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Türkiye's Black Sea Policy for Energy Security

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Abstract. Türkiye's foreign policy has recently taken on a more autonomous trajectory, less directly tied to European Union (EU) or NATO policies. Notably, the Black Sea region stands out as an area where Türkiye has charted an independent and distinctive course. The Black Sea region's growing importance underscores the need to define Türkiye's policy that contributes to stability in the region. Recent conflicts involving Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia, as well as the interest of non-regional actors, have heightened the region's security concerns and energy security risks. Understanding Türkiye's role in this context is essential for international relations scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War environment of military competition was replaced by an environment of cooperation and collaboration in the Black Sea region, combining political, economic, and cultural goals. However, the emerging conflicts between some littorals, such as Russia and Georgia in 2008 and Russia and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, have caused a change in the perception of security and stability of the region. Thus, the interest of external actors in the Black Sea has increased and their attempts have begun to demonstrate a greater presence in the region. This has induced circumstances that increase the risk of conflict in the region and threaten energy security. Furthermore, the region has attracted the interest of non-littoral states, which has led to new challenges. In light of these developments, the authors seek to provide an objective examination of Türkiye's Black Sea policy, emphasizing its growing significance within the region's evolving dynamics and energy security concerns. In addition, the main pillars of Türkiye's Black Sea policy under the principle of regional ownership will be discussed.

Key words: energy, geopolitics, politics, security, Turkish straits, Montreux Convention

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Черноморская политика Турции в области энергетической безопасности

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Аннотация. Внешняя политика Турции в последнее время приняла более автономную траекторию, менее связанную с политикой ЕС или НАТО. Примечательно, что Черноморский регион выделяется как территория, где Турция выбрала независимый и самобытный курс. Растущая важность Черноморского региона подчеркивает необходимость определения политики Турции, которая будет способствовать стабильности в этом регионе. Недавние конфликты с участием России, Украины и Грузии, а также интересы внерегиональных игроков усугубили проблемы безопасности региона и риски для энергетической безопасности. Понимание роли Турции в этом контексте особо значимо для ученых, политиков и практиков в области международных отношений. После распада Советского Союза в 1991 г. вместо атмосферы военной конкуренции эпохи холодной войны в Черноморском регионе была создана среда содействия и сотрудничества, сочетающая в себе политические, экономические и культурные цели. Однако возникли конфликты между некоторыми прибрежными территориями. Например, Россия и Грузия в 2008 г., а также Россия и Украина в 2014 и 2022 гг. вызвали изменение восприятия безопасности и стабильности региона. Таким образом, интерес внешних игроков к Черному морю возрос, о чем свидетельствует рост их присутствия в регионе. Это создало обстоятельства, которые увеличивают риск конфликта в регионе и ставят под угрозу энергетическую безопасность. Кроме того, регион привлек внимание со стороны нечерноморских государств, что привело к возникновению новых проблем. В свете этих событий авторы стремятся дать объективный анализ черноморской политики Турции, подчеркивая ее растущую значимость в рамках развивающейся динамики региональных процессов и проблем энергетической безопасности. Кроме того, будут рассмотрены основные столпы турецкой политики в отношении Черноморского региона в рамках принципа региональной ответственности.

Ключевые слова: энергетика, геополитика, политика, безопасность, Черноморские проливы, конвенция Монре

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Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the dynamics of the Black Sea region changed significantly. This was primarily due to Russia's declining economic, informational, and political influence over the Black Sea states, as well as the reduction of Russian military and naval presence in the region. The newly established states in this region aspired not only to cultivate ties with Western nations, but also to integrate into various European structures and institutions in order to secure economic assistance (Urchenko, 2008, p. 19). In addition,

the geopolitical discourses directed at the Black Sea also changed, and energy security-centric rather than political-military security geopolitical discourses came to the fore (Erbaş, 2012, pp. 143—145).

Under the leadership of Türkiye, the littoral states of the Black Sea started to work on establishing relations and cooperation, primarily in the economic field, and these fruitful efforts developed in a short time, resulting in the establishment of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

Another initiative for peace and security in the Black Sea was put forth by the Turkish

Navy at the 2nd Meeting of Chiefs of Black Sea Navies in Varna in 1998. The Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) was established with the agreement signed in Istanbul in 2001 only among the Black Sea littoral states, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Türkiye, and Ukraine, based on the Montreux Convention of 1936, to ensure security cooperation in the Black Sea (Uçarol, 2015, p. 1185). Established within the framework of the regional ownership principle, which is the basis of Türkiye's Black Sea policy, the BLACKSEAFOR Agreement was a clear demonstration of the littoral states' common will to ensure regional stability in the Black Sea and to further develop solidarity and mutual understanding among the naval forces (Çomak et al., 2017, pp. 403—410).

Another security-based approach is the Document on Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) in the Naval Field in the Black Sea, which was initiated under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Aiming to strengthen peace, security, and cooperation among the coastal states, the CSBM Document was signed at the BSEC Foreign Ministers Meeting held in Kyiv in 2002 and started to be implemented in 2003.¹

In 2004, the Turkish Navy launched the Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH)² contribute to regional peace, and with the accession of Russia in 2006, the operation became international in nature. After the

participation of Ukraine and Romania, OBSH became an important initiative to ensure security in the Black Sea (Kasım, 2007).

However, the conflicts between Russia and Georgia, Russia and Ukraine in the past two decades have caused a change in the perception of security in the region. This has increased the interest of non-regional actors in the Black Sea and their attempts to project more presence and activity in the region. This trend set off conditions that increased the risk of conflict in the region and threatened energy security. Following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO in 2004 and to the European Union (EU) in 2007, external actors such as the EU, the U.S., and NATO started to become more involved in the geopolitical processes in the Black Sea region.³ In addition, the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the joining of Crimea to the Russian Federation in 2014 created tensions among the littoral states and caused a crisis of confidence in the Black Sea Region.

After the successful completion of 21 activations, BLACKSEAFOR activities were suspended in 2014, and likewise, CSBM activities in the naval field could not be conducted in the Black Sea since 2018.⁴ The regional initiatives launched in the Black Sea region for dialogue and cooperation could not prevent the Black Sea from becoming an area of global competition and from the ultimate conflicts.

With the Russian special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Black Sea once again came to the fore. Türkiye diagnosed the situation as a state of war and applied the restrictive provisions of the Montreux

¹ Letter Dated 10 May 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General // UN Digital Library. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/466840?ln=en> (accessed: 08.11.2022).

² Operation Black Sea Harmony was initiated nationally by Türkiye in March 2004 to contribute to the Maritime Security in the Black Sea. The main purpose of the operation is to support the efforts made all over the world to prevent the illegal spread of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and related material, to show presence and determination in the Black Sea Region, and to prevent illegal activities within the scope of deterring such activities.

³ Makarychev A. S. Securitization and Identity: The Black Sea Region as a “Conflict Formation” // PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo. 2008. No. 43. P. 1—5. URL: https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/pepm_043.pdf (accessed: 08.11.2022).

⁴ Tulun T. E. Black Sea Needs Confidence and Security Building Measures More Than Ever // AVİM. 2018. No. 30. URL: <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/BLACK-SEA-NEEDS-CONFIDENCE-AND-SECURITY-BUILDING-MEASURES-MORE-THAN-EVER> (accessed: 08.11.2022).

Convention of 1936 to the warring parties on February 27, 2022.⁵ Meanwhile, acting impartially between Russia and Ukraine, Türkiye is playing a crucial role as a mediator and facilitator for the two countries to come to the table for a permanent ceasefire and peace. As the architect of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which enabled the transportation of Ukrainian agricultural products to be delivered to the world markets, Türkiye continues its constructive efforts to re-establish an atmosphere of confidence in the Black Sea region. Being the only NATO member that can keep the diplomatic channels open for dialogue, despite all kinds of negative conditions, Türkiye has ensured uninterrupted energy supplies from the Black Sea (Oktav, 2022).

This paper aims to provide an objective examination of Türkiye's Black Sea policy, which has been instrumental in securing its geopolitical, security, and economic interests in the Black Sea region. Despite its membership in NATO, Türkiye has pursued an independent and impartial stance in the Black Sea. Shaped under the discourse of regional ownership, Türkiye's policy underscores Türkiye's view of the Black Sea as a "Sea of Peace." It seeks to promote cooperation with regional countries in both the economic and security spheres, emphasizing joint initiatives and cooperation among the littoral states to enhance Black Sea security.

The study analyzes Türkiye's position as a NATO member capable of maintaining open diplomatic channels for dialogue under challenging circumstances. These aspects are crucial for understanding Türkiye's contribution to the Black Sea's energy security and regional significance. In this article, Türkiye's Black Sea policy, the principle of regional ownership in the region, and geopolitical considerations

will be discussed in the context of energy security⁶ and the importance of the Black Sea.

Geopolitical Significance of the Black Sea

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the political geography of the Black Sea region changed with the emergence of countries that wanted to break away from Soviet influence and get closer to the West (Erbaş, 2014). With these countries leaving the Warsaw Pact and Romania and Bulgaria becoming NATO members, the region became more of an area of interest for the Euro-Atlantic Alliance (Koçer, 2011, pp. 28—29). In this way, the Black Sea drew the world's attention to reshaping Russia's immediate environment after the Cold War. In addition to security concerns, the Black Sea region, which hosts the energy transportation corridors between Europe and Asia as well as important economic and trade markets, has become a focus for the commercial and economic interests of Western countries. Due to the worsening of political relations between Russia and the EU in recent years, as well as the EU's concerns about electricity shortages and the reduction of gas flows from Russia to Europe, the EU has been looking for alternative sources that can reduce its energy dependence on Russia. For example, with the conflict in Ukraine the gas flows to the EU decreased by 82%.⁷

As for Russia, on the one hand, it struggled not to mitigate its influence on the former Soviet states, and on the other hand, the risks and the opportunities brought by globalization

⁶ In the article, the term energy security is referred to International Energy Agency's definition as: "Energy security is the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price." See: Energy Security // International Energy Agency. URL: <https://www.ica.org/topics/energy-security> (accessed: 08.11.2022).

⁷ Russian Natural Gas Flow to the European Union, January 2019 — July 2022 // International Energy Agency. July 18, 2022. URL: <https://www.ica.org/data-and-statistics/charts/russian-natural-gas-flow-to-the-european-union-january-2019-july-2022> (accessed: 08.11.2022).

⁵ Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: Montrö Sözleşmesi'nin Bütün Hükümlerini Şeffaf Bir Şekilde Uygulayacağız // Anadolu Ajansı. 27.02.2022. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-montro-sozlesmesinin-butun-hukumlerini-seffaf-bir-sekilde-uygulayacagiz/2517057> (accessed: 01.11.2022).

and liberalism led the countries of the region to establish new international relations (Yiğit & Gülbiten, 2017, pp. 58—59). It is a fact that the Black Sea is of vital importance not only for Türkiye, but also for Russia. The interests of non-littoral countries and the increase of their influence in the region have been a concern for regional powers. During the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Türkiye sensitively implemented the provisions of the Montreux Convention and prevented the actions of some non-littoral countries that could further escalate the tensions in the Black Sea were prevented (Sarı & Avcu, 2020, p. 153). Especially after joining of Crimea to the Russian Federation in 2014, Ukraine's NATO membership came to the fore and paved the way for a confrontation between Russia and the West in the Black Sea. Ukraine has become a battleground between East and West by transforming into a buffer zone between them. In addition, in recent years, the perception of Bulgaria and Romania on Russia as an unreliable littoral state in the region has led these countries to seek security support from NATO and the U.S. This situation has led to an increased US presence in these countries and the region.

Türkiye's Black Sea Policy

During the Cold War, Türkiye demonstrated the ultimate will in implementing the Montreux Convention without any exception and made lots of efforts and sacrifices to maintain the security and stability of the Black Sea. As a regional power in the Black Sea, Türkiye offered various areas of cooperation to the countries of the region and took various initiatives after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Fully aware of the sensitive security parameters of the Black Sea, Türkiye, aimed to create a cooperative environment in the region, to minimize the risks of deterioration of stability in the maritime domain and always to keep the Black Sea out of geopolitical competition. With this policy, which was shaped under the regional ownership narrative, Türkiye aimed to

cooperate with the countries of the region in the fields of economy and security.

Türkiye's foreign policy has recently taken on a more autonomous course, less directly tied to the policies of the EU or NATO. In particular, the Black Sea region stands out as an area where Türkiye has charted an independent and distinctive course (Shlykov, 2023, p. 141). In this regard, Türkiye has a unique Black Sea policy with three pillars for the security and the stability of the Black Sea region. These pillars are as follows:

1) to implement the Montreux Convention literally and support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the regional countries (from a political perspective);

2) to maintain cooperation activities (such as BSEC and bilateral) with all countries in the Black Sea region (from an economic perspective);

3) to continue the implementation of established security cooperation and initiatives such as BLACKSEAFOR, OBSH, and CSBM (from a security perspective).

Adhering to International Law

The Montreux Convention of 1936, which was accepted as the most important political document just after the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923, is of vital importance for Türkiye. Since its inception, the Montreux Convention, which has been implemented impartially even in the most difficult times such as the World War II and the Cold War era, has contributed to the establishment of peace and stability in the Black Sea region and to the prevention of conflicts. The Convention, which is a *sine qua non* for Türkiye, as well as for Russia, which makes it possible to block the expansion of non-regional forces and maintain Türkiye's exclusive role for its Western allies and Russia (Irkhin & Moskalenko, 2021, p. 508).

South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which had been seeking secession and independence from Georgia since the early 1990s, were supported by Russia. In the context of the conflict in

Georgia, Russia prevented Georgia from taking these regions under its control with a military operation in 2008. Türkiye, which had the opportunity to practice its policy on the region, was not an active party because of its relations with both countries and acted in a restrained manner during this war. At the same time, Türkiye implemented the provisions of the Montreux Convention and did not allow the passage of two naval hospital ships sent by the U.S. to Georgia to provide aid and to prevent the escalation of tensions (Elmas, 2018, p. 347).

Regarding Crimea joining Russia in 2014, Türkiye took an anti-Russian stance, stating that it recognized Crimea as a part of Ukraine and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁸ Similarly, regarding the Kerch Strait incident in 2018, Türkiye took a stance against Russia's seizure of three Ukrainian naval ships which were sailing from Odessa to Mariupol in the Sea of Azov, while Türkiye did not accept Ukraine's request to close the Turkish Straits (Sıvış, 2019, pp. 567—570).

The Russian special military operation in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has negatively impacted the regional security and has become one of the most important issues on the global agenda. Since the beginning of the conflict, Türkiye has made various attempts to end the conflict and ensure a permanent ceasefire within the scope of its regional ownership policy in the Black Sea region. In order to ensure this aim, Türkiye has defined the ongoing situation between Russia and Ukraine as a 'state of war' and has implemented the restrictive provisions of the Montreux Convention for the nations at war⁹

⁸ TBMM Başkanı Şentop: Türkiye, Kırım'ın İlhakını Tanımamıştır, Tanımayacaktır // Anadolu Ajansı. 25.10.2022. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/tbmm-baskani-sentop-turkiye-kirimin-ilhakini-tanimamistir-tanimayacaktır/2720157> (accessed: 10.11.2022).

⁹ Per Art.19 of The Montreux Convention, it is forbidden for warships of the countries being at war to pass through the straits if Türkiye is not at war in time of war. If Türkiye is at war, per Art.20 Turkish government will be able to act as it wishes regarding the passage of warships.

since February 27, 2022.¹⁰ In order to prevent further escalation of tensions in the region, NATO members and third-party countries have been advised not to operate their warships through the straits.

Supporting Economic Cooperation in the Black Sea

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new states of the Black Sea region began to strengthen their economies in order to consolidate their sovereignty. Türkiye has tried to establish economic cooperation with the countries of the region in the newly formed political geography and to play an active role in ensuring the stability of the region.¹¹ In this context, on the initiative of Türkiye, BSEC was established on June 25, 1992 with the Istanbul Summit to develop bilateral and multilateral relations.¹² The fact that the Black Sea region is rich in energy resources and includes energy transit routes and energy transportation lines

See: The Montreux Convention. 1936 // UN Treaty Collection. URL: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20173/v173.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2022).

¹⁰ Malsin J. Turkey Says War Exists in Black Sea, Allowing it to Block Russian Navy // The Wall Street Journal. February 27, 2022. URL: <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-02-26/card/turkey-says-war-exists-in-black-sea-allowing-it-to-block-russian-navy-uDQCa9dMZsNGZLQsfWYg> (accessed: 24.10.2022).

¹¹ Apakan E. Türkiye's Approach to the Black Sea Region and the Organization of The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) // Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-approach-to-the-black-sea-region-and-to-the-organization-of-the-black-sea-economic-cooperation-_bsec_-.tr.mfa (accessed: 24.10.2022).

¹² The BSEC, a regional economic cooperation organization, was established with the Istanbul Summit held on June 25, 1992. Its Permanent Secretariat, which was put into service in 1994, is located in Istanbul. The BSEC has 13 members: Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Greece. See: Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) // Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-black-sea-economic-cooperation.en.mfa> (accessed: 22.10.2022).

spotlights the necessity of the BSEC (Bakan & Güven, 2021, pp. 533—534). The BSEC aims to benefit from the complementary aspects of the economies of the member countries, to establish cooperation in areas such as economy and trade, and to ensure the free movement of goods and services in the Black Sea region. It is worth mentioning that, despite its extensive projects, the BSEC has failed to evolve into a robust regional framework that could effectively enhance economic and trade cooperation. As a result of these criticisms of the BSEC, there are suggestions that the organization should prioritize specific initiatives that may not be as grand in scale but would yield tangible economic advantages (Eshba, 2013, p. 45).

Türkiye's approach to transportation routes became more accommodating to Russian interests, leading to the development of stronger political relations. Consequently, the *Blue Stream* pipeline, a significant infrastructure that transports natural gas from Russia to Türkiye through the Black Sea, successfully started operations in 2003 (Balta, 2019, pp. 83—84). Natural gas transfer activities of the *TurkStream* to both Türkiye and Europe via the *Blue Stream* and *TurkStream* pipelines, and the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant by the Russian state company Rosatom are the main areas of cooperation in the Black Sea region between Türkiye and the Russian Federation. With the *Blue Stream* pipeline, which was launched in 2003, Russia transports 16 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually to Türkiye via the Black Sea.¹³ With the agreement signed in 2016, the *TurkStream* carries natural gas from Russia, first to Türkiye and then to Europe over the Black Sea. Gas supplies through the *TurkStream* pipeline with an annual capacity of 16 billion cubic meters started on January 1, 2020.¹⁴

¹³ The Blue Stream Pipeline Project, Europe // Hydrocarbons Technology. URL: <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/bluestream-pipeline/> (accessed: 24.10.2022).

¹⁴ Karabay Z. B. 34.8 Billion Cubic Meters of Gas Carried Through TurkStream in 2 Years // Anadolu

In addition to Russian gas pipelines, there are also alternative infrastructure projects in the region. Due to its access to the Black Sea and its road connections to the major energy exporting and importing countries, Georgia occupies a strategic position on the East — West and North — South energy trade routes. The Baku — Tbilisi — Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline is being expanded to connect with Trans-Anatolia natural gas pipeline. While 200 million barrels of oil per year pass through the Turkish straits via the Baku — Supsa line, 260 billion cubic meters of natural gas, which corresponds to one third of Russia's production, reach the world markets through the Turkish straits via existing pipelines in the Black Sea or liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers.¹⁵

Türkiye takes all measures to support economic cooperation in the Black Sea region and to ensure the uninterrupted passage of commercial vessels through the Turkish straits. For example, while unprecedented heavy economic sanctions are being imposed by the West on Russia on a global scale, since Türkiye has good relations with both countries, Türkiye became a counterpart in solving the problems through dialogue and did not participate in the sanctions imposed on Russia.¹⁶ On the other hand, Russia's blockade and Ukraine's mining of the ports have made it difficult for commercial ships to leave Ukrainian ports, resulting in a global food crisis.

Türkiye ensured the involvement of the UN Secretary General in the process through its mediation and facilitation activities. On July 22,

Agency. January 7, 2022. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/energy-projects/348-billion-cubic-meters-of-gas-carried-through-turkstream-in-2-years/34380#> (accessed: 24.10.2022).

¹⁵ Turkey — Oil and Gas // International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. URL: <https://www.trade.gov/energy-resource-guide-turkey-oil-and-gas> (accessed: 24.10.2022).

¹⁶ Gökçelik Ş. B. Rusya — Ukrayna Savaşı'nda Türkiye'nin Arabulucu Rolü // AVİM. 11.04.2022. URL: <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Yorum/RUSYA-UKRAYNA-SAVASI-NDA-TURKIYE-NIN-ARABULUCU-ROLU> (accessed: 05.12.2022).

2022, the first step was taken by signing “The Initiative Certificate of Secure Shipment of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports” and in order to manage the activities, a Joint Coordination Center was established in Istanbul on July 27, 2022. The officials from Ukraine, Russia, Türkiye, and the UN are working at the Joint Coordination Center and grain products were shipped safely from three Ukrainian ports (Odessa, Chornomorsk, and Yuzhne).¹⁷ Between August 1, 2022 and December 17, 2022, more than 14 million tons of grain were transported by 560 ships,¹⁸ thanks to the policy pursued by Türkiye grain prices, which increased rapidly in the world, decreased. In addition, Türkiye also took the necessary actions to transfer of the grain to the poor and needy countries.

Ensuring Security in the Black Sea

In order to maintain peace and stability in the Black Sea, to enhance regional cooperative activities and mutual solidarity, and to strengthen good neighborly relations, BLACKSEAFOR was established with the signing of the “BLACKSEAFOR Establishment Agreement” in Istanbul on April 2, 2001. Its establishment was the natural result of the naval exercises conducted since 1998 with the participation of the Black Sea littoral states. By signing this agreement, for the first time in the history of the region, the representatives of the littoral states of the Black Sea demonstrated their determination to transform the Navy Forces into a joint on-call force by coming together to promote good relations, mutual

understanding, friendship, and regional stability. Along with other maritime initiatives, BLACKSEAFOR has been sustained to strengthen mutual trust among the littoral states, to prevent polarization in the region and to minimize the possible instabilities that could arise due to this aspect, thus serving the security needs of all littoral states and the countries using the Black Sea.

However, the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the joining of Crimea to the Russian Federation in 2014 negatively affected the mutual trust environment among the countries of the region. Thus, the command of BLACKSEAFOR was handed over to Bulgaria after the crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations in March 2014. Nevertheless, as a result of the crisis and joining of Crimea to Russia, BLACKSEAFOR activities have been suspended.¹⁹

Another initiative launched by Türkiye, together with the other Black Sea littoral states, to ensure security and cooperation in the region is the CSBM. Within the scope of CSBM, intercourses and information exchange activities between the Naval Forces were carried out, and various cooperation activities and invitations to naval bases were performed (Uslu, 2019, pp. 43—44).

Additionally, Türkiye launched OBSH on March 1, 2004 in order to contribute to the maritime security in the Black Sea. In this context, Naval Forces units such as patrol boats, maritime patrol aircrafts (MPAs), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have been regularly deployed in the Black Sea to show flag and presence, to monitor and control of the activities of merchant ships which are considered to be related to terrorism/illegal activities, and to monitor the activities of the ships passing through the Turkish Straits (Erkek, 2006,

¹⁷ BM Müşterek Koordinasyon Merkezi'nin İstanbul'da Açılışını Memnuniyetle Karşıladi // United Nations Türkiye. 29.07.2022. URL: <https://turkiye.un.org/tr/192587-bm-m%C3%BC%C5%9Fterek-koordinasyon-merkezinin-i%CC%87stanbulda-a%C3%A7%C4%B1%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1n%C4%B1-memnuniyetle-kar%C5%9F%C4%B1lad%C4%B1> (accessed: 04.12.2022).

¹⁸ Tahıl Koridorundan 14 Milyon Tondan Fazla Tahıl Taşındı // TRT Haber. 17.12.2022. URL: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/tahil-koridorundan-14-milyon-tondan-fazla-tahil-tasindi-731483.html> (accessed: 18.12.2022).

¹⁹ Mamedov R., Pylova O. On the Road to “Strategic Depth” in the Black Sea Region // Russian International Affairs Council. March 6, 2019. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/on-the-road-to-strategic-depth-in-the-black-sea-region/> (accessed: 18.12.2022).

pp. 250—275). Moreover, to contribute to the security of the maritime area, the Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Agencies Cooperation Forum (BSCF) was established followed by a meeting held in Istanbul on November 7—9, 2006 (Uslu, 2019, p. 47).

In the recent period when security concerns in the Black Sea have increased, NATO's efforts to enhance its presence in the region have come to the fore. According to NATO, Russia's making use of the Black Sea Fleet assets to transfer power, especially to the Eastern Mediterranean and Syria caused the Black Sea to be perceived that it becomes one of the regions where it should be alerted against Russia (Hodges, Horrell & Kuz, 2022). Türkiye, as a member of NATO, actively participates in naval exercises and maneuvers in the Black Sea. Following the NATO summit in April 2019, a significant naval exercise called "Sea Shield 19" took place in the region, involving ships from Romania, Bulgaria, Canada, Greece, the Netherlands, and Türkiye (Avatkov & Gudev, 2021, p. 356).

On the other hand, Türkiye avoids the global competition in the Black Sea. Türkiye has sought to maintain the regional initiatives which it has put into practice. Despite Ankara's strong economic ties with Moscow and their rapid development, Türkiye has still taken measures to maintain the balance of power in the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean, and the Near and Middle East. In essence, Türkiye aims to prevent Russia from gaining too much influence in these regions. These actions demonstrate that Türkiye prioritizes its own security over economic gains in its foreign policy, especially when dealing with Russia. This strategic approach is known as hedging (Shlykov, 2023, p. 155).

Türkiye's Role in the Black Sea Energy Security

Türkiye became an energy corridor after the discovery of hydrocarbon-rich resources in the Caspian Sea basin, and the need to transport

oil and natural gas to Europe and the world markets. The natural gas pipelines reaching Türkiye from Russia are *Blue Stream* and *TurkStream*. The *Blue Stream* natural gas pipeline, which transports Russian natural gas to Türkiye, was officially opened in 2005 with a ceremony in Samsun (Uçarol, 2015, p. 1334). In addition, the "Southern Gas Corridor," supported by the EU to create an alternative to Russian gas was built to transport the natural gas produced in Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz natural gas field to Türkiye and then to Europe. As of December 31, 2020, the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy through the *Trans Adriatic Pipeline* (TAP), which is connected to the *Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline* (TANAP) of Türkiye as a part of the Southern Gas Corridor, was initiated.²⁰

According to analysts, the natural gas pipelines between Türkiye and Russia and the energy supply system add an important dimension to the relations between the two countries. Moreover, Türkiye's strategy to establish an energy hub coincides with the strategy of supplying energy to the world markets in line with the Russia's goal of maintaining a regional and global influence. However, as part of the search for alternatives to the energy crisis that emerged in Europe following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as a result of the negotiations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan to contribute to the energy supply security in Europe, it is planned to double the annual natural gas shipment of 16 billion cubic meters in the TANAP pipeline to reach a capacity of 32 billion cubic meters in a short period of time.²¹

²⁰ Güngör G. Hazar Denizi Üzerinden Doğu — Batı Bağlantısı İçin Fırsatlar // AVİM. 14.04.2021. URL: <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/HAZAR-DENIZI-UZERINDEN-DOGU-BATI-BAGLANTISI-ICIN-FIRSATLAR> (accessed: 11.12.2022).

²¹ TANAP'ın Kapasitesi İki Katına Çıkarılacak // T.C. Enerji ve Tabii Kaynaklar Bakanlığı. 06.10.2022. URL: <https://enerji.gov.tr/haber-detay?id=21046> (accessed: 07.12.2022).

In addition to these projects, which increase the strategic importance of the Black Sea, following the cancellation of the South Stream project, which was planned to transport Russian natural gas to Europe and through Bulgaria during the visit of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to Türkiye on December 1, 2014, as a new project, the *TurkStream* natural gas pipeline, which aims to deliver Russian natural gas to Türkiye and later to Europe, was put into operation on January 8, 2020 and Russia has strengthened its position as a gas exporter (Ayvazyan, 2020, p. 81). 34.8 billion cubic meters of natural gas have been transported to Europe through the *TurkStream* within 2 years.²²

The U.S. stated that it opposes the *TurkStream* project which makes Türkiye a transition point for energy transit to Europe, on the ground that “Europe will increase its energy dependence on Russia and it will destabilize Ukraine’s economic and strategic stability,” but the countries of the region have expressed their willingness to join the project.²³ Currently, Bulgaria supplies its annual 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas needs through *TurkStream*. Besides, the Baku — Tbilisi — Erzurum natural gas pipeline and TANAP were incepted in 2007 and 2019, respectively. TANAP meets Türkiye’s energy needs and also makes Türkiye a hub for energy supplies to Europe was launched. As a part of the Southern Gas Corridor (Erbaş, 2018, pp. 26—28), Azerbaijan’s natural gas is exported to Europe through TANAP, which passes all over Türkiye and connects to TAP.

²² TürkAkım Üzerinden 2 Yılda Türkiye ve Avrupa’ya 34,8 Milyar Metreküp Gaz Taşındı // Anadolu Ajansı. 07.01.2022. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkakim-uzerinden-2-yilda-turkiye-ve-avrupaya-34-8-milyar-metrekup-gaz-tasindi/2467928> (accessed: 11.12.2022).

²³ A New Energy Policy for Europe: The Significance of Ukraine // Council on Geostrategy. January 7, 2022. URL: <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/a-new-energy-policy-for-europe-the-significance-of-ukraine/> (accessed: 11.12.2022).

Moreover, having one of the largest service and special vessels fleet with 2 seismic research and 4 drilling vessels, as a result of its research and drilling efforts for hydrocarbon resources for years, Türkiye discovered a total of 540 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the Black Sea in 2020 and 2021. This makes the need of maintaining security and stability in the Black Sea more important than ever. The discovery, made at a distance of 170 km from the mainland, was the largest seaborne discovery in 2020.²⁴ The natural gas field was found within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Türkiye and once again demonstrated the significance of the Turkish EEZ of which borders were determined in 1986 with a treaty with the Soviet Union.

On February 24, 2022, after the special military operation launched by the Russia in Ukraine, the Western states one after another sanctioned Russia and tended to reduce the dependency on the energy sources taken from Russia. Having losses in terms of economic indicators has tried to respond to these sanctions through energy, which is an important national power in its hands, Russia’s turning off one turbine of the Nord Stream 1 natural gas pipeline due to repair work and reduced by 75% of natural gas which was transported to Europe.²⁵ On the other hand, the *Nord Stream 1* and *Nord Stream 2* natural gas pipelines experienced a series of clandestine bombings and underwater gas leaks on September 26th, 2022. The identities of the perpetrators and the motives for the sabotage remain debated. President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin claimed in an interview that the idea that

²⁴ Karadeniz’deki Keşif Gaz Talebinin Yüzde 22’sini 40 Yıl Boyunca Karşılatabilecek // Anadolu Ajansı. 19.10.2020. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/karadenizdeki-kesif-gaz-talebinin-yuzde-22sini-40-yil-boyunca-karsilatabilecek/2011244> (accessed: 02.12.2022).

²⁵ Nord Stream 1 Gas Supply Cut Aimed at Sowing Uncertainty, Germany Warns // Reuters. June 15, 2022. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220623123156/https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/german-minister-accuses-russia-finding-excuse-cut-nord-stream-1-gas-2022-06-15/> (accessed: 02.09.2023).

the terrorist attack on the *Nord Stream* was carried out by some Ukrainian activists completely nonsense. He also said that an explosion of such power, at such depth, can be carried out only by specialists, supported by the entire power of the state, which has certain technologies.²⁶ These events led to an increase in gas prices in Europe. Therefore, the EU started to search for alternative energy sources.²⁷

After the special military operation, the EU issued a statement as a result of the Versailles Summit, announcing that it will stop all energy purchases from Russia until 2030, as well as it will support the LNG infrastructure projects within the Union, and it will give importance to the new pipeline projects in this period.²⁸ As the largest natural gas producer, the USA has declared that it will support the EU and be an alternative to Russia.²⁹ Therefore, the decision taken at the Paris Summit of EU Leaders on March 10—11, 2022, forced countries to turn to alternatives. Nigeria, Morocco, and West African countries, for instance, signed a memorandum on the construction of the Morocco — Nigeria natural gas pipeline. It was also noted that this pipeline will be connected to the Maghreb —

²⁶ Putin Called Nonsense the Version About the Undermining of Nord Streams by Ukrainian Activists // TASS. March 14, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/17264835> (accessed: 26.09.2023).

²⁷ Nord Stream 1: How Russia Is Cutting Gas Supplies to Europe // BBC News. September 29, 2022. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60131520> (accessed: 10.12.2022).

²⁸ Informal Meeting of Heads of State or Government, Versailles // EU Council. March 10—11, 2022. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2022/03/10-11/> (accessed: 10.12.2022).

²⁹ Fact Sheet: United States and European Commission Announce Task Force to Reduce Europe's Dependence on Russian Fossil Fuels // The White House. March 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/25/fact-sheet-united-states-and-european-commission-announce-task-force-to-reduce-europes-dependence-on-russian-fossil-fuels/#:~:text=Today%2C%20President%20Joe%20Biden%20and,war%20of%20choice%20against%20Ukraine.> (accessed: 10.12.2022).

Europe gas pipeline.³⁰ In addition, the German Chancellor visited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, and signed a contract with the UAE on the transfer of LNG.³¹

Although the West is searching for energy transportation routes alternative to Russia, it is believed that the Black Sea region will continue to be an important energy hub. It is observed that in the energy sector, Türkiye keeps simultaneously supplying the Caspian Sea natural gas from Azerbaijan and it has rapidly developed the Project to use natural gas resources that have been explored in the Black Sea. The Black Sea geography, which is connected to Southeast Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and also to the Mediterranean Sea is an extremely vital region for Türkiye's regional and global strategy.

In addition to the existing transportation lines, the Black Sea has continued to be brought up in many projects as it provides uninterrupted energy supply and energy security. In Astana Summit on October 12—13, 2022, RF proposed to Türkiye to establish an energy center including a new pipeline to connect with TurkStream. Türkiye is preparing for the infrastructure in Trakya which is close to the EU.³²

³⁰ Kemp Y. Morocco — Nigeria Gas Project Vital to Africa's Energy Security // ESI Africa. November 8, 2023. URL: <https://www.esi-africa.com/research-and-development/morocco-nigeria-gas-project-vital-to-africa-and-the-energy-link-to-europe/#:~:text=The%20pipeline%20will%20be%20located,reach%20the%20European%20gas%20network.> (accessed: 10.11.2023).

³¹ Almanya LNG Tedariki Konusunda BAE İle El Sıkıştı // Bloomberg HT. 26.09.2022. URL: <https://www.bloomberght.com/almanya-lng-tedariki-konusunda-bae-ile-el-sikisti-2315884> (accessed: 01.12.2022).

³² Vladimir Putin Proposed Creating a Gas Hub in Turkey // Vedomosti. October 12, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2022/10/12/945202-miller-otsenil-defitsit> (accessed: 28.09.2023).

Conclusion

During the Cold War era, the Black Sea was a region where the Montreux regime was implemented and a secluded region where the deterioration of the *status quo* was not desired. After the Cold War, it became a region brought to the agenda of the international public at different intervals. Since the early 1990s, a new political geography has emerged in the Black Sea region, and leading to changes in the policies of states. The energy transportation lines passing through the Black Sea and the discovery of new energy sources led to the updating of energy security issues in the Black Sea. For Türkiye which expresses the desire to be an energy corridor at all levels, the Black Sea should also be a region where stability is ensured, and the continuity of energy supply are ensured.

Türkiye and Russia, two important military and political powers in the arena in the Black Sea region, embrace a policy that prioritizes regional cooperation rather than a competitive policy. In recent years, the perception of Bulgaria and Romania towards Russia has been defined as an unreliable littoral in the region, which led them to distance themselves not only from cooperation with Russia, but also from regional initiatives. Moreover, these countries requested support from NATO and the USA to support their security. This situation has enabled non-regional actors to increase their presence in the region.

Türkiye, in accordance with the rules of international law, carries out a policy that heightens economic cooperation activities and pursues a three-pillar policy in the Black Sea. This enables and supports cooperation activities in political, economic, and security dimensions. If a problem arises in one pillar of this policy, the other pillar tries to balance the others. For example, Türkiye, on February 27, 2022, just 3 days after the war in Ukraine, defined the crisis between the two countries as a state of war and activated the restrictive provisions of the Montreux Convention. Türkiye closed the

Turkish Straits to the ships of the warring parties and informed other countries through diplomatic channels, advising them not to send their ships to the Black Sea. Thus, it can be said that Türkiye once again prevented further escalation of the tensions in the Black Sea by implementing the Montreux regime.

When faced with an economic problem, the political and security pillars were activated. Similarly, the world's food crisis worsened with the war and affected the whole world. It was solved by activating the security pillar by signing the Grain Corridor Agreement with the two countries including the UN and by establishing a Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul. These initiatives led to the decrease of food prices in the world. Likewise, regarding the drifting mine threat encountered in the Black Sea, Türkiye safeguarded commercial ships and the energy flow through the Turkish Straits by initiating reconnaissance and surveillance activities with the assets of Turkish Naval Forces. In addition, Türkiye advocates the problems in the Black Sea need to be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy, in an appropriate manner in accordance with international law. Although relations between Türkiye and Russia have deteriorated from time to time since the early 1990s, they have always managed to find a way out through dialogue and diplomacy, and in general, they have made significant progress based on cooperation, in the political, economic, trade and energy fields. The balance policy has provided absolute benefits to all countries of the region with a win-win policy.

Türkiye conducts mediation and facilitation roles impartially during wartime in accordance with the principle of regional ownership. Additionally, a highly constructive policy, the strict implementation of the Montreux provisions, the meetings of the parties in Antalya and Istanbul, the shipment of Ukrainian grain to the world markets by establishing the Grain Corridor Agreement, and concrete developments such as the captive exchange have been the results of Türkiye's Black Sea

policy. Türkiye's Black Sea policy has made promising contributions to restoring security and stability in the Black Sea.

Due to its geostrategic location, Türkiye occupies a place between the countries that have the energy and the countries that need energy. In addition, Türkiye is emerging as a regional actor that can maintain its stability in the problems that have arisen in its peripheral regions, such as North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Russian-Ukrainian conflicts in the north. Because of its proactive foreign policy, Türkiye has played the role of a peacemaker in many problems in its neighborhood. With its stable structure and as a

regional actor, Türkiye is an ideal transit country for energy transportation lines. Considering the presence of too many actors in the Eastern Mediterranean and the existence of the factors that make cooperation difficult, it is believed that the Black Sea can be an important region in terms of energy in the future like the Eastern Mediterranean. From the past to the present, Türkiye emerges as a reliable actor in ensuring the Black Sea security and energy supply security. The Black Sea has the potential to become a safe zone with more resources every day through new sources of energy supply that will flow uninterruptedly to countries in need thanks to Türkiye.

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