ülkeleri tarafından birincil öncelikli olarak görülmemiştir. Bununla birlikte, Romanya ve Bulgaristan'ın 2004 yılındaki NATO üyeliği bölgedeki güç dengesini tamamiyle değiştirmiş ve ABD ile NATO, Karadeniz'de Rusya Federasyonu'nu sınırlama çabalarına hız vermiştir. Ancak NATO'nun Gürcistan ve Ukrayna'yı da pakta dahil etme politikası, Batılı ülkelerce çevrelendiğini düşünen Rusya tarafından sırasıyla 2008 ve 2014 yıllarında sert karşılık bulmuş ve Rusya Federasyonu'na, Kırım'ı ilhak ve Abhazya özerk bölgesi sahillerine erişim fırsatını yaratmıştır. Karadeniz'deki yeni satranç oyunu, Rusya Federasyonu'na Karadeniz Filosunu ve 'Erişimi Engelleme-Bölgeden Men Etme (A2/AD)' yeteneklerini güçlendirme imkânı sağlarken, ABD de, Karadeniz'deki deniz tatbikatları ve denizde seyir serbestisi harekâtlarının yanı sıra Bulgaristan ve Romanya'daki yeni NATO deniz üsleri ile bölgedeki varlığını önemli ölçüde artırmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra Türkiye ise son dönemde Rusya ile yakın iş birliği içinde olan bir NATO üyesi olarak, özellikle Montrö Sözleşmesinin kurallarının korunması prensibini esas alacak şekilde Karadeniz'deki bölgesel barışı korumaya çabalamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karadeniz, NATO, A2/AD, Montrö Sözleşmesi, Deniz Güvenliği.

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Introduction

The early Post-Cold War era provided a crucial opportunity for the West and especially for NATO to access the former members of the Warsaw Pact that encircle Russia. In 1999 and 2004 the Alliance underwent two important enlargement processes, in which ten former Warsaw Pact states became members -something undreamed of during the Cold War-. The Alliance has also increased its cooperation with other states such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine through various programs such as the Partnership for Peace (PFP) and bilateral military activities.

The change in geopolitics also changed the strategic importance of the Black Sea, in which the Soviet Union had enjoyed relative supremacy during the Cold War. NATO membership for Bulgaria and Romania altered the security paradigm in the region and Russia lost crucial naval bases in the Black Sea, her most important access point to warm-port seas. Russia, however, continued to maintain its presence in the Black Sea with naval bases leased from Ukraine, thanks to pro-Russian governments in that country. NATO's further enlargements to include Georgia and Ukraine, and the overthrow of pro-Russian governments through Color Revolutions supported by Western states encountered harsh reaction from Russia in 2008 and in late 2013, as part of Russia's efforts to augment her relative hegemony in the region since Vladimir Putin consolidated his authority. Russia did not allow membership of Georgia and Ukraine in NATO, and did not hesitate to resort to military power in both states, highlighting these as a red line for her national and regional security.

The struggle between the West and Russia focused mainly on superiority in the Black Sea, one of the main routes for transit of the natural resources of Central Asia and the Caucasus to the West. The West aims to stabilize maritime security in the Black Sea by containing Russia through the Alliance's military power, while Russia struggles to reduce Western influence in the region by continuing the Western maritime presence and retaining naval bases in Georgia and Ukraine. The struggle is of especial importance for Turkey, which has been working to keep the security and peace in the Black Sea since the end of the Cold War through regional initiatives such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Turkey, as a NATO ally, figures as part of NATO policies while cooperating with Russia and other regional states to keep the security of the Black Sea without outside intervention. The fate of the Montreux Convention, which stabilizes the balance in the Black Sea and regulates the Turkish Straits, has also become a crucial factor in the struggle, whereas Turkey would prefer it not be part of this competition between Russia and NATO.

The aim of the study is to examine the struggle between Russia and the U.S./NATO in the Black Sea which increased in the post-cold war era and Turkey's policy in the competition. With this purpose, after analysing the strategic importance of the Black Sea, historical perspective was presented. RF's increased military capabilities and NATO's increased naval/air activities were also discussed with data analysis method. Findings obtained are shown in the conclusion section. It was concluded that; the Black Sea will remain the sea of peace, stability, and security as long as its control rests within the littoral states and the Montreux Convention is the most important tool to provide this.

Strategic Importance of the Black Sea

The Black Sea is a semi-closed region with an area of 432,000 square kilometers and coastline of 4,340 km. It clearly covers a smaller area than other security zones and in terms of security is considerably easier to monitor (Karadeniz, 2007, p. 107). Its geographic location, economic potential and role as an energy and transit corridor provides the Black Sea its geopolitical importance (Polat, 2017, p. 56).

One important platform for the Black Sea lies in the transport of Caucasian and Asian natural resources to the West. The "Blue Stream" has been providing natural gas to Turkey since 2003, while the "Turk Stream" started to operate in 2019—two important projects— for meeting the needs of both Turkey and Europe. Moreover, Turkey announced on August 21, 2020 that the drilling ship Fatih explored 320 bm^3 natural gas reserves in the Tuna-1 well (TRT World, 2020); the amount of the reserve was increased to 405 bm^3 subsequently (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Investment Office, 2020). There are other ongoing projects such as the Neptune Deep gas project (Yapıcı, 2015, p. 89) in Romania's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The Black Sea also plays an important role in the maritime transportation of oil in the region. The Turkish Straits are a strategic waterway of importance in the world energy trade; 84 million barrels of oil are consumed daily worldwide, half of it transported interregionally, with 3 million barrels of crude oil transported annually by tankers through the Turkish Straits (Koday et al., 2017, p. 888). As the second-highest exporter of oil exporting in the world (OPEC, 2020), Russia sends crude oil through the Turkish Straits, primarily to European destinations.

Russia's economy is heavily reliant on exports of its resources as the world's largest natural gas exporter and second-highest exporter of crude oil. These resources comprised 60 percent of Russia's GDP in 2017 (The Moscow Times, 2019). Russia aims to be an effective power in the global energy market and to increase its her influence in geopolitically important regions such as the Black Sea, the Caucasus region and the Caspian Sea. These regions hold strategic importance for security and energy policies through pipeline projects and as a transportation route for Russia. In addition to the Turkish Straits, the Danube River, the longest river in the European Union region, also provides an important route for maritime transportation through the Black Sea and provides opportunity for the Black Sea states, including Turkey, to reach Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine (Çiçek et al., 2014, p. 2) with mid-sized cargo ships. The strategic importance of the Black Sea increased substantially since it was connected to the North Sea by the Rhine-Danube Canal and to the Caspian Sea by the Volga-Don Canal (Erol et al., 2012, p. 19). The Volga-Don Canal crowned the joining of the five seas: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the White Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea, by connecting riverways and crossing arid steppes. This generally overlooked transportation corridor offers important opportunities as a new route for heavy equipment being shipped to the Caspian Sea, for investment in transportation infrastructure, and in sales of cargo-handling equipment and technology (Global Security, 2011). It also allows Russia to connect her naval assets between the BSF and the Caspian Sea Flotilla (Kucera, 2018).

The security of the Black Sea also plays a crucial role for Bulgaria, while Romania's port of Constanta is the largest port in the Black Sea, including, as it does, maritime traffic on the Danube River and the canals and waterways of Europe. The ongoing Anaklia Black Sea Deep Water Port Project on Georgia's Black Sea coast will likely make that country a logistic hub when finished, as the new mixed-cargo port will enable loading of container ships bound for Europe as well as unloading of vessels coming from the West. It could well make Georgia a faster maritime corridor between China and Europe within the scope of the project "One Belt, One Road" (Larsen, 2017). As for the littoral states, the security of the Black Sea also plays a crucial role for other states, especially for European countries dependent on Russian natural gas in addition to oil and other resources transported through the Black Sea. Therefore, insatabilities in the Black Sea has an interlinked characteristic in terms of politics and energy security. In fact energy security is one of the biggest challenges in the region.

The strategical importance of the Black Sea, however, stems mainly from its geopolitical location, as scholars of history have pointed out. Alfred Thayer Mahan, for example, stressed the importance of the Black Sea: *'At present, indeed, it seems that the center of sea power, resting mainly with England and France, is overwhelmingly in the West; but should any chance add to the control of the Black Sea basin, which Russia now has, the existing strategic conditions affecting sea power would all be modified'* (Mahan, 1890, p. 13). The Black Sea also played a crucial role in the Heartland Theory developed by British geo-strategist Sir Halford J. Mackinder in which he claimed *"the whole basin of the Black Sea must be regarded as of the Heartland and that who rules the Heartland, commands the World through the World-Island"* (Mackinder, 1942, p. 106).

The Black Sea is a bridge between the Mediterranean, Europe and the Middle East, (Al, 2017, p. 153) connecting the Mediterranean and the oceans to the Black Sea coastal countries. This is especially true for Russia, through the Turkish Straits, which is why Russia has pursued the policy of accession to warm-water ports for centuries (Keleş, 2009, p. 89) Russia's warm-water ports on the Black Sea enable Russia to control the sea, project power, maintain good order, and observe a maritime consensus (Chauhan, 2020, p. 57). This has rendered the Black Sea a crucial sector in the West's containment policy of Russia, resulting in a Black Sea chess game since the end of the Cold War.

The Power Struggle for the Black Sea at the Post-Cold War

One of the maritime security threats described by Bueger as the 'threat of maritime inter-state disputes' and "the Arctic, the South China Sea and the East China Sea" are defined in his 2014 article, 'What is Maritime Security?' as regions having inter-state tensions. Due to recent crises, the Black Sea has been added to that list, for example by Sanders (2017, p. 9) and Coyer (2016) who regard the Black Sea as a commensurate security situation with the South China Sea. Sanders also regards the Black Sea as having both traditional (conventional military threats) as well as new security challenges such as pollution and nuclear trafficking.

The Soviet Union enjoyed massive maritime superiority during the Cold War thanks to the membership of all Black Sea states in the Warsaw Pact except Turkey. During the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact had 10 naval bases in the Black Sea (*Novorossiysk, Sevastopol, Odessa, Lake Donuzlav, Balaklava, Poti, Constanta, Mangalia, Varna, Atia (Sozopol)*). Therefore, until the end of the Cold War NATO regarded the Black Sea as a secondary area of struggle.

The early post-Cold War era witnessed close cooperation between Russia and the U.S., including the 'Threat Cooperation Reduction Program' to contain proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from former Soviet states. The U.S. increased its activities in East Asia, Central Asia and Caucasia during the Color Revolutions, as in Kyrgyzstan or Georgia, or through bilateral agreements such as the agreement for lease of the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan.

After the first decade of the post-Cold War era, though, America's low profile regarding Black Sea issues gradually changed as Caspian energy issues drew American attention to the region. The U.S. reassessed its geostrategic interest in the area by adding a military dimension to its strategy and enhancing the role of NATO (Çelikpala, 2010, p. 10) by adding regional countries to the Euro-Atlantic system. The NATO membership of Bulgaria and Romania in 2004 resulted in the loss of strategical superiority for Russia by losing the naval bases in those two countries. Both countries gradually modernized their fleet and bases after their membership based on NATO standards.

Freedom of Navigation (FoN), a principle of customary international law, has been the main argument for the involvement of the U.S. in the competition in the Black Sea. Article 87 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) states that “*The high seas are open to all States, whether coastal or land-locked*” and lists “*freedom of navigation*” as the first of several rights for all states on the high seas. Based on this, since 1983 the U.S. has been conducting FoN operations (Rolph, 1992, p. 135) throughout the world as per the U.S. Oceans Policy, (United States Oceans Policy, 1983) which from time to time increased tensions in the Black Sea during the Cold War era¹.

Countering NATO's efforts, Russia accelerated cooperation in the Black Sea with Ukraine. In 1997 Russia leased the naval base in Sevastopol, on the Crimean Peninsula, for 20 years as the main base for its BSF, with the option of extension for 20 more years (Dolya, 2016, p. 2). Russia signed a deal in 2010, the “Kharkiv Pact”, with Ukraine’s pro-Russian leader Yanukovych, extending the lease that was due to expire in 2017 on Russia's BSF for 25 years, until 2042; in return Ukraine received a discount on its gas bills owed Russia (Hearding, 2020). The deal cost Russia’s budget around \$4 billion a year, or around \$40 billion over the period covered by the gas contract expiring in 2019 (Bush, 2014). Thus, Russia bolstered its presence in the Black Sea through modernization of the base as well as of the BSF located in Crimea. NATO's attempt to include Georgia became an important step in the struggle between the U.S. and Russia in the Black Sea. The invitation for NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine at the 2008 Bucharest Summit became a cornerstone for the Black Sea chess board and the breaking point for NATO-Russia relations. For both Georgia and Ukraine, the principal reason for their NATO membership aspirations was to secure their independence from Russia (Rumer et al., 2006, p. 14). However, matters turned out differently as Georgia's military operation in breakaway South Ossetia encountered a harsh Russian military operation in which Russian tanks were stopped only 40 km from Tbilisi. The ‘Six Days War’ resulted in the loss of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for Georgia, as Russia planned to establish a temporary naval base in Ochamchira near Sukhumi (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 2010).

Russia clearly indicated that it would make any move, including war, or take any risk to prevent being encircled in the Caucasus or Black Sea regions. Thus, Russia not only restrained NATO on Georgia’s coast but also increased her military presence in Abkhazia, whose autonomy Russia supports (Ünalmiş et al., 2019, p. 4). After the crisis, Russia showed clearly to the world that she has a voice in the region, a move that increased Russia’s superiority in the Black Sea region as well as the Caucasus, and negated NATO’s strategy on expanding its influence in the Black Sea through Georgia. After the 2008 War, the RF Ministry of Defense initiated an ambitious armaments program and overall budget of 20.7 trillion rubles (approximately US\$700 billion at the average 2011 exchange rate) as a continental power (the navy portion was roughly 25% of the budget—with a planned procurement of 5 trillion rubles (or US\$165 billion). Within its navy portion, 2.3 trillion (US\$78 billion) was budgeted for shipbuilding alone (Delanoë, 2019, p. 4).

NATO and Russia overcame the negative effect of the Georgian crisis in a very short time and increased cooperation in the region. However, NATO's efforts to expand to the East, and the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 in which the pro-Russian government was overthrown through street protests backed by the West, again resulted in a harsh reaction by Russia, including invading and annexing Crimea, in which it had leased a military base until 2017. NATO’s mistakes in Georgia sparked the Ukrainian crisis.

¹ One of the notable operations conducted as part of FoN program was performed by two Navy warships (USS Yorktown and USS Caron), when tasked by Pentagon officials to enter Soviet waters in the Black Sea, off the southwestern tip of the Crimean peninsula on February 12, 1988. They first shadowed then bumped by the Soviet ships in an attempt to divert them out of Soviet territorial waters.

Thus, the Western move to contain Russia in the region by leaving it without access to the Black Sea turned out differently than foreseen; Russia gained full sovereignty over the Sevastopol Naval Base, which was believed to be the leading factor in Moscow's annexation of the peninsula. During the 2000s, Russia had been seriously concerned over the possibility of disrupted access to the Sevastopol Naval Base after the end of the lease in 2017. Therefore, as early as 2004, it undertook construction of a new naval base in Novorossiysk, on Russia's Black Sea shores. Neither the signing of the Kharkiv Agreement in April 2010 nor the annexation of Crimea in 2014 jeopardized this program.

The Ukrainian crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea started a series of counterattacks by the Alliance and especially the U.S. NATO adopted 'Assurance and Adaptation Measures' called the 'Readiness Action Plan' (RAP), in order to reassure its members in the region. Maritime measures in the Black Sea included deployment of multinational maritime forces and an enlargement of the 'Standing NATO Maritime Groups' (NATO, 2020) with longer duration of NATO's presence in the Black Sea. Standing Naval Forces (SNF)² comprised the nucleus of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which is part of the NATO Response Force (NRF) with the additional forces, as the spearhead or the first echelon to react to a crisis with very short notice. The Alliance, on the other hand, focused on maritime security issues in the Black Sea, a now crucial stance for the Alliance, described at the 2014 Wales Summit as "*the need to adapt to a complex, more crowded, rapidly evolving, and increasingly unpredictable maritime security environment*" (NATO, 2014). At the 2016 Warsaw Summit (NATO, 2016), "*the deterioration in the Black Sea security situation*" was noted and "*provocative military activities near NATO borders in the Black Sea and Russia's use of its military presence to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean*" were criticized.

NATO has been increasing its military presence in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea since the outbreak of the conflict in southeastern Ukraine in April 2014, in response to what it considers to be Russia's aggressive foreign policy (Sputnik, 2017). SNF groups are being deployed in the Black Sea as per their schedule of operation, and both SNMG-2 and SNMCMG-2 conduct exercises with the littoral countries' naval assets whenever deployed. NATO nations deploy their naval assets to these groups as conditions dictate, but problems in force generation still determine the composition of the groups. Between 2016 and 2018 NATO conducted exercises in the Black Sea with participation by regional states, including Spring Storm in 2017 or Platinum Lion in 2018, a counter insurgency peacekeeping exercise involving 700 personnel from NATO members (Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania and the U.S.) as well as members of the PfP programme (Georgia, Moldova and Serbia). The alliance also conducted 'real' bilateral and multilateral maritime exercises in the Black Sea such as 'Breeze' and 'Sea Breeze.' These aimed to enhance interoperability among participating units and strengthen NATO's readiness in the Black Sea region with participation of the SNF, three riparian NATO members, and Ukrainian and Georgian naval forces. The 2018 Brussels summit (NATO, 2018) highlighted the "*substantial increase in NATO's presence and maritime activity in the Black Sea*". Russia considers the Black Sea an 'area of vital concern' and is uncomfortable with Euro-Atlantic dominance in her 'near abroad' (the independent republics that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union). Moscow's strategy for the Black Sea is to retain control over it and limit Western influence, while NATO's strategy is to integrate regional countries within the Western political and economic system by making some Black Sea littoral nations a member and by keeping the door open for the others (Canar, 2013, p. 115).

² Standing Naval Forces comprised of the Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMG) 1 and 2, and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Groups (SNMCMG) 1 and 2.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its consequences (sanctions, lasting tensions with the Euro-Atlantic community, new shores to protect) led Russia's Ministry of Defense to recalibrate its priorities regarding modernization of the BSF. Countering the increased Western activities, Russia enhanced her BSF with modern frigates (3 Admiral Grigorovich class), submarines (6 improved Kilo class) and small missile ships (3 Project 21631) all equipped with Kalibr cruise missile systems as of early 2019 (Delanoë, 2019, p. 23). RF's 4 Mistral class Landing Platform Dock's (LPD) procurement project to be constructed by France, with one to be deployed in the BSF, was cancelled after the annexation of Crimea, but a remarkable maritime force was established in the Black Sea (*Ibid.*). Currently, Russia's BSF is comprised of some 50 units including service, support, surface combatant, and submarine units and some 25,000 personnel operating from bases in Crimea and Novorossiysk (Haines, 2016). Today, the BSF appears to be a more flexible and multipurpose naval formation and its area of responsibility has evolved, focusing more on the greater Mediterranean region. Russia's annexation of Crimea opened the path to the renewal of Russian maritime power and presence not only in the Black Sea but in the Mediterranean as well. Russia deployed 28,000 troops in Crimea and embarked on a major program to build housing, restore airfields, and install new radar there. Deployment of the Monolit-B radar system, for instance, which has a passive range of 450 km, "provides the Russian military with an excellent real-time picture of the positions of foreign surface vessels operating in the Black Sea." In addition, "Russian equipment in Crimea includes 40 main battle tanks, 680 armored personnel carriers, and 174 artillery systems of various kinds," along with 113 combat aircraft. In March 2019, Russia announced the deployment of nuclear-capable Tupolev Tu-22M3 strategic bombers to Gvardeyskoye air base in occupied Crimea in response to the U.S. missile defense deployment in Romania (PressTv, 2019). With the modernization of the Naval Base in Crimea, Russia has increased its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), which describes the situation when a state deploys weapons systems, often with long-range capabilities, to deny foreign forces' freedom of movement in the theatre (Francis et al., 2018, p. 498), which would allow Russia to target any moving ship in the Black Sea (Sanders, 2017, p. 9).

Russia's occupation and militarization of Crimea, modernization of the BSF and expanded forces in the Southern Military District have strengthened its ability to secure its vital southwestern flank from attack, dissuade and intimidate neighbors, and project power into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant (Flanagan et al., 2019). The balance has changed in favor of Russia. After observing a series of naval exercises conducted by Russia's BSF in September 2016, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, announced that "Several years ago the Russian [Black Sea] fleet's combat capabilities were in stark contrast with that of the Turkish Navy. Some even said that Turkey was in full command of the Black Sea. Now it's different." The Black Sea has become a theater of intense competition between the US/NATO and Russia, to the extent that the military activities between the Western states and Russia in the Black Sea sometimes become so dangerous that they might ignite a military confrontation. On January 29, 2018, for example, Russian Su-27 bombers maneuvered around the U.S. EP-3 Aries signals reconnaissance plane in international airspace in the Black Sea to force it to give up its mission. The Russian Defense Ministry confirmed the episode, saying that it was necessary to prevent the aircraft from violating Russian airspace (Sputnik, 2018). On May 4, 2018, British Typhoon jets scrambled in response to Russian aircraft over the Black Sea (Allison, 2018). During Exercise Sea Breeze 2019, the Russian BSF missile destroyer Smetlivy entered a Black Sea area closed to navigation, despite a warning regarding closure of the area for conducting the international exercise, as per the Ukrainian Navy's claim (Sputnik, 2019a).

On June 17, 2019, U.S. B-52H bombers were intercepted by Russian Su-27 Flanker jets over the Black Sea (Sputnik, 2019b). Two U.S. B-1B Lancer strategic bombers conducted a long-range strategic Bomber Task Force mission to the Black Sea region on May 29, 2020 (Fratini, 2020) and practiced procedures for employing the AGM-158C Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM), while Russian Su-27 and Su-30 fighter jets were scrambled to intercept the U.S. Air Force B-1Bs (Sputnik, 2020). All three incidents have shown that both sides regard the competition in the Black Sea as important, and might ignite a hot fire exchange. Potential territorial disputes between Romania and Russia—as their EEZs are now adjacent to each other (Sanders, 2017, p. 15)—and already existing disputes between the RF and Ukraine as in the Kerch Strait incident³ indicate that territorial disputes also will escalate tension in the region in the future, hampering the maritime security environment in the Black Sea.

Turkey's Position and Maritime Security Initiatives in the Black Sea

During the Cold War, Turkey was the only NATO member in the Black Sea. The end of the Cold War opened a new era, with the emergence of new littoral states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Turkey embarked on new projects such as the Black Sea Economic Corporation (BSEC) of 1992, which aimed to bring together all Black Sea riparian states for economic cooperation and development by establishing a regional organization for cooperation in the areas of environment, energy, tourism, education, and taxation (Oktay, 2006, p. 150). This was followed with establishment of the 'Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Agencies Cooperation Forum (BSCF)' whose meetings were inaugurated in 2000 under Turkish leadership, with the participation of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the RF, and Ukraine (Turkish Coast Guard Command). Turkey also supported the establishment in 2001 of Naval Co-Operation Task Group BLACKSEAFOR, which aimed to enhance peace and stability in the Black Sea area by increasing regional co-operation and improving good relationships or 'Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) in the Naval Field' as put forward in 1993 by Ukraine, within the context of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Despite pressure by the U.S. and the Alliance, Turkey always preferred to keep the balance of power in the region, pursuing a policy based on ensuring stability in the Black Sea while supporting actively NATO's assurance measures by taking into account the Montreux Convention. Abstaining from provoking the RF pointlessly is part of this policy (Çomak et al., 2018, p. 413).

Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH), which commenced in 2004, is an important example of Turkey's balance policy. In 2006, Russia and Turkey jointly vetoed a U.S. proposal to expand NATO's Operation Active Endeavor (OAE) into the Black Sea (Ariel et al., 2006). The reason for Turkey's refusal was that allowing permanent deployment of non-regional ships in the Black Sea would violate the Montreux Convention (Özdamar, 2015, p. 184). After the decision taken to transform the OAE into a regional multinational operation, and with bilateral agreements, the RF, Ukraine and Romania joined in the operation in 2006, 2007 and 2010 respectively, and Bulgaria and Georgia announced their desire to join it. The aim of the operation is "to assist establishment of a recognized maritime picture in the Black Sea along the sea lines of communication as well as to shadow-trail suspect ships" (Gürdeniz, 2005). This aim is also in line with UN Security Council resolutions 1373, 1540, 1566. The Turkish Navy shared Automatic Identification

³ The incident took place on November 2018 by Russia's seizing three Ukrainian military vessels by her Coast Guard after attempting to pass through the Kerch Strait off the coast of Crimea without getting proper clearance according to RF officials. <https://www.rt.com/news/446910-freedom-navigation-resolution-provocation/>, (Accessed on: 23.05.2020).

System (AIS)⁴ information with NATO, gathered through the task group, while complementing the efforts of the OAE⁵ until the operation transformed into 'Operation Sea Guardian'.

In November 2015, relations between Russia and Turkey deteriorated rapidly, essentially destroying their "strategic partnership," after the Turkish air force shot down a Russian fighter jet that had entered Turkish airspace, the third violation since Russia began hitting ground targets in Syria (Has, 2015). The RF suspended the information exchange within the scope of OBSH while liaison officers were withdrawn reciprocally. But after the two countries' board discussions, it was agreed to deploy liaison officers and restart information exchange (Çomak et al., 2018, p. 404). Currently the operation Black Sea Harmony still goes on with Romania and Ukraine (Karakas, 2016). On July 20, 2020 a Turkish Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) conducting a reconnaissance flight within the scope of that operation received a 'request for help' signal for a man overboard from a Bulgarian merchant ship in their search and rescue area. Coordinated search activities were conducted with the Bulgarian authorities (Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı, 2020).

Security and stability in the Black Sea are important not only for the littoral states, but also for the Euro-Atlantic community. Black Sea maritime security must rely on three principles: the contribution and will of the coastal states, effective sharing of intelligence and information between the regional mechanisms and Euro-Atlantic security mechanisms, and finally respect for the Montreux Convention (Karadeniz, 2007, p. 95).

The U.S. intention to expand the OAE's area of operation to the Black Sea—which was launched in the Mediterranean—involved questioning the Montreux Convention, which is the cornerstone of its ally Turkey's security. The Montreux Convention has been seen as the only obstacle to the U.S. strategy to deploy her navy in the Black Sea for controlling Russia and Iran, while controlling energy resources (Derman, 2018, p. 159). One of the indications is the analysis emphasizing the need to revisit the decision to block the OAE from being extended to the Black Sea, and overturn the "archaic" Montreux Convention (Jackson, 2005, p. 39).

The Montreux Convention regarding the regime of the straits, signed in 1936, gave Turkey control over the Turkish Straits and regulates the transit of naval warships. It dominates Turkey's Black Sea policy substantially (Canar, 2013, p. 190). The Convention guarantees the free passage of civilian vessels in peacetime while restricting the passage of non-riparian Black Sea states' naval ships according to their type, tonnage, duration and number, while requiring notification in advance from riparian or non-riparian states for the passage. With this convention, not only was the sovereignty of the Turkish Straits achieved but at the same time a 'security regime' was established in the Black Sea. Thanks to Turkey's decisive diplomacy within the Montreux Convention's regulations, for more than eight decades crisis periods have been evaded successfully in the Black Sea, including WWII, the Cold War, and the 2008 RF-Georgia and 2014 RF-Ukraine crises (Gürdeniz, 2015). No Turkish government approved a NATO exercise in the Black Sea during the Cold War era, as Turkey played the role of 'honest broker' between NATO and the Soviet Union while abstaining from actions that could upset the balance in the Black Sea or provoke her neighbor (Gürdeniz, 2016). Since the beginning of the post-Cold War era, the Convention

⁴ AIS forms part of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) and is a requirement for all vessels over 300 tons on international voyages, 500 tons non international and all passenger ships to transmit, on VHF, information in digital form which says who they are, where they are, what sort of vessel they are and useful information like course, speed and heading. *International Maritime Organisation*. <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Safety/Navigation/Pages/AIS.aspx>, (Accessed on: 25.05.2020).

⁵ OAE was succeeded by Operation Sea Guardian in November 2016 and currently non-Article V Maritime Security Operation.

has constituted a significant problem between the US/NATO and Turkey. Although U.S. officials declared that the U.S. government fully respects the convention (Wilson, 2007), there were instances in which Turkey had to reject proposals that acted against the regulations of the Montreux Convention, even if they were 'informal' such as the proposal during the RF-Georgia crisis in 2008. During this crisis, the U.S. planned to deploy two hospital ships (USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy) both over 60,000 tons—which was over the tonnage limit of the convention (Gürcanlı, 2008)—in the Black Sea for transportation of assistance by sea to Georgia (Hürriyet, 2008) but after Turkish authorities' decisive action, other ships within the proper size were deployed for the same purpose (Ergan, 2008).

Another case was the USS *Taylor's* exceeding the time limit for foreign warships' presence in the Black Sea, per the Montreux Convention, during the Sochi Winter Olympics. Russia reacted by publishing a declaration on her Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official website on April 10, 2014, claiming that: "USS Taylor entered the Black Sea on February 5, 2014, extended her stay until March 9, and stayed 11 days longer than what the convention dictates, while Russian Authorities were not informed about this delay". In the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' answer published on April 12, the Russian authorities and other parties were informed of the frigate's delay and that the convention was not violated (Sandıklı et al., 2014, p. 14), and that the delay arose from the ship's having struck her propellor aground during fuel transfer at Samsun, Turkey. The episode pointed out the delicate role of the Convention in the security of the Black Sea.

In its White Paper 2000, (Turkish Ministry of National Defence, 2000) the Turkish Ministry of Defense stressed 'economic cooperation, confidence, and security-building measures and naval cooperation' as the way to make the Black Sea 'a sea of peace, stability and prosperity' (Wezeman et al., 2018, p. 3), which points out that peace remains the main incentive for Turkey. The Black Sea has been the only region in which Turkey declared an EEZ with all her riparian neighbors there without any problem. The Black Sea region can be considered as 'stable' in terms of delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas from Turkey's point of view. Turkey considers preservation of the Montreux Convention to be the "red line" for regional security. Taking into account these developments, pipeline projects such as the Turkish Stream, and the escalation between the RF and Ukraine over territorial waters in the Sea of Azov, as well as considering logistic capabilities in the region, the Turkish Naval Forces reached a decision on establishing their ninth naval base, in Sürmene in the Eastern Black Sea. With this geostrategic move Turkey aims to increase her naval forces' operational capability, believing that its base at Karadeniz Ereğli alone will not be enough to protect her 'blue homeland' in such a vast jurisdiction area. Moreover, establishing such a base will also contribute to the region's industrial and social development (Karakaş, 2018).

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the West has increased its actions to encircle Russia in the Black Sea region through several initiatives. Membership of Bulgaria and Romania in NATO and the European Union played an important role in the modern containment policy. Western plans to grant membership to Georgia and Ukraine changed the security paradigm for Russia, although it would be too optimistic to expect their membership in the short term without solving problems such as the sovereignty and independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for Georgia, and the status quo of Donbass for Ukraine. But this change did not prevent Russia from hesitating to respond militarily to the Western-backed activities in Georgia and Ukraine. Thus, the Black Sea region became "a new chess game board" between the U.S. and Russia in the post-Cold War era. Western containment policies, however, turned out differently than anticipated.

Russia's actions delayed the plans for Georgian membership in NATO. By annexing Crimea—not recognized by the international community—where Russia has been maintaining a large and crucial naval base leased by Russia before the crisis, Russia increased its military presence and activities in the Black Sea, rather than being contained as planned by the Western states. Especially since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the U.S./NATO have embarked on assurance and adaptation measures to reassure its members in the region, while Russia has expanded military activities in the Black Sea. This may lead to dangerous confrontations that might ignite a serious crisis between the armed forces of both sides on the ground. As the only NATO member on the Black Sea littoral during the Cold War, Turkey has been pursuing a consistent strategy based on a balance between the West as their long term ally and Russia, with whom Turkey has been cooperating on several issues. Turkey's first priority is to keep the Black Sea as a region without competition and confrontation, by preserving the Montreux Convention and the security of energy transportation, either via pipeline or by tankers. An expanded American and NATO role in the Black Sea has a potential risk of complicating Turkey's pivotal role in the region. The Black Sea will remain the sea of peace, stability, and security as long as its control rests within the littoral states. NATO bilateral relations with Black Sea littoral countries, instead of comprehensive strategies covering the whole region, would complicate the continuation of her existence as an effective actor because the countries that perceive Russia as a threat, and that are getting closer to the West, expect more precise and holistic policies from NATO. But as time progresses, by not giving persuading answers to these expectations NATO could cause these countries to question its power and effectiveness. Security of maritime transportation is of great importance for Black Sea littoral states, and thus running military exercises near international shipping routes, or closure of the Kerch Strait, puts pressure on shippers and threatens the entire transportation corridor. Although UNCLOS recognized 'freedom of navigation' for passage through international straits, no state has the right to endanger national security or maritime security of a coastal state. Therefore, all parties should abstain from activities that may hamper maritime trade. There are instruments to overcome maritime security problems in the Black Sea regionally, but the question is how to make them work effectively with participation of all riparians. For Russia and Ukraine to cooperate within the frame of those initiatives in the short or middle term—maybe even in the long term—does not seem very possible. Also, Romania's ambition to host projects initiated by the U.S. seems likely to continue in the future, but different initiatives such as the 'International Black Sea Maritime Security Symposium' and 'Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) in the Naval Field' should continue periodically. Turkey should go on leading these initiatives in its 'honest broker' role, to share ideas and to gather all littoral countries' representatives at the same table even if they have conflicts and divergences in their policies.

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