



SOVEREIGNTY AND SYNERGY: INTEGRATING MONTREUX CONVENTION COMPLIANCE INTO EU BLACK SEA SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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The Strategic Blind Spot

The European Unions Black Sea Strategy, formally adopted on May 28, 2025, declares ambitions for regional "security, prosperity, and resilience" yet systematically overlooks the legal bedrock of Black Sea stability: Türkiye's authority under the 1936 Montreux Convention. This omission is not merely procedural but strategic, as the convention grants Türkiye exclusive governance over the Turkish Straits — role critical to balancing NATO-Russian tensions and preventing non-littoral militarization. By marginalizing this treaty-based custodianship, the EU undermines its own security objectives and risks destabilizing the Black Sea through diplomatic negligence.[1]

Montreux Convention: Türkiye's Non-Negotiable Black Sea Framework

The 1936 Montreux Convention remains the cornerstone of Black Sea security, granting Türkiye exclusive authority to regulate naval transit through the Turkish Straits. This treaty enshrines Türkiye's sovereignty to balance strategic interests by restricting non-littoral warships' tonnage, duration of stay, and weaponry while allowing civilian passage during peacetime.[2]

The EUs May 2025 strategy ignores this legal architecture. Its proposed "Maritime Security Hub" and "Connectivity Agenda" omit mechanisms acknowledging Türkiye's regulatory role, instead centralizing threat monitoring under EU/NATO control. For instance, the Hubs real-time surveillance framework lacks provisions for Türkiye's Montreux-mandated oversight of naval access, despite Türkiye possessing 16 frigates and 13 submarines — regions most capable navy. Similarly, the — billion connectivity investments prioritize EU geopolitical objectives (e.g., bypassing Russia) without conditioning projects on Montreux-compliant transit protocols.[3]

This omission invites strategic erosion: Externalizing security to NATO-led initiatives [] demining operations under the Bulgaria-Romania-Türkiye trilateral [] Türkiye's custodial authority. Such precedents risk destabilization by encouraging non-compliance, as seen when the U.S. pressured Türkiye to admit UK minehunters in 2024, testing treaty limits.[4]

Flawed Foundations of the EU Strategy

The EU's strategy entrenches asymmetric cooperation by relegating Türkiye to peripheral "partner" status, despite its proven expertise in regional security frameworks like Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH). While OBSH has facilitated intelligence sharing and mine-clearing coordination since 2004, the EU's Maritime Security Hub [] exclusively by Brussels and NATO [] Türkiye's command structures, despite its operational superiority in littoral surveillance.[5]

The strategy's resilience rhetoric further reveals hypocrisy. Environmental and demining programs [] the Bulgaria-Romania-Türkiye trilateral [] framed as EU-led initiatives, sidelining Türkiye's Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) environmental working groups. This top-down dynamic ignores BSEC's 2024 Mine Action Plan, which established Türkiye as the regional demining coordinator, and instead centralizes authority under the EU's Maritime Security Hub. Moreover, NATO-EU maritime initiatives risk escalating nuclear brinkmanship in the Black Sea, where Russia's tactical nuclear deployments remain unaddressed[6]

Functional Cooperation: A Türkiye-Led Alternative

A constructive path forward requires embedding EU initiatives within Türkiye's established regional frameworks, thus reconciling security ambitions with treaty obligations and local expertise. For maritime security, the EU's proposed real-time threat monitoring should be integrated into the operational architecture of Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH), which has coordinated multinational naval patrols and intelligence sharing since 2004 under Turkish command. This would not only leverage Türkiye's proven surveillance capabilities but also ensure Montreux Convention compliance in all naval activities.[7]

In the realm of demining, EU-funded efforts should be subordinated to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) mechanisms, where Türkiye already leads regional mine action initiatives. BSEC's 2024 Mine Action Plan, which designates Türkiye as coordinator, offers a ready-made platform for transparent, regionally owned operations [] sharply with the top-down approach of the EU's Maritime Security Hub.[8]

For connectivity investments, conditioning EU funding on Montreux-compliant transit protocols would safeguard both legal integrity and regional trust. Such conditionality would prevent the circumvention of Türkiye's regulatory authority and align infrastructure development with established security norms.[9]

BSECs Project Development Fund [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in regional infrastructure [REDACTED] Türkiye's capacity to steward EU connectivity investments while ensuring Montreux compliance. Similarly, BSECs 2024 energy corridors offer a blueprint for integrating EU goals with Türkiye's energy-security priorities. Embedding EU actions within Turkish-led frameworks would not only enhance conflict prevention but also foster trust and resilience, aligning with the EU's stated objectives while respecting the region's legal and political realities.[10]

Sovereignty as Stabilizer

The EU's transactional, top-down approach to Black Sea security [REDACTED] rhetorically committed to resilience [REDACTED] risks fueling regional distrust and eroding the foundational legal order established by the Montreux Convention. By marginalizing Türkiye's custodial authority and prioritizing external frameworks over regional mechanisms, the strategy undermines both its own objectives and the stability of the Black Sea basin. To avoid strategic failure, the EU must move beyond symbolic partnership and embed its initiatives within Türkiye's established functional models, such as Operation Black Sea Harmony and BSEC-led demining. Conditioning EU investments on Montreux compliance would affirm Türkiye's indispensable role as the Black Sea's legal custodian, transforming transactional diplomacy into enduring stability. Only through such an approach can the EU's ambitions align with the region's realities, ensuring that sovereignty remains the stabilizing force in the Black Sea.

*Picture: [dunya.com](https://www.dunya.com)

[1] European Parliament Think Tank, EU Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region, May 22, 2025 ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "The Foundational Pillars of Stability in the Black Sea," Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), June 3, 2025 , <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/THE-FOUNDATIONAL-PILLARS-OF-STABILITY-IN-THE-BLACK-SEA>; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "Integrating NATO's Cybersecurity and Maritime Strategy: Upholding the Montreux Convention," April 24, 2025, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/INTEGRATING-NATO-S-CYBERSECURITY-AND-MARITIME-STRATEGY-UPHOLDING-THE-MONTREUX-CONVENTION>

[2] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "The Foundational Pillars of Stability in the Black Sea ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, " Efforts To Change Or Circumvent The Provisions Of The 1936 Montreux Straits Convention," Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), March 28, 2024, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/EFFORTS-TO-CHANGE-OR-CIRCUMVENT-THE-PROVISIONS-OF-THE-1936-MONTREUX-STRAITS-CONVENTION>

[3] European Commission, "EU Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region," May 28, 2025, 9, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/170d9b3a-d45f-4169-80fa-9adb753c0921_en?filename=EU+Strategic+Approach+Black+Sea+Strategy.pdf ;

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[4] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, " Integrating NATO's Cybersecurity and Maritime Strategy: Upholding the Montreux Convention ; "The Montreux Convention and NATO's Presence in the Black Sea," Atlantic Forum, May 24, 2024, <https://www.atlantic-forum.com/atlantica/the-montreux-convention-and-natos-presence-in-the-black-sea>

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[6] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "Integrating NATO's Cybersecurity and Maritime Strategy," ; BSEC, "Joint Demining Initiative Action Plan," March 15, 2024, 4
<https://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/culture/action-plan>

[7] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "Türkiyes Constructive Vision, EUs Divisive Diplomacy in Black Sea and Central Asia," ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "The Foundational Pillars of Stability in the Black Sea

[8] BSEC, "Joint Demining Initiative Action Plan," ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "Integrating NATO's Cybersecurity and Maritime Strategy: Upholding the Montreux Convention"

[9] European Commission, "EU Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region," May 28, 2025, 11, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/170d9b3a-d45f-4169-80fa-9adb753c0921_en?filename=EU+Strategic+Approach+Black+Sea+Strategy.pdf .

[10] United Nations, "Black Sea Grain Initiative Joint Coordination Centre," 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative>

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