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İngilizce

TÜRKİYE'S MARITIME SECURITY POLICIES IN THE BLACK SEA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR *

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

DOI

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Abstract

This study examines how the Russia–Ukraine War has reshaped maritime security in the Black Sea and evaluates its impact on Türkiye's capacity to maintain regional stability. It investigates whether wartime conditions have produced rupture or continuity across the military, economic, and civilian dimensions of maritime security in a semi-enclosed sea. The study adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on official statistics, policy documents, and academic sources, comparing the pre-war (2020–2021) and post-war (2022–2024) periods. The findings indicate that, despite increased military risks, maritime security in the Black Sea has not experienced a systemic breakdown. The consistent implementation of the Montreux Convention by Türkiye has constrained naval escalation and limited extra-regional military involvement. In the economic domain, maritime trade and energy transportation have shown resilience. While the war reduced trade with Ukraine, expanded maritime trade with Russia strengthened Türkiye's role as a logistical balancing hub, and uninterrupted transit through the Turkish Straits supported energy security. The conflict has, however, increased asymmetric risks, particularly drifting naval mines, without causing a broader rise in illicit maritime activities. Overall, the study argues that maritime security in the Black Sea is shaped not only by naval power but also by the interaction of legal regimes, economic continuity, and asymmetric threats.

Keywords: Black Sea maritime security, Energy transit routes, Asymmetric threats, Montreux Convention, Russia-Ukraine war

Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı Bağlamında Türkiye'nin Karadeniz'de Deniz Güvenliği Politikaları

Öz

Bu çalışma, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nın Karadeniz'de deniz güvenliğini nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini incelemek ve bu dönüşümün Türkiye'nin bölgesel istikrarı sürdürme kapasitesi üzerindeki etkisini değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma, yarı kapalı bir deniz niteliği taşıyan Karadeniz'de savaş koşullarının deniz güvenliğinin askeri, ekonomik ve sivil boyutlarında kopuş mu yoksa süreklilik mi yarattığını analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, resmî istatistikler, politika belgeleri ve akademik kaynaklara dayanan nitel karşılaştırmalı bir yöntem benimsemekte ve savaş öncesi (2020–2021) ile savaş sonrası (2022–2024) dönemleri karşılaştırmaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, artan askeri risklere rağmen Karadeniz'de deniz güvenliğinin sistemsel bir çöküş yaşamadığını göstermektedir. Türkiye'nin Montrö Sözleşmesi'ni tutarlı biçimde uygulaması, deniz kuvvetleri arasındaki tırmanmayı sınırlamış ve bölge dışı askeri aktörlerin müdahil olmasını kısıtlamıştır. Ekonomik boyutta ise deniz ticareti ve enerji taşımacılığı önemli ölçüde dayanıklılık göstermiştir. Savaşın Ukrayna ile ticareti azaltmasına karşın Rusya ile deniz ticaretinin genişlemesi Türkiye'nin lojistik dengeleyici merkez rolünü güçlendirmiş, Türk Boğazları'ndan kesintisiz geçişin sürmesi ise enerji güvenliğini desteklemiştir. Bununla birlikte çatışma, özellikle sürüklenen deniz mayınları gibi asimetrik riskleri artırmış, ancak deniz kaynaklı yasa dışı faaliyetlerde genel bir artışa yol açmamıştır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, Karadeniz'de deniz güvenliğinin yalnızca deniz gücü dengesi tarafından değil, hukuki rejimler, ekonomik süreklilik ve asimetrik tehditler arasındaki etkileşim tarafından şekillendiğini ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Karadeniz deniz güvenliği, Enerji taşımacılığı güzergâhları, Asimetrik tehditler, Montrö Sözleşmesi, Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı

* Makale geliş tarihi / Received date: 23.07.2025

Makale kabul tarihi / Accepted date: 26.06.2026

Erken görünüm tarihi / Published online: 29.06.2026

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Türkiye's Maritime Security Policies in the Black Sea in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War

Introduction

The Black Sea has historically functioned as a strategic interface between continents, empires, and competing regional orders. As a semi-enclosed sea surrounded by six littoral states, including Türkiye and Russia, the Black Sea has long been characterized by geopolitical rivalry, contested legal regimes, and overlapping security interests. Its connection to global markets through the Turkish Straits, combined with its role as a corridor for energy transportation and maritime trade, has further enhanced the Black Sea's strategic significance within both regional and global security architectures.

The Russia-Ukraine War, which broke out in February 2022, marked a critical turning point in the Black Sea's maritime security environment. Unlike previous regional crises, the war directly changed the balance of naval power, disrupted commercial shipping routes, and intensified concerns related to energy security and asymmetric threats. As the primary gatekeeper of access to the Black Sea and the implementing authority of the Montreux Convention, Türkiye assumed a central role in managing the maritime repercussions of the conflict. By formally designating the situation as a state of war and activating the relevant provisions of the Montreux regime, Türkiye aimed to preserve regional stability, limit escalation, and restrict extra-regional military engagement.

This study examines how the Russia-Ukraine War has modified maritime security in the Black Sea and the extent to which this transformation has affected Türkiye's capacity to sustain regional stability. In this context, the study seeks to answer the question of in which dimensions the Russia-Ukraine War has transformed maritime security in the Black Sea and to what extent this transformation has influenced Türkiye's ability to maintain regional stability in terms of naval power, trade, energy, tourism, and asymmetric threats.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and comparative analytical framework. Drawing on official statistical data, policy documents, and

secondary academic sources, it compares developments in the Black Sea during the pre-war period (2020–2021) and the post-war period (2022–2024). By jointly examining sectoral indicators, security practices, and legal arrangements, the study deals with how Türkiye has address maritime security risks during a period of heightened geopolitical tension.

The article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the literature review situates the study within existing debates on maritime security, Black Sea geopolitics, and the maritime implications of the Russia–Ukraine War. The subsequent section presents the historical and geopolitical background of the Black Sea, outlining the region's strategic evolution and enduring dynamics of competition. The sections that follow analyze the effects of the war on naval power balances, maritime trade, energy security, tourism, and asymmetric threats in the Black Sea. The conclusion discusses the findings and evaluates Türkiye's role as a stabilizing actor capable of maintaining regional balance under conditions of crisis.

By combining conceptual analysis with empirical sectoral data, this study contributes to ongoing debates on maritime security in semi-enclosed seas and offers a Türkiye-centered assessment of how regional stability can be sustained under conditions of great power competition and armed conflict.

1. Literature Review

In the literature, the concept of maritime security broadened significantly after the early 2000s, particularly following the September 11 attacks and the growing recognition of non-traditional threats in the maritime domain. Earlier approaches often equated maritime security with maritime safety and focused on navigational risks and regulatory compliance, whereas later studies emphasized a broader range of challenges including terrorism, piracy, smuggling, irregular migration, environmental risks, and the protection of critical maritime infrastructure (Feldt et al., 2013; Germond, 2015; Klein, 2011). Because of its multidimensional nature, maritime security is generally treated as a contested and context-dependent concept. Till's notion of "good order at sea" links maritime security to stability and governance but has been criticized for its ambiguity (Scott, 2010; Till, 2009). In response, Bueger (2015) proposes a relational framework situating maritime security at the intersection of sea power, maritime safety, the blue economy, and human security, allowing the concept to be analyzed across military, legal, and economic dimensions. Accordingly, this study adopts Bueger's framework as its main analytical lens in order to assess maritime security holistically rather than limiting the concept to naval power alone.

The literature on Black Sea security has largely evolved in the post–Cold War period around NATO–Russia rivalry, regional security complexes, and military power balances. Most studies approach the region through naval power, deterrence, and geopolitical competition, while the Montreux Convention is regarded as the primary legal mechanism limiting military escalation (Aydın, 2004, 2009; Canar, 2013, 2024; Rüma & Çelikpala, 2019; Polat, 2017). The consistent implementation of the Montreux regime by Türkiye during crises such as the 2008 Georgia War, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the 2022 Russia–Ukraine War is widely considered a stabilizing factor in maintaining the regional balance (Acer, 2023; Değer, 2023; Dinçer, 2023; Üren, 2023).

However, studies on the Russia–Ukraine War have mainly focused on land operations, sanctions, and the European security architecture, while the maritime dimension of the Black Sea has often been treated as secondary and largely limited to military developments (Delanoë, 2024). In practice, the war has simultaneously affected maritime trade, energy transportation, tourism, and asymmetric threats, turning the Black Sea into a multidimensional security space extending beyond naval competition (Bekar, 2025). This indicates a gap in the literature, which has yet to fully address the interaction between military, economic, and civilian dimensions of maritime security.

The war has shown that the Black Sea is no longer a peripheral area but a direct theater of maritime security where energy supply, maritime transport, and hybrid threats are closely interconnected. Türkiye’s role is often discussed in terms of diplomacy and alliance politics, yet its control over the Turkish Straits, its implementation of the Montreux Convention, and its maritime security practices also position it as a key actor managing multiple sectoral risks simultaneously (Acer, 2023; Altınsoy, 2025; Üren, 2023). At the same time, the limited effectiveness of NATO and EU policies, due to legal constraints and regional power asymmetries, suggests that stability in the Black Sea largely depends on the balancing policies of the littoral states (Çetinkaya, 2024; Gürsoy, 2025; Kurt, 2015).

1.1. Contribution of the Study

This study aims to move beyond the predominantly military- and geopolitics-centered approaches that define the literature on Black Sea security by addressing maritime security within a multidimensional and sectoral framework. Without excluding discussions on NATO–Russia rivalry, the Montreux regime, and military balance, it offers a comprehensive analytical perspective by jointly examining naval security with maritime trade, energy transportation, tourism, and asymmetric threats.

In this context, the study adopts a comparative approach to the pre-war and post-war periods of the Russia–Ukraine War in order to map patterns of continuity and change in the Black Sea's maritime security environment, rather than treating military dynamics in isolation.

Overall, the study frames the Black Sea not merely as an arena of naval competition, but as a semi-enclosed maritime security space shaped by the interaction of legal arrangements, sectoral interdependence, and regional security practices. In doing so, it offers a Türkiye-centered analytical contribution to the literature on maritime security in semi-enclosed seas under conditions of great power rivalry and armed conflict.

2. Analytical and Geopolitical Foundations of Maritime Security in the Black Sea

The maritime security environment of the Black Sea cannot be explained merely through geography; it requires an analytical framework that integrates geopolitics, legal regimes, and sectoral interdependence within the structural constraints of a semi-enclosed sea. This study examines how the Russia–Ukraine War has reshaped maritime security dynamics in the region and evaluates whether Türkiye has been able to maintain regional stability under intensified great power competition.

The literature on Black Sea security generally follows two main perspectives. The first frames the region as an arena of great power rivalry and explains security primarily through military balance, naval power, and geopolitical competition (Atlantic Council, 2024; Aydın, 2004, 2009; Çelikpala, 2010; Glebov, 2009; Kanbolat, 2006; Kasım, 2008). The second emphasizes legal regimes, regional ownership, and institutional arrangements, particularly the stabilizing role of the Montreux Convention (Bocutoğlu & Koçer, 2006; Bükülmez & Küpeli, 2007; Doğru, 2013; Özdamar, 2010; Özersay, 2001). However, neither approach alone sufficiently explains the Black Sea, whose semi-enclosed character imposes structural constraints such as narrow straits, regulated access regimes, and the need to maintain uninterrupted economic corridors. For this reason, maritime security must be analyzed not only in terms of naval balance but also through legal restrictions and the continuity of economic flows. Accordingly, the Black Sea is conceptualized here as a regional strategic subsystem in which naval power, legal regimes, and economic circulation are mutually interdependent.

Understanding this structure requires viewing the Black Sea as a semi-enclosed maritime security space shaped by restricted access, dense traffic, and

strong regional interdependence. Historically, the basin has functioned as a strategic corridor linking trade, military access, and transit routes. From antiquity through the Ottoman period, control of maritime passages—especially the Straits—formed the core of regional security practices (Acer, 2023, pp. 286–293; Koca, 2016, pp. 279–284; Tellioglu, 2022). Ottoman–Russian rivalry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the limited exit points of the basin reinforced its strategic character, while during the Cold War the semi-enclosed geography contributed to relative stability by constraining military mobility (Uçarol, 2015, pp. 121–167).

After the Cold War, the emergence of new littoral states, NATO and EU enlargement, and the expansion of energy and trade corridors reshaped the Black Sea into a multi-actor security environment (Canar, 2013, pp. 114–115; Efe, 2012; Kahraman & Merdan, 2020, p. 439; Tüysüzoglu, 2013, p. 63). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russia–Ukraine War in 2022 further highlighted the maritime dimension of regional security by linking military competition with trade flows, energy transportation, and critical infrastructure (Çetinkaya, 2024, pp. 456–477).

Although the term “Black Sea Region” may refer either to the six littoral states or to the wider regional framework including neighboring areas (Ağacan, 2007; Cornell et al., 2006; Weaver, 2011), the basin’s physical characteristics provide a clear analytical basis. With limited maritime exits and a surface area of approximately 432,000 km², the semi-enclosed structure makes access control, route continuity, and congestion central to security dynamics (Rende, 2010). Located along major transportation and energy corridors linking Europe, the Caspian Basin, Central Asia, and the Middle East, the region’s strategic importance connects naval competition with trade and energy security (Asmus & Jackson, 2004; Bekar, 2025, p. 110; Duman, 2021, p. 276).

Therefore, maritime security in the Black Sea cannot be explained solely by military power. Its semi-enclosed character makes legal regimes, economic continuity, and civilian maritime activities inseparable from naval balance. The following sections analyze how the Russia–Ukraine War has affected this interconnected maritime security environment.

3. Maritime Security

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, security is defined as “the state of being free from danger or fear,” while safety refers to “the condition of being protected against harm, injury, or loss” (Merriam-Webster, 2025). Due to their conceptual proximity, the terms maritime safety and maritime security were long

used indiscriminately, particularly before the 2000s, when maritime risks were largely understood as technical or accidental and addressed through regulatory and preventive measures (Şahin & Sadioğlu, 2023, p. 143).

After the September 11 attacks, understandings of maritime threats changed considerably, and maritime activities began to be evaluated not only in terms of safety but also security. Incidents such as the USS Cole attack (2000), the Limburg attack (2002), the SuperFerry 14 bombing (2004), and increasing piracy in the Strait of Malacca revealed that maritime risks could not be managed solely through technical regulations and required broader military, political, economic, and legal responses (Germond, 2015, pp. 137–138). Despite this shift, there is still no universally accepted definition of maritime security, as its meaning varies according to the priorities of different actors (Klein, 2011, p. 8).

The literature offers various definitions. Potgieter associates maritime security with the prevention of threats such as terrorism, smuggling, piracy, illegal fishing, and maritime accidents (2012, pp. 1–4), while Till defines it as the maintenance of “good order at sea,” a concept criticized for its ambiguity (Scott, 2010, pp. 76–94; Till, 2009, p. 5). Zohourian distinguishes between deliberate human threats and structural challenges (2020, p. 245), whereas Roach defines maritime security as the absence of risks, a view criticized for neglecting non-traditional threats such as environmental risks and vulnerabilities in maritime infrastructure (Kraska & Pedrozo, 2013; Roach, 2004, p. 42).

Instead of offering a fixed definition, Bueger conceptualizes maritime security as a relational framework embedded sea power, maritime safety, the blue economy, human security, and resilience (2015, pp. 161–165). This perspective shows that maritime security extends beyond military threats to include economic, environmental, legal, and human dimensions.

Accordingly, maritime security should be understood as a multidimensional and evolving concept, making it a suitable field for interdisciplinary analysis in both theoretical and policy-oriented studies.

3.1. The Russia–Ukraine War and Its Impacts on Maritime Security in the Black Sea

On 27 February 2022, Türkiye became the first country to officially characterize Russia’s intervention in Ukraine as a war (Güvenç & Aydın, 2023). This designation did not solely constitute a diplomatic statement; rather, it is widely regarded as a reflection of Türkiye’s historically deep-rooted and structurally shaped understanding of regional ownership and maritime security (Salis & Topal, 2024). This long-standing approach, sustained by Türkiye over

centuries, became increasingly evident through the strategic decisions taken and the regional posture adopted in the subsequent phases of the war. In this context, and in line with the multilayered nature of maritime security outlined above, the following analysis examines Türkiye's Black Sea policy through a sectoral framework, respectively focusing on naval power, maritime trade, maritime jurisdictional areas, maritime energy security, maritime tourism, and asymmetric threats in order to operationalize the concept of maritime security within the context of the ongoing war.

3.1.1. Naval Power

A state's total capacity across political, military, cultural, economic, scientific, and technological domains is defined as national power (Gürdeniz, 2015). Sea power, in turn, refers to the totality of activities that materially and immaterially underpin the development of maritime affairs within the scope of states' interactions with seas and oceans (Speller, 2016, pp. 162–164). Naval power, as a key component of maritime power, is regarded as a hard power instrument through which military force is employed in pursuit of political objectives (Kane & Lonsdale, 2016, p. 30).

In the Black Sea, the role of naval power is shaped not by the classical understanding of power projection discerned in open seas, but instead through a fragile interaction between legal regimes, access constraints, and military capabilities (Üren, 2023). The character of the Black Sea as a semi-enclosed sea necessitates analyzing maritime security not solely on the basis of fleet size or the number of naval platforms, but also in terms of the legal and spatial boundaries within which these assets can be employed (Dinçer, 2023). In this context, the primary arrangement defining the structural framework of Black Sea security is the 1936 Montreux Convention (Acer, 2023, pp. 309–311).

The Montreux regime subjects access to the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits to legal control by establishing different provisions for peacetime and wartime, thereby limiting the projection of extra-regional military presence. In particular, Article 19 of the Convention grants Türkiye the authority, in times of war, to deny passage through the Straits to warships belonging to states that are not parties to the conflict; in this respect, it functions as one of the primary legal mechanisms constraining naval-based military escalation in the Black Sea (Montreux Convention, 1936, art. 19)¹. This arrangement demonstrates that

1 Article 19: "In time of war, Turkey not being belligerent, warships shall enjoy complete freedom of transit and navigation through the Straits under the same conditions as those laid

military balance in the Black Sea is shaped not merely by power capabilities, but also through access control and legal legitimacy.

Within this structural framework, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 constituted a major military turning point that directly affected the balance of naval power in the Black Sea. Developments following 2014 revealed that, alongside naval-based deterrence, long-range precision strike capabilities have assumed an increasingly central role in the region's security architecture. In this context, Russia initiated a comprehensive modernization process encompassing the Black Sea Fleet, notably incorporating Kalibr cruise missile systems into its inventory, which provide high-precision strike capabilities against both land and maritime targets (Delanoë, 2024, p. 4).

With an effective range of around 2,500 km and the ability to be launched even from low-tonnage platforms (Delanoë, 2024, p. 8), these systems allow Russia to operate across most of the Black Sea. Given the sea's geographical size—approximately 750 nautical miles east to west and about 250 nautical miles north to south (International Hydrographic Organization [IHO], 1953, p. 18; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025)—Russia can strike targets across almost the all operational area. As a result, Russia's regional military reach has expanded, altering the balance of power in the Black Sea in Moscow's favor.

Nevertheless, with the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine War, it became clear that this military superiority was not absolute. Following the onset of hostilities, Türkiye activated Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, suspending the passage of warships belonging to states not party to the conflict through the Turkish Straits (Malsin, 2023). This decision created a critical access constraint that directly affected naval power projection in the Black Sea. Despite its confidence in its military dominance in the region, Russia—although entitled under the Montreux provisions to recall its naval units stationed outside the Black Sea—chose not to redeploy these forces back into the basin (Delanoë, 2024, p. 4; Yinanç, 2023).

down in Articles io to i8 Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not, however, pass through the Straits except in cases arising out of the application of Article 25 of the present Convention, and in cases of assistance rendered to a State victim of aggression in virtue of a treaty of mutual assistance binding Turkey, concluded within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and registered and published in accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Covenant. In the exceptional cases provided for in the preceding paragraph, the limitations laid down in Articles IO to 18 of the present Convention shall not be applicable. Notwithstanding the prohibition of passage laid down in paragraph 2 above, vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers, whether they are Black Sea Powers or not, which have become separated from their bases, may return thereto. Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not make any capture, exercise the right of visit and search, or carry out any hostile act in the Straits”

In the later phases of the war, the asymmetric warfare approach adopted by the Ukrainian Armed Forces clearly demonstrated the inadequacy of assessing naval power in the Black Sea solely in terms of platform numbers or firepower. In particular, the use of low-cost yet high-impact assets—such as unmanned systems and coastal defense missile systems—resulted in the neutralization of approximately one-third of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (Thorne, 2024). During the same period, Russia's ability to reinforce its fleet remained limited to the transfer of a small number of naval assets from the Caspian Sea via the Volga–Don Canal (Castillo, 2024; Coffey, 2023), once again underscoring the military consequences of the Black Sea's semi-enclosed geography.

These developments indicate that the balance of power in the Black Sea is shaped not by absolute military superiority, but rather by legal constraints, access control, and operational flexibility. In this context, Türkiye has demonstrated its strategic importance as a stabilizing actor within the Black Sea security structure not only through its control over the Turkish Straits, but also by its careful and consistent implementation of the Montreux regime, its posture limiting extra-regional military build-up, and its maintenance of maritime-based deterrence (Aydm, 2025, pp. 21-36). Accordingly, Türkiye's role in the Black Sea is defined less by direct increases in military capacity than by its function as a balancing and constraining security provider.

3.1.2. Maritime Trade

Maritime trade constitutes one of the fundamental components of the global economic system, as the majority of international flows of goods and energy are conducted via sea routes. Maritime transportation remains as the dominant mode of transport enabling the spatial integrity of global supply chains due to its low cost, high carrying capacity, and ability to generate economies of scale over long distances. In this respect, maritime trade is not merely a mechanism facilitating the physical circulation of economic activities, but also a strategic infrastructural component shaping states' foreign trade capacity, economic resilience, and access to global markets (Rodrigue et al., 2020).

Within this structural framework, the relationship between maritime security and maritime trade is directly linked to the protection of freedom of navigation and the continuous functioning of sea lines of communication. Military tensions, security risks, or access restrictions emerging in maritime spaces can rapidly produce tangible economic consequences by directly affecting shipping routes, insurance costs, and logistical planning. Therefore, maritime security should be addressed not only as a military concern, but also as a critical determinant of the sustainability of global and regional trade (Magkos, 2025).

According to data from 2023, global trade volume reached 12.3 billion tons, approximately 86 percent of which was carried through maritime transportation (İstanbul ve Marmara, Ege, Akdeniz ve Karadeniz Bölgeleri Deniz Ticaret Odası [İMEAK DTO], 2023, pp. 31–32). This vast volume of trade is transported by 61,811 vessels with a capacity of 300 gross tons and above, clearly demonstrating the indispensable role of maritime transportation within the global supply chain.

Within this global framework, the Black Sea functions as a strategic trade corridor for the Russian Federation. In the first half of 2023, Russia's total maritime trade volume was recorded at 453.4 million tons, of which 151.2 million tons—approximately 33.35 percent—was conducted through Black Sea ports (Delanoë, 2024, p. 6). This figure indicates that roughly one-third of Russia's international maritime trade depends on access to the Black Sea, directly linking maritime security in the region to the country's economic security.

From Türkiye's perspective, maritime trade with Russia reached 98 million tons in 2023, corresponding to approximately 22 percent of Russia's total maritime trade volume (İMEAK DTO, 2023, p. 124). Russia's overall maritime trade volume in previous years was recorded at 820.80 million tons in 2020, 835.47 million tons in 2021, and 841.52 million tons in 2022 (Delanoë, 2024, p. 6). This trend appears to be similarly reflected in Türkiye's trade relations with other Black Sea littoral states.

Table 1. Türkiye's Maritime Trade Volume with Black Sea Littoral States
(in million tons)

Country	2021 (million tons)	2022 (million tons)	2023 (million tons)
Russia	57,5	75	98
Ukraine	16	9	7,5
Bulgaria	3,5	4	3,5
Romania	7	8	8
Georgia	2	-	2,5

Source: İMEAK DTO, 2022, p. 127; İMEAK DTO, 2023, p. 130; İMEAK DTO, 2024, p. 124

Table 1, presents Türkiye's maritime trade volumes with Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia between 2021 and 2023. According to these data, Türkiye's maritime trade volume with Russia increased by 23 million tons in the post-war period (2021–2023). One of the main drivers of this increase is the redirection of trade routes toward Türkiye as a result of sanctions imposed on

Russia, which led to significant shifts in commercial flows (European Commission, 2025). By contrast, maritime trade with Ukraine declined by 8.5 million tons due to the disruption of operations at key Ukrainian ports such as Odesa and Chornomorsk (Harding, 2025), as well as the overall rise in security risks in the Black Sea.

No significant changes were observed in maritime trade volumes with Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia. When comparing the pre-war period (2020–2021) with the post-war period (2022–2023), these developments indicate a notable transformation in Türkiye's foreign trade position in the Black Sea. While the decline in trade with Ukraine highlights regional vulnerabilities, the increase in trade with Russia has further strengthened Türkiye's position as a strategic logistics partner.

In conclusion, the war in the Black Sea and the accompanying maritime security risks have reconfigured Türkiye's foreign trade architecture. The decline in trade with Ukraine has been offset by increased economic cooperation with Russia, thereby reinforcing Türkiye's position as a regional economic and logistics hub.

3.1.3. Maritime Jurisdictional Areas

States' authority over maritime spaces is regulated under different legal regimes depending on the scope of sovereignty and sovereign rights. Maritime domains include areas of full sovereignty, such as internal waters and territorial seas, as well as maritime zones where states exercise limited rights for specific purposes. The limits of the territorial sea form the main reference point, while beyond this boundary lie maritime zones such as the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf, where states hold rights related to natural resources and economic activities (Toluner, 1996, pp. 54–68).

Accordingly, maritime jurisdictional areas are generally classified as internal waters, territorial seas, the contiguous zone, the continental shelf, and the exclusive economic zone. While the first two fall under full sovereignty, the latter areas provide limited sovereign rights and jurisdiction, shaping not only the legal regime of maritime spaces but also the scope of enforcement authority and security policies (Demir, 2020, p. 29). From a maritime security perspective, disputes over the delimitation of these areas constitute a major source of tension, as conflicts over maritime zones directly affect economic activities, trade routes, and military mobility. Any disruption in these areas may therefore produce multidimensional security consequences extending beyond legal disputes (Klein, 2011, p. 11; Şahin & Sadioğlu, 2023, pp. 145–146).

In the Black Sea, the legal framework of maritime jurisdictional areas began to take shape with the continental shelf delimitation agreement signed between Türkiye and the Soviet Union in 1978. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the coordinates established under this agreement were maintained by the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Georgia, indicating the de facto acceptance of the maritime boundaries (Yaycı, 2019, p. 38). Türkiye's declaration of an exclusive economic zone in 1986 and subsequent delimitation agreements with Bulgaria and Georgia in 1997 further institutionalized maritime jurisdictional areas in the region. Today, Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction in the Black Sea is estimated at approximately 172,009 km² (Balık, 2018, p. 91).

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a major turning point in the maritime jurisdictional structure of the Black Sea. As a result, a significant portion of Ukraine's exclusive economic zone effectively came under Russian control, increasing Russia's access to maritime resources and strengthening its naval presence. This shift not only reduced Ukraine's maritime jurisdiction but also altered regional maritime boundaries, extending Russia's maritime reach toward areas adjacent to Romania and transforming the previous Türkiye–Ukraine maritime boundary into a de facto Türkiye–Russia boundary (Balık, 2023, p. 8).

In the context of the Russia–Ukraine War that began in 2022, further de facto expansion of Russia's maritime jurisdictional areas in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov remains a likely outcome, together with the potential loss of Ukraine's access to parts of its maritime zones (Balık, 2023, p. 8). By contrast, the war has not produced any legal or factual change in Türkiye's maritime jurisdictional areas. Throughout the conflict, the boundaries, scope, and legal status of Türkiye's maritime zones in the Black Sea have remained unchanged, indicating that the war has had a neutral effect on Türkiye in terms of maritime jurisdiction.

3.1.4. Maritime Energy Security

The geographical concentration of energy supply within limited basins causes such areas to acquire strategic significance not only in economic terms, but also through their geopolitical and security dimensions. In this context, the Black Sea has evolved beyond functioning merely as a maritime transportation and transit corridor linking energy production sites with consumer markets; it has become a comprehensive regional security space where the relationship between energy security and maritime security intersects across legal, military, and operational dimensions (Bozhilov et al., 2024; Çetinkaya, 2024, pp. 442–445; Polat, 2017, p. 56).

As of 2023, proven global oil reserves stand at approximately 1.75 trillion barrels, while proven natural gas reserves amount to around 210 trillion m³ (Energy Institute, 2025). A significant share of these resources is concentrated in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea basins, which, when considered together, account for approximately 5–7 percent of global energy supply (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2025, pp. 16–18). This concentration renders the Black Sea an integral component not only of regional but also of the global energy security architecture.

Energy resources produced in the Caspian Basin that are of direct relevance to Türkiye are transported to global markets through two primary routes. The first route is based on maritime transportation. Within this framework, oil and natural gas are loaded at Black Sea ports and shipped to the Mediterranean via the Turkish Straits, from where they are delivered to broader global markets. In this context, for example, crude oil loaded at the Port of Novorossiysk accounts for approximately 38 percent of Russia's seaborne oil exports (Çelikpala, 2025, p. 4).

The second route operates through pipeline networks, within which Türkiye occupies a central position as a transit country. Projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline, TurkStream, Blue Stream, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), and the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) enable the direct transfer of energy resources from the Caspian Basin to European markets (BOTAŞ, 2025). In particular, TANAP—forming the backbone of the Southern Gas Corridor—clearly demonstrates the complementary nature of maritime and overland transportation routes in the context of Black Sea energy security. Stretching approximately 1,850 km, TANAP connects with the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) at the Türkiye–Greece border and transports a total capacity of 16 billion m³ of natural gas, of which 6 billion m³ are supplied to Türkiye and the remaining 10 billion m³ are delivered to European markets (Erşen & Çelikpala, 2019).

When these transportation data are considered together, it becomes evident that Black Sea energy security is largely shaped by Russia's production capacity and its de facto control over transportation routes. Indeed, as of 2023, Russia alone accounted for approximately 12 percent of global oil production and 17 percent of global natural gas production (Energy Institute, 2025, pp. 21–29).

Another critical component of Black Sea energy security is the strategic role of the Turkish Straits. An average of approximately 3 million barrels of crude oil per day and around 20 million tons of petroleum products annually transit through the Turkish Straits. This volume corresponds to roughly 3 percent of global annual oil trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye [MFA], 2024). Shipping data from the period 2021–2024 indicate that there has

been no significant decline in oil and natural gas transportation through the İstanbul and Çanakkale Straits.

Table 2. Vessel Transit Statistics for the Transportation of Oil and Petroleum Products through the İstanbul and Çanakkale Straits

Years	Total Tankers					
	TTA		LPG/LNG		TCH	
	İstanbul	Çanakkale	İstanbul	Çanakkale	İstanbul	Çanakkale
2020	5,252	5,644	530	671	2,653	3,057
2021	5,085	5,196	462	627	2,701	3,385
2022	5,447	5,874	424	616	2,782	3,414
2023	6,174	6,292	442	625	2,671	3,386
2024	6,233	6,315	526	635	2,910	3,500

Source: Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı [UAB], 2025

An examination of Table 2 reveals that the number of transits by TTA tankers carrying crude oil and petroleum derivatives through both Straits has followed a stable trajectory, while vessel traffic in the LPG/LNG and TCH categories has likewise continued in a similar manner. These data indicate that, despite wartime conditions, no structural disruption has occurred in energy transportation across the Black Sea.

In addition, the Sakarya Gas Field located in the Black Sea indicates that Türkiye is beginning to assume a role in the energy security equation not only as a transit country but also as a producer. Based on reserve assessments derived from the Tuna-1, Amasra-1, and Çaycuma-1 wells, the estimated natural gas reserves reaching approximately 710 billion m³ demonstrate that the Black Sea possesses the potential to evolve not merely as a transit zone but also as a strategic production area (Kılıç, 2023).

This multilayered energy network transforms the Black Sea into a highly sensitive security space not merely as an energy corridor, but also in terms of protecting energy infrastructure, maintaining freedom of navigation, and ensuring the security of maritime energy transportation. Despite the ongoing war and heightened security risks, no structural disruption has occurred in energy flows directed toward global markets through the Turkish Straits; Russia's ability to largely maintain its oil and natural gas production levels has further supported

this continuity (Bekar, 2025, pp. 112–115; Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC], 2025).

3.1.5. Maritime Tourism

Maritime tourism is defined as a form of tourism that emerges through tourists' participation in activities directly related to the sea, such as sailing, diving, marine wildlife observation, yachting, and cruise travel (Göksu & Atik, 2016, pp. 89–95). At the global level, the sustainability of these activities is directly dependent on the maintenance of safe navigation, the protection of port infrastructure, and the continuity of stability in maritime spaces. For this reason, maritime tourism constitutes not merely an economic activity, but also a fragile sector that is directly affected by maritime security dynamics.

Globally, maritime and coastal tourism accounts for approximately 40–50 percent of total tourism revenues (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2024). In Türkiye, maritime tourism represents around 25 percent of total tourism revenues, corresponding to an economic volume of approximately USD 13.5 billion (İMEAK DTO, 2024, p. 193). These figures indicate that instability in maritime security conditions has the potential to generate indirect yet significant impacts on tourism revenues.

Within maritime tourism, cruise tourism and yachting are regarded as two principal sub-sectors at the global level (Sargın & Konurhan, 2021). Cruise tourism is structured around scheduled port calls by vessels and the shopping and entertainment activities that take place at these ports, whereas yachting offers a more flexible and individualized form of mobility centered on marinas and coastal areas (Ioannidis, 2019, pp. 31–34). Regions where these activities are concentrated typically stand out as areas characterized by high levels of maritime security and political stability.

From a Türkiye-specific perspective, maritime tourism activities are predominantly concentrated along the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts (Kozan et al., 2014). Although there are a total of 26 ports along Türkiye's coastline capable of accommodating cruise ships, the vast majority of these ports are located in the Aegean and Mediterranean basins. A similar pattern is observed in yachting tourism. Of the 84 marinas in Türkiye, only a limited number are situated along the Black Sea coast, while the primary global centers of yachting tourism are concentrated in the Mediterranean basin and the Caribbean (İlgar, 2019, p. 595; İMEAK DTO, 2024, pp. 198–200).

When assessed specifically in the Black Sea context, the region does not emerge as a primary maritime tourism hub for Türkiye. Although ports such as

Trabzon, Sinop, Samsun, and Bartın along the Black Sea coast are capable of accommodating cruise ships, passenger volumes at these ports remain highly limited when compared to those in the Aegean and Mediterranean. Indeed, while the number of cruise passengers arriving at Black Sea ports stood at 12,700 in 2022, this figure increased to 35,507 in 2023; during the same period, the total number of cruise tourists nationwide in Türkiye was recorded at 1,010,767 and 1,542,522, respectively (İMEAK DTO, 2024, pp. 204–208). This disparity clearly demonstrates that the Black Sea occupies a secondary position in terms of maritime tourism.

Accordingly, analyzing the impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on maritime tourism in the Black Sea directly through cruise or yachting traffic remains methodologically limited. Instead, the reflections of war-induced changes in the maritime security environment on the tourism sector are assessed indirectly through the nationalities of tourists arriving in Türkiye from Black Sea littoral states and the temporal evolution of these flows.

Table 3. Number of Foreign Tourists Visiting Türkiye Between 2020 and 2024 (in Millions)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Number of Foreign Tourists	12,734,213	24,712,266	44,564,395	49,209,180	52,629,283
Russia	2,128,758	4,694,422	5,232,611	6,313,675	6,710,198
Ukraine	997,652	2,060,008	675,467	839,729	941,614
Georgia	410,501	291,852	1,514,813	1,633,977	1,466,188
Romania	269,076	496,178	886,555	990,005	1,173,358
Bulgaria	1,242,961	1,402,795	2,882,512	2,893,092	2,918,581

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2025

As shown in Table 3, data for the 2020–2024 period indicate that the war has generated a pronounced security effect on tourism flows. While the number of tourists arriving in Türkiye from Ukraine stood at 2.06 million in 2021, this figure declined sharply to 675,000 in 2022 following the outbreak of the war and was only able to recover to 941,000 by 2024. By contrast, despite restrictions imposed on European airspace, the number of tourists arriving from the Russian Federation increased, rising from 4.69 million in 2021 to 6.71 million in 2024.

Türkiye's perception as a safe, accessible, and stable destination has emerged as one of the key factors underpinning this increase (TASS, 2025).

Although the available statistics do not focus directly on maritime tourism, the fact that approximately 70 percent of foreign tourists visit Türkiye during the summer season indicates that a substantial portion of these visits involves sea-related tourism activities (TÜİK, 2025). This pattern demonstrates that maritime security plays an indirect yet decisive role in the sustainability of tourism revenues and overall economic stability.

In conclusion, maritime tourism in the Black Sea does not constitute a high-volume or decisive sector. Within this framework, asserting that the core components of maritime tourism—namely cruise and yachting tourism—have been directly and measurably affected by the Russia–Ukraine War in the Black Sea context is not methodologically feasible given the available data.

By contrast, tourism flows observed during the war indicate that overall tourist movements from Black Sea littoral states to Türkiye are closely linked to regional security perceptions and conditions of accessibility. This suggests that rather than generating a direct maritime tourism dynamic in the Black Sea, the war has indirectly influenced general tourism stability through Türkiye's overall security image.

Therefore, the preservation of maritime security in the Black Sea carries strategic significance not only in military and energy security terms, but also in sustaining Türkiye's image as a safe and stable regional tourism destination.

3.1.6. Asymmetric Threats

Asymmetric threats refer to strategies in which opposing actors seek tactical advantage not by directly confronting stronger forces, but by targeting vulnerabilities through unpredictable and non-conventional methods (Şahin & Sadioğlu, 2023, p. 146). In the maritime domain, such threats encompass activities including piracy, maritime trafficking of human beings, weapons, and narcotics, illegal fishing, maritime terrorism, and irregular migration (Bağbaşıoğlu, 2021, pp. 60–64; Klein, 2011, p. 30). These threats typically do not directly target conventional military objectives; instead, they disrupt order at sea, thereby indirectly undermining national security, economic stability, and sovereignty.

In the global security environment shaped in the aftermath of September 11, efforts to counter maritime-origin threats have intensified, and the Black Sea region has emerged as one of the focal points of regional security initiatives.

Within this framework, Türkiye launched Operation Black Sea Harmony (BSH) in 2004 with the aim of preventing terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and other illicit activities through a region-centered security approach. Türkiye makes a substantial contribution to the Recognized Maritime Picture (RMP) in the Black Sea by providing approximately 67 percent of the data generated through maritime and aerial patrols (NATO, 2025a; Yinanç, 2023). These activities have continued in a stable manner during the war, as they did prior to the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

One of the prominent asymmetric threats during this period was the emergence of drifting naval mines, first reported in February 2022 through notice to mariners (NOTMAR) promulgated by Ukrainian authorities. These unmoored “drifting mines” posed serious risks to maritime traffic. In response, Türkiye, together with Bulgaria and Romania, established the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures (MCM) Task Group, thereby adopting a multilateral and preventive security posture (Millî Savunma Bakanlığı [MSB], 2024; Seren, 2024).

Another critical development has been attacks targeting energy infrastructure. For instance, the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attack on the TurkStream natural gas pipeline clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of strategic maritime energy infrastructure (Utucu, 2025). Similarly, incidents involving the Panama-flagged *VYSSOS* vessel and the Turkish-flagged *İDA* vessel striking drifting naval mines in the Black Sea have shown that civilian maritime activities are also exposed to serious security risks (Denizhaber, 2023).

When assessed in the context of irregular migration, although a noticeable increase is observed in the number of irregular migrants apprehended in Türkiye during the 2021–2024 period, this increase is understood to be largely concentrated along the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts. Official data do not indicate a significant flow of irregular migration via the Black Sea route (Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı, 2025a). For this reason, directly associating broader irregular migration trends with maritime security dynamics in the Black Sea is not methodologically appropriate.

With regard to other asymmetric threats such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal fishing, no significant change has been observed between the pre-war and post-war periods (Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı, 2025b). This stability indicates that Türkiye’s maritime security infrastructure has maintained its resilience and effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Russia–Ukraine War has introduced new dimensions to asymmetric risks, with threats such as drifting naval mines and infrastructure sabotage becoming particularly prominent. Nevertheless, these threats have not

destabilized the overall maritime security architecture in the Black Sea. Türkiye has maintained a stable and proactive security posture through initiatives such as Operation Black Sea Harmony and regional cooperation mechanisms. The limited impact observed in irregular migration and other illicit maritime activities once again demonstrates the effectiveness of Türkiye's maritime security framework in the Black Sea.

Conclusion

This study has examined how the Russia-Ukraine War has affected maritime security in the Black Sea and the extent to which these effects have transformed Türkiye's capacity to sustain regional stability. The central research question has been whether wartime conditions in the Black Sea have produced a rupture or continuity across the military, economic, and civilian dimensions of maritime security, and how Türkiye has assumed a balancing role throughout this process. Within this framework, the findings indicate that the legal and economic continuities that existed in the pre-war period have not been entirely eliminated in the post-war context despite the increase in military risks; rather, they have been reconstituted in differentiated forms across sectors.

The findings reveal that, rather than experiencing a full-scale rupture as a result of the war, maritime security in the Black Sea has undergone a highly controlled transformation characterized by sectoral differentiation. In terms of naval power balances, despite the military advantage Russia gained following the annexation of Crimea, the effective implementation of the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits has closed the Black Sea to extra-regional military buildup, thereby structurally constraining escalation based on naval power. Türkiye's consistent and impartial application of the Montreux regime since the outset of the war has been decisive in keeping military competition in the Black Sea under control.

Data on maritime trade indicate that, despite wartime conditions, no structural collapse in trade has occurred in the Black Sea. While the loss of functionality of Ukrainian ports led to a decline in Türkiye-Ukraine trade, the increase in maritime trade with Russia has demonstrated that Türkiye has emerged as a logistical and commercial balancing hub in the Black Sea. This outcome shows that the relationship between maritime security and economic interdependence has not been completely severed even under conditions of war.

In terms of maritime energy security, the Black Sea has emerged during the war as a high-risk yet resilient energy basin. The absence of a significant decline in oil and natural gas transportation through the Turkish Straits

demonstrates that energy supply chains have maintained continuity due to the legal and operational balance implemented by Türkiye. In addition, the commissioning of the Sakarya Gas Field indicates that Türkiye has begun to position itself not only as a transit country but also as a producer in the Black Sea. At the same time, the concentration of energy infrastructure has rendered the Black Sea a security space increasingly exposed to asymmetric threats.

From the perspective of maritime tourism, the Black Sea does not constitute a high-volume maritime tourism hub for Türkiye. No direct or measurable impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on cruise or yachting tourism in the Black Sea context has been identified. However, changes in the number of tourists arriving in Türkiye from Black Sea littoral states indicate that security perceptions and accessibility play a decisive role in overall tourism stability. This finding demonstrates that the impact of maritime security on tourism revenues is indirect yet strategic in nature.

With regard to asymmetric threats, the war has brought particular attention to risks such as drifting naval mines and threats targeting energy infrastructure in the Black Sea. By contrast, no systemic increase has been observed in other threat categories, including piracy, smuggling, and irregular migration. Türkiye's region-centered initiatives, such as Operation Black Sea Harmony and the Mine Countermeasures Task Group, have generated a preventive and stabilizing effect on maritime security.

These findings indicate that, as a semi-enclosed maritime security space, the Black Sea has not become fully destabilized even under wartime conditions; rather, it has been able to generate a controlled security environment through legal regimes, economic continuity, and a regional ownership approach. At the same time, the policy implications derived from this study also point to longer-term risks. Should Russia emerge from the war with military and geopolitical gains, there is a strong possibility that—similar to the period following the 2014 annexation of Crimea—it may further reinforce the Black Sea Fleet and expand its de facto control over maritime jurisdictional areas. Such a scenario could transform the relative balance of power in the Black Sea into a more costly security environment for Türkiye. In particular, the likelihood of low-intensity tensions related to maritime jurisdictional areas may increase, especially with regard to potential energy fields and subsea infrastructure.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that maritime security in the Black Sea cannot be explained solely through military power balances; rather, it requires the joint consideration of legal regimes, economic flows, and asymmetric threats. In this respect, the study diverges from the existing literature that predominantly frames Black Sea security through military–geopolitical competition and instead proposes rethinking maritime security on the basis of

cross-sectoral interactions. Türkiye's balancing approach in the Black Sea illustrates that regional stability can be maintained even under conditions of war, thereby offering a Türkiye-centered, multidimensional, and empirically grounded contribution to the literature on maritime security in semi-enclosed seas.

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Plagiarism check: Completed.

Declaration of conflicting interests: The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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