

# Restricted Influence Over the Black Sea: The Limitations of the European Union's Role <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The Black Sea has been an important region for the international actors to consider with its countries with diverse backgrounds, complicated relations, and attempts to its region-building. European Union has been involved in Black Sea dynamics, yet the effectiveness of its role in the region is questionable. This study aims to show European Union's limitations on a more significant role in the Black Sea region. The article explains three main limitations: seeing its role mainly from a trade perspective, the clashing interests of several international actors, and differences among member states. At first, the article focuses on European Union's involvement in the Black Sea to acknowledge these limitations. The specific focus on the Russian-Ukrainian war provides a fresh look at the European Union's role. How these limitations are reflected in this context can give a chance to the European Union for a more significant role while presenting new challenges to tackle. However, this study argues that current European Union policies do not provide a comprehensive approach. The article suggests that having a security dimension in its Black Sea policies, establishing more comprehensive relations with other international actors, and providing unanimity among member states about the Black Sea policies can help the European Union to overcome its limitations.*

**Keywords:** European Union, Black Sea, EU Foreign Policy

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## Karadeniz Üzerinde Kısıtlı Etki: Avrupa Birliği'nin Rolündeki Sınırlandırıcı Faktörler

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### Öz

Karadeniz farklı geçmişlere sahip farklı ülkeleriyle, karmaşık ilişkileri ve bölge inşası girişimleriyle uluslararası aktörler için önemli bir bölge olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği bölgede etkin olan uluslararası aktörlerden birisi olduğu halde rolünün etkinliği sorgulanabilir. Bu çalışma Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz bölgesindeki rolünü sınırlandıran faktörlere odaklanmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği'nin rolüne sadece ticaret yönünden odaklanması, bölgedeki farklı aktörlerin çıkar çatışması ve üye devletler arası farklılar bu çalışmada sunulan sınırlandırıcı üç faktördür. Bu araştırma bu üç faktörü açıklamak için öncelikle Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikasının gelişimini açıklamaktadır. Sonrasında 2022 Rusya ve Ukrayna savaşına odaklanılması sınırlandırılan faktörlerin daha iyi anlaşılması için yeni bir çerçeve sağlamıştır. Bu sınırlandırıcı etkenlerin savaş bağlamındaki yansıması Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'de daha etkin bir role sahip olması için yeni bir fırsat yaratırken çözmesi gereken yeni problemleri de beraberinde getiriyor. Bu makale Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikalarının kapsamlı bir yaklaşıma sahip olmadığını ifade etmektedir. Avrupa Birliği'nin bu sınırlandırıcı faktörlerden kurtulması için güvenlik boyutunu da rolüne dahil etmesi gerektiğini, bölgedeki diğer uluslararası aktörlerle daha kapsayıcı ilişkiler kurmasını ve üye devletler arasında Karadeniz politikalarıyla ilgili görüş birliğini sağlaması gerektiğini savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa Birliği, Karadeniz, AB Dış Politikası

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## Introduction

The Black Sea region starts from Romania and Bulgaria, through Turkey, Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Even though it has a small territory, its specific characteristics attract European interests. By having divergent political, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds, Black Sea states constitute a distinct political agenda by engaging numerous actors in the region. The region's attractiveness increased in recent decades and having a conversation on the Black Sea politics has become highly important and unavoidable in global affairs. The European Union (EU) has been a well-grounded institution and a blueprint for region-building. While being a significant example of 'being a region,' it also contributes to world politics by actively engaging with the politics around its territory.

Throughout its decades of existence, European Union has been an impactful actor in the neighborhood areas. Its successful management of enlargement and implementing norms made the European Union a power of example for other regions. The European Union's role is essential to discuss when it comes to the Black Sea, yet it remains unclear. The research widely outlines how the European Union's interests and challenges play a role in implementing the EU policies. Regarding the European Union's role in the Black Sea politics, the recent developments in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict show the importance of discussing the European Union's limitations for a more influential role in the Black Sea.

The Ukrainian-Russian conflict is inevitable to acknowledge when it comes to discussing the Black Sea dynamics and its influence over world politics. The recent developments in the territory and the outbreak of the war between these two countries created new areas to discuss. As the days pass, the war between Russia and Ukraine creates new dynamics in world politics and international relations. Discussing the Ukrainian war is important to acknowledge the relationship between Russia and the West. When the war started, the world immediately reacted with diverse responses. The world mainly discussed the state responses, especially the Western states, alongside institutions like NATO. In this context, it is important to discuss where does Europe stand? The first days of the war showed that the EU's role in Black Sea politics, particularly Ukrainian politics, remains insufficient. However, close relations with Ukraine and possible membership negotiations make the EU's role in the region important.

Therefore, this article aims to search for the limitations of the European Union's role in the region and how the European Union can extend its influence over the Black Sea. Seeing the Black Sea primarily from a trade perspective, the clashing interests between the EU, Russia, China, and the US, and domestic differences among members' interests can be considered the European Union's limitations. These limitations can be observed in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Therefore, the article references the Russian-Ukrainian War to see European Union action. In this sphere, the first part of the article focuses on the context of the Black Sea region. Later, the developments of the European Union policies provide insights into the European Union's agenda on the Black Sea. Finally, the last part contributes to the gap by referencing the limitations of the European Union's role in the region by focusing on the Russian-Ukrainian War.

## The Black Sea: A Newborn Region

The Black Sea is a highly important region that needs to be discussed more intensely in world politics. Region's dynamics have been changing with their complex characteristics and affect the politics of the rest of the world. Even though the interest has been increasing in the region, the region's struggles remain unsolved. It is an important region with its strategic geography, bridging different worlds of the East and the West. The existing regional actors are nowhere to be seen when it comes to active engagement and cooperation in the region. The discussion on the 'regionness' of the region and the roles of external and internal actors have an important place in enhancing Black Sea politics. The concept of regionness is explained in Hettne and Söderbaum's work

(2000) as a comparative analytic tool for explaining the emergence of regions and the establishment of relevant actors in diverse contexts. Literature on regionalization has been attempting to identify ‘what is a region?’ and ‘how a certain entity can become a region?’ Hettne and Söderbaum aim to identify the degree of a particular area in order to assume it’s a distinct entity that can be considered a “relatively coherent territorial subsystem.” Regionness can be referred as the level of the region to be ‘more or less,’ and authors argue that the level of regionness can decrease and increase. (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000, p.461). Thus, regionness is explained in five different levels varying from regional space, regional complex, regional society, and regional community to region-state. These levels can provide people understanding of how regionness of a region has complex characteristics. The Black Sea has been a ‘region in the making,’ and its regionness has been shifting between different levels through the years under the influence of several actors and their actions.

Diving into the regional characteristics and problems provides actors with an agenda to discuss what should be done to achieve better results in their Black Sea policymaking. The Black Sea is an original territory to discuss with its authentic dynamics and different countries with distinct political, social, and cultural backgrounds. It has been facing a lot of political transitions. The region becomes an interesting area for all-powerful political actors by standing in the middle of the world. Its involvement in trade and economy with oil, gas, and trade routes attracts outsiders.

The end of the Cold War marked the new era for the Black Sea territory as the Black Sea transformed from being a passive zone to an active region that corridors between the West and the East. The region became an attractive place for international actors as well as local ones. Cooperation was much needed to eradicate the Soviet heritage and establish a region that meets the expectation of a region in recent decades. However, these cooperation attempts are restricted by numerous factors like unequal political and economic developments within the Black Sea states, nationalist movements, and the hostility between different regional players (Çelikpala, 2010, p. 287). Despite these new dynamics, the Black Sea did not get immediate attention from the global actors as the Western states and the international and regional institutions mostly paid attention to Central Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War.

As Black Sea’s region-building is more recent than the neighboring regions with post-Soviet heritage, international actors’ involvement in transforming the region “through internationalization, institutionalization, and democratization” has significance. These international actors would be the United States, NATO, and the EU, as all have diverging interests and experiences in regionalism (Triantaphyllou, 2014, p. 286).

### **European Union and the Black Sea Politics**

The involvement of the European Union in the Black Sea opened a new era for EU politics, especially in expanding its external policies. Even though Black Sea politics began to shape after the Cold War with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the European Union did not get involved with the region. The member states were not interested in interfering in this complex area. Yet, the fifth and sixth enlargements of the EU, namely the Eastern Enlargement, brought European Union to the borders of the Black Sea. 2007 was a significant year for the European Union due to its expansion through the new region with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. From that point, member states started to pay more attention to the region by developing new policies with new interests. The EU has aimed to have a well-governed neighborhood to avoid conflicts, organized crimes, and dysfunctional societies on their borders that will create problems (Fischer, 2009, p. 338).

The European Commission defines the Black Sea region as a “distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically located” (European Commission, 2007, p. 2). European Union sees the region as an opportunity that has the potential to carry out energy and transport flows, and a well-established region can

complement this potential. However, region-building is considered hard to establish with large populations, unresolved conflicts, environmental problems, and organized crimes. The European Union has been attempting to increase regional efficiency with some policies. For instance, Black Sea Synergy is one of the first and main EU initiatives dedicated to the Black Sea region. The main objective is to promote cooperation by developing a dialogue among the stakeholders. Black Sea Synergy provides guidelines for cooperative actions in diverse areas to achieve regional development. Its flexible approach can be attractive to the Black Sea states as participation in projects occurs on a voluntary basis (European Commission, 2007).

Black Sea Synergy is not the only initiative taken within the EU. The European Neighbourhood Policy is extended through the shores of the Black Sea with its eastern dimension. The eastern dimension specifically relies on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to enhance its involvement in the Black Sea cooperation. The Eastern Partnership started to strengthen cooperation in 2009 by using bilateral and multilateral means with three eastern members of the European Union: Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, and three South Caucasus countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia (Henderson and Weaver, 2010, p. 17). Poland and Sweden initiated the EaP to promote primarily bilateral relations with the support of multilateral agreements between these six countries. Today, the EaP supports the main global objectives like UN Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Agreement to increase stability and prosperity of the EU neighbouring countries as the extension of its foreign and security goals (European Commission, 2008).

To achieve its goals, the European Union developed different areas of interest in the context of the Black Sea. Securitization, promoting democracy, good governance, and human rights within the region can be considered primary interests. The EU members established ENP policies and initiatives for the Black Sea to meet these interests. According to European Strategy for the Black Sea resolution, the main goal was to develop coherence and visibility of the European Union's action in the Black Sea region (Garces de Los Fayos, 2013, p. 4). Emphasis was on security, energy, and socio-economic development, and the need for a separate budget for the policy implementation was discussed. The 2011 resolution critically examined the Black Sea Synergy for its deficiency in enhancing the EU goals and the lack of policy control since there was no Commission report since 2008. This criticism shows that there was dissatisfaction within the EU as well, and the lack of contribution to the policy implementation decreases the EU's attributed role in the region. Black Sea Synergy was welcomed very contently by the members when it was proposed after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. There were many expectations about the EU bringing political attention to the new coastline just like it does to the Mediterranean or Baltic Sea, but it remained insufficient (Garces de Los Fayos, 2013, p. 5).

The deficiency of Black Sea Synergy cannot be linked only to the European Union's efforts. The timing of the policy was also effective. The neighbourhood policy after the enlargement attempted to connect "two culturally and politically distinct areas." The partnership intensified in 2008 with the adaptation of Black Sea Synergy. Some members were reluctant to BSS as it could undermine the objectives of the Eastern Partnership. However, the outbreak of the war between Russia and Georgia over the Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not let it happen. The conflict provided a new catalyst for the Eastern Partnership while jeopardizing the effectiveness of other policies like the Black Sea Synergy (Garces de Los Fayos, 2013, p. 6). The Eastern Partnership became a solid external policy of the EU supported by governmental meetings and the involvement of civil society. Nonetheless, the Black Sea Synergy has been limited in its efforts to build partnerships because of the reluctance of third countries to participate in the project.

In the light of the Black Sea policies, the question of the European Union's commitment to the region arises. Most would argue that the EU lacks a shared strategic vision for effective involvement in its regional policies and practices (Triantaphyllou, 2014, p. 289). This argument can be discussed in light of the outbreak of the war between Ukraine and Russia. The early months of 2022 showed people that one of the most significant conflicts in the region is still strong. Some consider the war between these two states as an opportunity for the EU to

renew its strategies over the region (Synder, 2022). European Union, the institution that was created as an answer to war, can be a peace advocator and help the stabilization of the Black Sea region. Therefore, having Europe in the Black Sea respond to the regional challenges is important. Having the Black Sea vision on the EU agenda is necessary to improve the regional dynamics (Aurescu, 2011, p. 36).

## Method

The sources in the existing literature along with the policy documents published by the European Union regarding the Black Sea policies explain the ground of this qualitative research. Policy documents of international organizations appear as guiding resources for us to determine these organizations' goals, objectives, and limitations on the relevant subject. The documents of the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership policies published by the European Union provide information about the objectives and methods of the EU in the Black Sea. In this way, the European Union's goals and attitudes regarding the Black Sea policies are analyzed. The study determines the factors that caused the EU not to take a more active role in the region by looking at the differences in the theory and practice of these policies. EU's role is dependent on several factors like its attributed role, regional actors, and member states' interests, and these can explain the expected relationship between these limitations and the EU's role. The study aims to explain the factors limiting the role of the European Union in the Black Sea with a more realistic and up-to-date approach. Therefore, in the next step, this study uses the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War as a case study, and the factors limiting the EU are explained. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War has become one of the focal points of the Black Sea region, the European Union, and the whole world. It has deeply affected all the actors in this geography and the relations between them and continues to change the region's dynamics.

## Findings and Discussion

### The Limitations of the EU Role

The main argument of this paper is that there are limitations to the European Union's role in the Black Sea region. When it comes to Black Sea policies, the glass looks half full, half empty. There are attempts to enhance its role, yet there are also fallbacks that cause the deficiency of the European Union. Therefore, the limitations are categorized into three different aspects to provide an insight into the European Union's involvement in the region. Demonstrating these limitations of the European Union can provide a ground for explaining European Union's position in the Russian-Ukrainian war. This article focuses on the limitations before explaining the dynamics within the war context to achieve this goal.

Firstly, there is an identity problem for the European Union. How European Union defines itself and its role in the region carry importance due to its potential influence over the region. The prior problem in its identification is that it is mainly in the selected areas. For instance, European Union has been considering its role primarily from a trade perspective as a root for communication and trade between the regions. However, the security dimension of the involvement is often neglected in the European Union agenda. Even if they establish some level of involvement, the security policies and practices remain limited. The European Union could use a lot more focus on this dimension to increase its influence over the region.

From the trade perspective, European Union sees the Black Sea as a region with one of the greatest growths. However, the policymakers know the growth is uneven and relies mainly on the oil and gas exporting states. In addition, the growth is fragile because of the dependency on exports and the high level of corruption. The goal is to create a stable institutional sphere to achieve sustainable and fair growth. The European Union takes into account trade, transportation, energy, environment, fisheries, science, education, and agriculture when referring to its goal of future economic development in the region (European Parliament, 2007). The EU

considers itself a necessary partner in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), especially in guiding them into economic and legislative initiatives. To build a region, there is a need to meet the European standards to adopt the EU's technical and financial aspects effectively.

By pointing out the uneven but strong economic growth in the region, the European Union illuminates the sustainability of the oil and gas exporting states. Despite the growth, the fragility of the private sector threatens the improvement of the investment of local and global companies. Therefore, it is inevitable to aim to build room for economic opportunities to achieve better regional prosperity for its people and trading partners (European Parliament, 2007). These are the arguments of the European Parliament on its Black Sea policy approach. The policy approaches and practices show the audience that European Union prioritizes the economic aspects of development to enhance cooperation in the Black Sea. The European Union's history shows how economic cooperation can enhance regionalism and how further regional integration is possible through spillover of economic integration to other sectors like political, social, and cultural.

In fact, the patterns of the EU's regional development can provide an idea of why the European Union primarily focuses on the economic dimension. Trade has been an essential factor in European integration, especially in its early years. As it was the Union's primary objective, the European Union considers trade and economic development the key catalyzer. This limits its objective, to some extent, in determining its role over the Black Sea region.

Secondly, the problem of the relevance of the European Union limits its role in the Black Sea region. The region dynamics are essential to discuss here. There are several influential internal and external actors in the region, and their involvement degrades the EU's involvement in this region. There is an ongoing clash of interests as well as cooperation between the big powers of the EU, Russia, China, and the United States. The race between them becomes part of redefining the global order. Especially the competition between the United States and China leads European Union to have a secondary role in the region.

Region dynamics cannot be explained fully without mentioning the Russian dimension. In the latest century, Russia reemerged as a big power and a partner of the United States and the European Union. Putin's leadership prioritizes the state's advantages to maximize its economic gains while "minimizing perceived geopolitical losses resulting from the expansion of Western institutions" (Trenin, 2008, p. 104). Russia, under Putin, attempts to transform itself in line with the West to become a regional leader by rebuilding its domain (Krastev, 2008). Russia's standing is significant in demonstrating European Union efficiency. Because its choice to decline participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy limits the EU's influence area. Russia has seen the European Union as a "newcomer" and a potential regional power competitor. Kremlin has been concerned about the Eastern Partnership that led Russia to accept the Black Sea Synergy. However, Russia's approach toward the European Union has been uncertain, especially within the Black Sea institutions. For instance, Russia has been neutral on the EU's role within the BSEC while strongly opposing its involvement in the Bucharest Convention Against Pollution of the Black Sea (Garces de Los Fayos, 2013, p. 16).

Equivalently, the United States (US) is another country encountered in the Black Sea region as an influential political actor in the world. The significance of the United States' presence in Black Sea politics cannot be ignored when discussing the limitations of the European Union. The main factor of the US involvement in the Black Sea was energy. While it still carries the same importance, especially after 9/11, security and democracy became important determinants to consider in US policymaking. Some consider the US involvement in the region as a corridor. For the United States, the Black Sea has been a backdoor to the Caspian Sea for a long time. Especially from the '90s to the 2000s, the Black Sea was considered an "East-West corridor" (Delanoë and Konoplyov, 2014, p. 360). The 9/11 events, the War on Terror policies, and NATO extension to Black Sea states made the region more attractive for the United States. As the transit corridor, the Black Sea is considered part of a broader territory that links the New Silk Road by reconnecting states that the rivalry in the previous

decades has shattered. The US needs to influence the region as it would provide ground for the Asian pivot of US foreign policy (Triantaphyllou, 2014, p. 290).

The presence of the United States and NATO influence the regional agenda of the European Union by policies and interests presented by these external actors. European Union mainly aimed to strengthen the governance to have a peaceful neighbourhood, while the United States primarily concentrated on the NATO enlargement and its security dilemmas (Manoli, 2012, p. 430). United States reconsidered its geopolitical interests in the area and built up a military dimension to this strategy by enhancing its role within NATO. The new comprehensive strategy in the region got a foreseeable response from Russia, creating a new geopolitical rivalry in the Black Sea. When we look at the Black Sea and West relations, the counterpart of the United States is the European Union. The Union has been sharing its external borders with the region since the '90s, yet it became a regional partner with Romania and Bulgaria's membership in 2007 (Çelikpala, 2010, 293). In the beginning, European Union lacked a strategic vision to pursue a common foreign policy in the Black Sea.

In addition, the conflicts in the region between 2004 and 2008 had a negative impact on member states and the EU's energy policies with the energy crisis in Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus (Çelikpala, 2010, 295). In this tense political sphere, the European Union contributes its effectiveness by treating Russia as a possible partner for cooperation. However, the steps taken by the EU can clash with the interests of the United States. As a result, tensions between the United States, NATO, and the EU can grow and limit the efficiency of EU policies. The involved actors' main concerns regarding security were primarily on the conflicts and energy security issues that affect the region's overall stability. While the United States and NATO are interested in security and military means, the European Union has been beware of the migration and trafficking issues to solve political and social insecurities in the region. From this perspective, balancing Russia-EU relations is also an essential factor in EU foreign policy to enhance its role in the region. Russia's aim to establish a separate mandate can restrict the EU policy goals and threaten regional stability (Popescu and Wilson, 2009, 320).

While changes in the Black Sea attracted newcomers to the region, China has become one of the essential actors in discussing Black Sea politics. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a significant foreign policy tool for China to expand its interests over different territories. Its primary goal of reaching the West leads Chinese policymakers to consider the Black Sea as a route. China may not consider the Wider Black Sea a region but a larger geo-economic territory that connects China to Europe and the Mediterranean region. The world has been transforming geopolitically where the power competition between the great powers came back and dominates international politics today. With its growing geo-economic and geopolitical impact, China's rising power makes it inevitable to discuss its role in the Black Sea dynamics.

Tensions between the US and China and trade competition have shaped global politics in the last decade, where the bipolar power competition arose. Hence, China's growing presence in the Black Sea is not only affecting the region dynamics but also affects world politics. Further, the United States and NATO's existence in the region create some level of motivation for China-Russia cooperation. Russia is concerned with the military presence of Western powers. At the same time, China sees the United States' presence as the key challenge to its Belt and Road Initiative and its regional implications. China sees the Black Sea as a corridor for the BRI, and the region is convenient for Chinese investments. On the grounds of this goal, China needs some level of stability and economic openness in the Black Sea region (Martin, 2021).

The European Union's stance on Beijing's policies carries out another significance as reshaping the trade relations within the unfair competition and predatory foreign policy practices between the great powers. One of the factors of China's BRI that contradicts with EU's vision is transparency. EU members are concerned about the lack of transparency and the unbalanced relationship within the BRI. Internal cohesiveness is a key for EU member states to decrease the dominance of Chinese regional attempts and establish a more prominent

EU role in the Black Sea. To do so, the European Union must contribute to its Eastern Partnership goals and provide a feasible alternative to China's BRI policies in the region (Martin, 2021).

Lastly, the third important factor in the European Union's involvement in the region is the internal divisions between the Union. It is important to discuss member states' interests in the region. Diverging interests can lead to a decrease in the effectiveness of policy implementation, and sometimes it can put the developments at risk by damaging the alignment. In the case of Black Sea politics, Eastern European states are more interested in developing better engagement with the region. The conflictual debate started among the members about the Black Sea vision of the European Union as it became a neighbouring country to the region after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. European Union's multilateral politics becomes an important part of the Black Sea agenda and enhancing the role of the European Union can only be achieved through unanimity among member states.

However, the domestic divisions on the opinions of the Black Sea policies made multilateralism an important tool for European Union to enhance its practices. Regarding the literature, multilateralism generally clashes with the claims of regionalism. As an alternative, regional multilateralism is introduced in special contexts. It refers to a "set of mutual expectations, rules, and regulations, common institutions and commitments that are accepted by a group of states that are continuous or close to each other" (Manoli, 2012, p. 432). It is often used to explain the European Union's eastern policies. In this multilateral approach, the division between member states can be seen. The EU members' preferences do not always align with the European Union's multilateralism in the eastern neighbourhood. Every EU member pays a different level of attention to Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Strategy. The preferences of each member influence the European Union's multilateralism. States' relations with the Union and the United States, another significant actor in the eastern neighborhood, have been effective in their approach to the Wider Black Sea (Manoli, 2012, p. 436).

There is a certain degree of consensus on the main interests of all EU members regarding the region, which is aligned with their goals of enhancing trade relations and maintaining external security and stability. However, the problem is the implementation of the policies. EU members cannot achieve consensus on how to conduct these policies. The disagreements on the policy implementation underlie the goals and the role of the EU within its neighbouring region (Fischer, 2009, p. 339).

### **European Union's Status in the Russian-Ukrainian War**

Over the years, European Union developed relations with both sides of the conflict and established diverse policies through its agreements and collaborations. The tension between Ukraine and Russia arose at the beginning of 2022. In January, the European Union involved itself in security talks with Russia, the United States, NATO, and OSCE to show its participation in the region. However, the European Union officials were mainly concerned about its exclusion from the security talks and its perception as the 'neutral spectator.' As the talks involve the neighborhood, European Union is more than a neutral observer with its security concerns (Khatu, 2022).

In the earlier years, the European Union was involved in the Ukrainian-Russian conflicts through its assistance to Ukraine. European Union helped Ukraine to decrease its economic dependency on Russia by providing Ukraine with over 17 EUR billion. With its 2014 Association agreement, the Union became the largest trading partner of the Ukrainian state. On the other side, a Russian-EU dynamic derives mainly from trade and energy. In 2020, Russia was the EU's largest trading partner with a %37,3 ratio. In addition, Russia has been the main supplier of natural gas and fossil fuels to the European Union. The insecurities about energy can be one of the weaknesses of the European Union, and it intensifies its limitations over its role in the Black Sea region, especially with the war in Ukraine (European Commission, 2021).

## **The Implications of the Limitations of the Russian-Ukrainian War**

The earlier part of the article showed the identity problem of the European Union as the first limitation for better engagement in the Black Sea politics. The defining role of the Union is highly important in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as well. European Union's relations with the Black Sea states, especially with Russia, have been mainly trade-related. Russia has been the most important trade partner and energy supplier of the Union. As the previous part suggested, European Union should show more engagement in the security policies and practices in the region. However, the war creates a dilemma for European interests over Russia, directly threatening its economic and energy security. Thus, increasing its power over the region demands European Union to increase its security means and practices.

Finalizing the first limitation of the EU's role in the Russian-Ukrainian war, the European Union has been putting up restrictive measures in the context of war and sanctions against Russia that also affect the trade relations with Russia. As mentioned earlier, European Union mainly contributes its role in the Black Sea from a trade perspective. Hence, the existence of the war and applied sanctions jeopardized the economic ties. War in Ukraine affected the war countries and the Black Sea states with the rest of the world. In the current situation, trade became less effective for the European Union in Black Sea politics. Therefore, European Union should expand its involvement in the region by engaging more security aspects.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine created security challenges in many aspects. Foremost, Ukraine faces human insecurities as people lose their homes, cannot have access to basic needs, and are forced to migrate. As a normative global power, European Union has an attributed role in promoting peace, democracy, and human rights. EU's role in the region can grow through its support of Ukraine. There is some European action in the war as human insecurities in Ukraine have been rising day by day against the Russian attacks. The uncertain status of fleeing refugees creates a new chance for European Union to show its effective role in handling the situation. Practical actions by providing support to Ukraine in diverse areas will be beneficial if the European Union wants to expand its political role.

The second limitation this article discusses is the problem of the relevance of the European Union. Region dynamics and regional actors also play an important role in the discussions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The important actors, China and the United States, also have been involved in the war discussions. The war between Russia and Ukraine is the most intense geopolitical conflict since World War II. Before the war, the United States had warned the world about a possible Russian attack on Ukraine. When the attacks started, the United States became one of the most influential actors. The possible regain of western leadership motivates the United States to get involved in this specific Black Sea conflict. From the beginning of the attacks, the United States' response against Russia was immediate, along with NATO engagement. Its presence within NATO also provides the United States greater role within the region. Most talked actors by the media were the United States and NATO during the first days of the invasion.

In addition to the United States, China is another actor to discuss in the war context. Not only for its importance for Black Sea politics but also its stance in the Russian-Ukrainian conflicts. Earlier months of 2022 remarked a joint partnership between Russia and China. Xi Jinping and Putin expressed that the two countries have an unlimited partnership at their meeting on February 4. China's position carries importance as it is one of the most influential global actors in recent years, and its dynamic relations with Russia shape its strategies in the Black Sea. One can argue that Xi Jinping did not calculate that the war could happen and go this far. Understanding China's position is important because the Chinese government could find itself standing against the united Western world if China supports Russia unconditionally. Therefore, China should decide carefully while protecting its own interests. Since the Russian invasion started, China has been relatively neutral by not acting as pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian in their statements. (Chakrabarti and Kotsonis, 2022).

This second limitation presented in this article focused on three specific states as the limitation of the greater European role in the Black Sea, Russia, China, and the United States. Up-and-down relations with Russia and its invasion of Ukraine jeopardize the possible implementation of the greater EU role. While it has been hard for the EU authorities to create effective policies under the presence of Russia in the region, it became harder with the existence of a war in the territory. In this context, the United States and China's effectiveness in the engagement with the region have become an important topic of discussion. From the very beginning of the attacks, the United States has been the 'trendy' actor to acknowledge within and outside the presence of NATO. While the United States' actions have been important for the Ukrainian side, the Chinese position has been widely discussed to see how Russian aggression can affect the current relations with Russia and the West. Where does the European Union stand in this context?

It is essential to acknowledge the EU's actions as an entity to discuss and determine its role's characteristics and borders within the context. The earlier days of the war showed the EU's -unwanted- dependency on NATO regarding security issues. EU became more engaged with the conflict and has been less discussed in the media. However, this situation has changed with Ukrainian refugees and the Ukrainian demand for becoming a member of the Union. The demand by president Zelensky increased the attention towards the European Union and intensified its role as an actor in political discussion.

The third limitation focuses on the domestic divisions among European Union member states. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War, the differences become highly important to create a collective response. Each state has diverging interests and relations with both sides of the conflict. Therefore, differences among member states become more visible and undeniable. Member states have different bilateral relations with Russia and Ukraine, and their distinct interests can influence their involvement in the war in Ukraine.

For instance, Russia carries importance for Germany in the energy sector, especially with the Nord Stream project. Even if Germany has a possibility of cutting off Russian oil imports, it will not be an immediate action. According to German Chancellor Scholz, the departure from Russian gas would take longer for Europe's biggest economy (France24, 2022a). Despite their economic ties with Russia, Germany supports Ukraine with weapons to help their defence against the Russian invasion.

France has been one of the operative countries since the beginning of the invasion alongside Germany. In the past, it has been criticized for not advising others on its stance on Russia. France is currently holding the presidency of the European Union and has been influential in the increased security actions. Since the beginning of the conflict, President Macron has been coordinating the talks with other member states and NATO members while maintaining contact with President Putin (France24, 2022b).

### **A Constructivist Role for European Union Policies**

The development of EU external policies has been analyzed by many scholars who study the Black Sea politics of the European Union. European Neighbourhood Policy changed its characteristics over time and shaped itself in accordance with the needs of the existing situations. IR scholars discussed many approaches to draw the framework for ENP. Constructivist approaches used the EU's characteristics of stability, security, and shared values to explain the behavior of the Commission and the Member States. For instance, the EU's external action goals adopt mainly a constructivist approach by focusing on its norms and values. However, in practice, it is not sufficient to explain the EU's external policies by only focusing on its values and norms. Some also can argue that European Neighborhood Policy follows a rationalist approach by following its geographical interests and security. The issue of security and interests challenges the constructivist view in many cases of European external relations. For instance, conflicts and wars in the Black Sea area often challenged the ENP goals over the region and led ENP to adopt more 'hard security' means in the following years. Even though

these challenges increased more rationalist behavior, constructivist arguments are still significant in explaining European Neighbourhood Policy. (Kratochvíl and Tulmets, 2017).

This article argues there are some limitations on the EU's role over the Black Sea, and constructivist-rationalist debate over the ENP can explain the limitations. The first limitation argues that European Union sees itself mainly from a trade perspective that has a rational approach to the Black Sea policies. The material means and the economy becomes the driving factor for the EU role. Applying the normative power dimension increases the constructivist understanding of the EU's role.

The second limitation focuses on the different actors in the region. For example, Russia's foreign policy adopts a more rationalist perspective. Putin mostly uses Russian foreign policy to achieve domestic supremacy. Russia's behavior created competition with the EU in the Black Sea region. In the case of Ukraine, the EU has been reactive and had some minor changes in its policies. This can show how the EU does not limit its role even when there is a strong actor presence. European Union's institutional grounds and its norms come into the scene again where it can express a more constructivist approach. One can argue that the EU and other actors in the region have been experiencing power competition, and they all have interests. However, these interests are not hiding the EU's institutional goals and norms in the Black Sea (Schunz and Gstöhl, 2017).

The third limitation concerns the differences among member states, and the limitation is intensified through the problem of unanimity. European members have been debating about its common goals and norms in recent years. Especially with Brexit, the diverse opinions on many policy areas have developed and European external policies are no exception. From a constructivist point of view, EU members can limit the Commission's goals over the region by refusing its shared objectives and norms. Hence, the limitations of the EU's role in the Black Sea can be observed in the constructivist approach in framing EU policies and how they contain normative objectives alongside with rational ones. Rational characteristics of the policies explain the limitations' ground, while the constructivist view can express the different dimensions of the limitations.

### **A Way Forward?**

As a result of today's connected world, new challenges create new opportunities to enhance the goals and policies of political actors. The war in Ukraine has created a great challenge for world politics, but it also constructed a new environment for political actors to act. Therefore, the question of the EU's role in the Black Sea arises again within this environment. Is it possible a way forward for the European Union to have a more influential role in the region by tackling its limitations? The answer to the question lies within the European members and authorities.

To tackle these limitations, European Union must follow new ways and extend its existing sphere of influence. Its first limitation derives from defining its role and approach to the region. European Union has been an economic alliance from the beginning. Even though the Union extended its areas of cooperation in the process, the main objective was economy and trade. The prioritization of trade also has been effective in its Black Sea goals, and member states have looked at the region from a trade perspective. Its trade focus connects the European Union to Russia as its biggest trade partner in the region. Limiting its influence area decreases the EU's chance of having a greater role. To overcome this limitation, the European Union needs to establish a more comprehensive foreign and security policy to get involved more in the security issues and politics of the Black Sea to intensify its role in the region. However, foreign and security policies should not be limited to civilian means. EU's attributed role as a normative power is also an important factor in how it defines its role. Discussions on the EU's role in international relations generally evolve around its characteristics. European Union does not use only its hard power means and tools. It mostly aims to use its norms and values in its actions and policies. Promoting these values stands at the core of the EU goals. Manners widely argues the EU's

normative power aspect to identify its role. Shared beliefs and sets of principles for member states and institutions are the center of EU identity, including concepts like democracy, liberty, peace, the rule of law, and human rights (Manners 2002, p. 239). These principles are essential when discussing the EU's external relations as they distinguish the EU from other political actors. European Union does not only use its materialistic tools but also promotes its norms and values in its external actions. Being a normative power requires to be ideational to adopt principles, actions in accordance. Thus, European Union uses its normative power to promote and enhance the norms and values in the Black Sea. Yet, some argue that there is an inconsistency between the internal and external actions of the Union (Manners 2008, p. 56). When it comes to CSDP, European Union mostly uses this normative side to legitimate its actions and its lack of active involvement in security policies. Therefore, there is a gap between its capabilities and expectations outside of its borders (Manners 2008, p.22). The EU should expand its involvement in the Black Sea security dilemmas and this can be achieved by going beyond the civilian missions in the conflict zones of the Black Sea. The Russian-Ukrainian war can be an example where people can observe the EU's actions where it proves the Union is more than a 'trade partner' or a 'normative power.' Its involvement through Ukraine's will to join the Union will increase its political influence over the region.

The region's dynamics are the second limitation of the EU's role in the Black Sea. The new political environment in the post-Soviet era had attracted several actors into the borders of the Black Sea. The Black Sea states, especially Russia and Turkey, have been engaging in regional affairs to increase their political power and have a voice in global politics. The presence of the United States and NATO is inevitable to discuss in the regional dynamics as they are the primary actors in the Black Sea security and politics. In addition to these actors, China's growing interest in the region due to its goals of BRI brought new challenges and opportunities to tackle. Rethinking relations within the triangle of US-Russia-EU in the light of the impact of China is important because international politics has been shaping multipolar relations (Cipek, 2018, p.23). With the existence of diverse influential actors, the European Union finds itself in the middle of a battlefield. The European Union has bilateral relations with other regional actors like the US, Russia, and China. Yet, having multiple relations with multiple agendas decreases the impact of the policies on the region. This dilemma has been visible in the war context as European Union has diverging relations with the actors involved. The United States and China's stance on the war and Russia's intentions and goals are important for further EU involvement in the Black Sea. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach that coordinates all relations in the region to enhance European Union's role in the region. Establishing a multilateral ground for Black Sea regionalism can be considered a well-established and stable region.

The last limitation concerns the agendas of the member states. Diverging interests in the region makes it harder to implement Black Sea policies. Some EU members are more attached to the region due to their political, cultural, or geographical conditions. In contrast, others want a certain degree of involvement to maintain stability and security within the European borders. Building a consensus on policy implementation is essential, but it has been one of the most complicated challenges of cooperative actions. Unanimity in policymaking can be achieved easily. Yet, finding common ground for implementing these policies is almost impossible with different levels of contributions of the members. The existing relations with Black Sea states outside of the EU make it harder for member states to implement policies at equal levels. A clash of interests among members can restrict the EU's role in the Black Sea for an unknown future. A crisis like the situation in Ukraine intensifies the different levels of members' contribution to the region. This could be the greatest challenge for the EU to tackle because one cannot successfully enhance its external role without having a unified internal dynamic on a subject matter.

## Conclusion

The Black Sea region has been like a baby learning about the world around itself. The surrounding area, different actors within its zone, and the reality of the world show the challenges it will face. However, its most significant challenges derive from its internal conflicts. The greatest obstacle to the Black Sea region-building has been its unsuccessful peacebuilding. Russia has been a key actor in these conflicts. The crisis in Ukraine shows how the Black Sea conflicts damage regional developments.

To prepare the Black Sea for diverse challenges and the political realities of a region, actors contribute to its region-building as it learns how to walk. Like a baby, the region needs guidance to show the ways before establishing a ground for its own. The region needs to learn how to provide and maintain peace and security through diverse means and policies in different sectors, and the guidance can come from the EU. The European Union can be considered a blueprint for establishing a region. Its long history, norms, and narratives provide insights into understanding the requirements for successful region-building.

Moreover, its effective role in external politics makes the EU a prior partner for the Black Sea region cooperation. When we mention the EU as the regional partner, it is inevitable to discuss its role in the Black Sea as a regional actor. Due to its late involvement in the Black Sea politics, European Union's policies concerning the area remain young. The future consequences of the policies and initiatives cannot be predicted. However, some argue that these policies do not provide a comprehensive vision for the Black Sea, and it remains inadequate for becoming a leading global power. Existing policies do not fully cover every need of a successful region, and the EU should overcome limitations to enhance these policies to contribute to its role.

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## Genişletilmiş Özet

### Amaç

Bu çalışma, Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü sınırlandıran faktörler olduğunu ifade etmektedir. Karadeniz bölgesi farklı niteliklere sahip pek çok ülkeden oluşan farklı çatışmalara ev sahipliği yapan bir coğrafyaya sahiptir ve Karadeniz siyaseti bu farklı özellikleriyle uluslararası ilişkilerde önemli bir yer tutmaya başlamıştır. Uluslararası bir aktör olarak Avrupa Birliği(AB) de Karadeniz bölgesiyle etkin bir ilişki içerisinde. Fakat, Avrupa Birliği'nin bölgedeki etkinliği çoğu zaman daha pasif bir tutum içerisinde kalmıştır. Avrupa Birliği'nin bölgede daha etkin bir rol oynaması için bazı sınırlandırmaları aşması gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, bu faktörleri Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı üzerinden açıklayarak AB'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünün sınırlandırılmasını daha yeni bir çerçevede göz önüne sermektedir.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda öncelikli olarak mevcut literatürdeki kaynaklar gözden geçirilmiştir. Sonrasında ise doküman analizi kullanılıp Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikalarıyla ilgili yayınladığı politika dokümanları incelenmiştir. Uluslararası kuruluşların politika dokümanları bu kuruluşların ilgili konudaki hedeflerini, amaçlarını ve sınırlılıklarını belirlememizde yol gösterici kaynaklar olarak karşımıza çıkarlar. Avrupa Birliği'nin yayınladığı Karadeniz Sinerjisi ve Doğu Ortaklığı politikalarının dokümanları AB'nin Karadeniz'deki amaçları ve yöntemleri hakkında bilgi edinilmesini sağlamıştır. Bu sayede Avrupa Birliği'nin teoride Karadeniz politikalarıyla ilgili amaçları ve tutumu analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, bu politikaların teori ve pratikteki farklılığını göz önüne alarak AB'nin bölgede daha etkin bir rol alamamasına sebep olan faktörleri belirlemiştir. Belirlenen Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü sınırlandıran faktörlere daha gerçekçi ve güncel bir yaklaşımla açıklamak istenmiştir.

Bu nedenle, bu çalışma sonraki adımda 2022 Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı vaka çalışması olarak kullanılmış ve AB'yi sınırlandıran faktörler açıklanmıştır. 2022 Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı tüm dünyayla birlikte Karadeniz bölgesi ve Avrupa Birliği'nin odak noktalarından biri haline gelmiştir. Bu coğrafyadaki tüm aktörleri ve bu aktörler arası ilişkileri derinden etkilemiştir ve bölge dinamiklerini değiştirmeye devam etmektedir.

### **Bulgular**

Bu çalışmada, Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü sınırlandıran üç farklı faktörün Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikalarının kapsayıcı olmasının önüne geçtiği ifade edilmiştir. Avrupa Birliği her ne kadar diğer aktörlere göre Karadeniz siyasetine daha geç dahil olduysa da çeşitli politika inşaları ve devletler arası ilişkileriyle Karadeniz'de belirli bir seviyeye ulaşmıştır. Fakat Avrupa Birliği'nin diğer bölgelerdeki etkin rolleri düşünüldüğünde Karadeniz'deki varlığı ve etkinlikleri yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu nedenle Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü arttırması için sınırlandırıcı üç farklı faktörü iyileştirmesi gerekmektedir. Öncelikli olarak ilişkilerde ticaret odağını kaldırıp güvenlik gibi konularda da Karadeniz devletleri ile öncü bir tutum sergilemelidir. Çalışmadaki ikinci faktör bölgede etkin olan diğer uluslararası aktörlerdir. Özellikle iki güçlü devlet olarak ABD ve Çin'in güvenlik ve askeri alanlarda etkin bir uluslararası kuruluş olarak NATO'nun varlığı AB'nin Karadeniz rolünü sınırlandırmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın son faktörü ise üye devletler arası farklılıklara odaklanmaktadır. Üye devletlerin siyasi, coğrafi ve ekonomik ilişkileri sebebiyle Karadeniz politikalarıyla ilgili katılımları ve düşünceleri farklılık göstermektedir.

Avrupa Birliği'nin Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşındaki rolü ve duruşu bu çalışmadaki sınırlandırıcı faktörler perspektifinde incelendiğinde Avrupa Birliği'nin bu sınırlandırmaları aşip daha etkin bir rol oynaması gerekliliği araştırmanın temel bulgusudur. Karadeniz'de, özellikle Rusya ile, olan ticari ilişkiler Avrupa Birliği'nin bölgedeki önceliği olmuştur. Ukrayna'daki savaş bağlamında AB'nin Karadeniz etkinliğini ticari rol odağında olması azaltmıştır. Buna ek olarak Karadeniz'de etkin olan Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Çin ve NATO gibi uluslararası aktörlerin savaştaki tutumu Avrupa Birliği'nin rolünü etkilemiştir. Bunlara ek olarak, üye devletler arası farklılıklar savaş durumunda da kendisini göstermiş olup coğrafi konumları ve Rusya'yla olan ikili ilişkiler üye devletlerin tutumlarını etkilemiştir.

### **Sınırlılıklar**

Bu çalışma, Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz bölgesindeki politikalarının yetersiz kalmasına neden olan faktörlere ve bunların Rusya-Ukrayna savaşındaki tutumuyla nasıl açıklanabileceğini odak olarak almıştır. Rus-Ukrayna çatışması yıllardır bölge siyasetini etkilese de savaşın hala devam etmesi bu çalışmayı sınırlandıran bir faktördür. Avrupa Birliği'nin uyguladığı politikalar ve yaptırımlar savaşla birlikte değişime uğramakta ve AB'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü etkilemektedir. Bu bağlamda AB'nin mevcut politikalarının da etkili bir şekilde uygulanamaması Karadeniz Sinerjisi ve Doğu Ortaklığı'nın etkisini ve iyileştirilmesini engellemektedir.

### **Öneriler**

Bu çalışma Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'de daha etkin bir rol oynamasını sınırlandıran faktörlere değinmektedir. Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'yla örneklendirilen bu faktörler Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki gelecek adımları için önem arz etmektedir. Avrupa Birliği bu sınırlandırıcı faktörleri aşmak için etkisini arttırabileceği yeni yollar bulmalıdır. Öncelikle AB'nin Karadeniz'deki ekonomi ve ticaret odağını genişletmelidir. Bunu sağlamak için daha kapsayıcı politikalar inşaa edip dış politika ve güvenlik boyutunda da daha aktif rol almalıdır.

Ek olarak, Avrupa Birliği'nin bölgedeki diğer uluslararası aktörlerle ikili ve çoklu ilişkilerini ilerletip bölgeye daha kapsamlı bir yaklaşım sağlaması daha sağlam bir bölge inşasının yolunu açabilir. Ayrıca, Avrupa Birliği'nin kendi içinde bir fikir birliğine ulaşması çok zorlayıcı bir hedef olsa da Karadeniz'deki rolünü arttırmasında önem arz etmektedir.

Avrupa Birliği'nin bölge inşasındaki tarihi ve devletler arası birliği düzenlemedeki tecrübeleri Karadeniz'deki rolünü arttırmak için yardımcı unsurlardır. Bu unsurlar araştırmalarda Karadeniz'deki bölge inşasının incelenmesinde temel olarak alınabilir. Rusya ve Ukrayna arasındaki dinamiklerin savaş sürecinde ve sonrasında nasıl ilerleyeceği ve Avrupa Birliği'nin gelecekteki adımları üzerine çalışmalar yapılabilir.

### **Özgün Değer**

Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikalarıyla ilgili çalışmalar genellikle AB'nin doğuya doğru genişlemesinden sonra oluşmaya başlamıştır. AB'nin bölgeye geç müdahili literatüre de yansımıştır. Sonraki aşamalarda da Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz politikaları, bölgedeki aktörlerle ilişkileri, bölgedeki çatışmalar ve barış inşasındaki rolleri farklı çalışmalara konu olmuştur. Fakat son yıllarda AB'nin Karadeniz'deki rolüyle ilgili fazla çalışma yer almamıştır.

Bu çalışma, Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'deki rolünü sınırlandıran faktörleri Rusya-Ukrayna bağlamında açıklaması açısından özgünlük içermektedir. Avrupa Birliği'nin Karadeniz'le ilişkisi ile ilgili çalışmalara literatürde sıklıkla rastlansa da bu ilişkiyi yavaşlatan ve Avrupa Birliği'nin rolünü sınırlandıran faktörlerle ilgili çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır. Bunun sonucu olarak, bu çalışma literatüre özgün bir katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Araştırmacı Katkısı:** Rabia İNLEYEN (%100).