

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

Teoman Ertuğrul TULUN

Analyst

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The Strategic Blind Spot

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

Montreux Convention: Türkiyes Non-Negotiable Black Sea Framework

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

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

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

Flawed Foundations of the EU Strategy

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

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

Functional Cooperation: A Türkiye-Led Alternative

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

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

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

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

Sovereignty as Stabilizer

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

*Picture: *dunya.com*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

About the Author :

Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun is an analyst at Ankara-based think-tank Center for Eurasian Studies. Dr. Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun received his Ph.D. in Political Science and Public Administration from İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University in Ankara. His area of research include European Union Studies, Globalization, Xenophobia, Hate Speech Studies and International Relations.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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