



## ULUSLARARASI ARENADA KARADENİZ JEOPOLİTİĞİ: ANA OYUNCULAR VE TÜRKİYE-RUSYA İLİŞKİLERİ

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### ÖZ

Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesinin ardından Karadeniz hem küresel hem de bölgesel aktörler için önemli bir bölge olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Devam eden siyasi gerginlikler ve çatışmalar ortasında, istikrarsızlığa yol açabilecek gelişmeleri ele almak için devletlerarasında bir güvenlik ve iş birliği ortamı oluşturmaya odaklanılmıştır. Soğuk Savaş sırasında yeni bir aşamaya giren uluslararası çerçeve, bölgesel alt sistemler içinde giderek daha önemli hale gelmektedir. Yeni Dünya düzeninden kaynaklanan küresel gerginliklerin mevcut bir tezahürü Karadeniz'de açıkça görülmektedir. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun (Rusya) farklılaşan çıkarları, bu bölgedeki artan istikrarsızlığa katkıda bulunmaktadır. Washington, Karadeniz'i stratejik çıkar bölgesi olarak görmekte ve Rusya'nın oradaki artan etkisini bir meydan okuma olarak algılamaktadır. Tersine, Rusya, ABD'ye karşı çok kutuplu bir dünya sistemini savunmaktadır. Amacı, kendisini bölgede "tek baskın güç" olarak kurmaktır. Çalışmada ABD, AB ve Rusya arasındaki bölgedeki rekabet ve Türkiye'nin tarihsel ve güncel stratejileri incelenmiş ve olası gelecekteki eylemlere odaklanılmıştır. Giriş ve incelemenin ardından aktörlerin Karadeniz'e yönelik politikaları ve Türkiye-Rusya ilişkileri tartışılacak ve sonuçlandırılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karadeniz, NATO, AB, ABD, Rusya.

## GEPOLITICS OF THE BLACK SEA IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA: KEY PLAYERS AND TÜRKİYE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

### ABSTRACT

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the Black Sea has emerged as a significant region for both global and regional players. Amid ongoing political tensions and conflicts, there has been a focus on fostering an environment of security and collaboration among states to address developments that could result in instability. The international framework, which entered a new phase during the Cold War, is becoming increasingly important within regional subsystems. A current manifestation of global tensions stemming from the new world order is clearly visible in the Black Sea. The diverging interests of the United States (US) and the Russian Federation (Russia) contribute to the increasing instability in this area. Washington sees the Black Sea as a region of strategic interest and perceives Russia's growing influence there as a challenge. Conversely, Russia advocates a multipolar world system against the US. Its aim is to establish itself as the "sole dominant power" in the region. The study examined the competition between the US, the EU and Russia in the region, as well as Türkiye's historical and current strategies, and focused on possible future actions. After introduction and review, actors' policy toward Black Sea and Türkiye-Russia relations will be discussed and concluded.

**Keywords:** Black Sea, NATO, EU, USA, Russia.

### Introduction

The importance of the Black Sea for Türkiye emerged with the settlement of Turks in Anatolia and then complete Turkish domination. The Turkish and Islamic heritage still continues in the countries around the Black Sea, which was a Turkish lake for about 300 years. Turkish influence, which had reached its lowest point with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, began

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to increase again with the rise of the Republic of Türkiye, which is an effective power in its region.

There are two different views that investigate the effects of power distribution on war and peace in international relations. One of these is the Balance of Power Theory, and the other is the Power Transition Theory. While the first theory suggests that a balanced distribution of power among actors in the international system will prevent wars, the second theory argues the opposite and argues that the formation of a balance of power among actors is an important element that leads to war. As geopolitical elements gained importance in the international system after the Cold War, while ideological elements began to lose their importance, the autonomy of regional systems began to increase and ethnic and religious structures began to come to the fore. In this new international order, global analyses used to understand the competition between Russia and the USA are not sufficient, and regional analyses are needed (İşcan, 2004).

The theory of life space (Lebensraum) put forward by Ratzel (1844-1904), who was accepted as the founder of political geography with his thesis called the organic theory of state evolution, which he developed under the influence of Darwin, was later used by Western colonial states as a scientific justification for expansionist politics (Davutoğlu, 2001). In order to make this power and wealth permanent or to extend it as much as possible, powerful states attacked the weaker ones in the empty region. Today, it has become difficult for wars between countries to occur due to different reasons, but this war is experienced very intensely in different areas, especially in the economic and cultural areas. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the September 11 events, and the Russia-Georgia War have revealed the geostrategic importance of the region again and the struggle of the dominant powers over the region has intensified.

40% of the world's total oil and gas reserves are located in the seas. In the last 20 years, oil and natural gas pipelines have become widespread, but it is not possible for these pipes to reach all countries. Pipelines are transported to the sea, from where they are distributed to the world by sea transportation. The world leader, the USA, and its neighbor, Canada, are in the middle of two oceans, and it is not possible to transport oil to these countries by plane or train. It is not possible for Japan to survive without Middle Eastern oil. As a result, maritime trade has lost none of its importance and function from 500 years ago, on the contrary, it has become more important (Tarakçı, 2005). The seas have maintained their importance throughout history, and empires have been more civilized and long-lasting when they have sea power and sea routes.

For the US and the EU; the region being a gateway to Eurasia, taking ownership of the states that broke away from the Soviet Union - filling the gap - and turning them into markets as new consumption areas, access to the Caspian Sea energy resources, secure acquisition and transfer of energy, the rapidly increasing energy needs of China and India, whose populations in Central Asia have reached 2.5 billion, and their demand to meet their developing economies from this region, the fact that Russia, with its 17 million km<sup>2</sup> land area and a population that will drop to 100-120 million by 2050 according to various reports, finds it very difficult to protect this much land, and their desire to seize the lion's share of these lands and underground resources by settling between China and Russia before the Chinese threat to the region. NATO is being put forward to achieve these goals in the region, and although the inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO was postponed to a later date with the recent war, NATO is trying to

enter the region. The biggest obstacle to NATO naval power is the Montreux Convention, and this is where the harmony between Türkiye and the Russian Federation emerges.

The Suez Canal, which was opened in 1869, not only shortened the sea journey between India and England by 4,000 nautical miles, but also increased the commercial and strategic importance of the Mediterranean. Thanks to the Panama Canal, which was opened in 1914, the USA became a global Western Hemisphere military front and a full Ocean State (Tarakçı, 2005). The Freedom of the Seas principle, which was put forward after World War I, gained an international dimension as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982 after long studies (Tarakçı, 2005). This expansion also targeted the Turkish Straits and the Black Sea after 1991.

For Russia; the US-EU-NATO advance in the region is increasing its encirclement. In order to stop this expansion, it took Georgia's attack on South Ossetia as an opportunity and by attacking Georgia, it separated South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions from the West, and expanded and strengthened its sphere of influence in the Caucasus. With the drawing of this border, the West's move focused on Armenia, and efforts were initiated to normalize Türkiye-Armenia relations, at least for now, to open a door. The occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia has not only severed Azerbaijan-Armenia relations, but also locked Türkiye-Armenia relations. However, when Russia's relations with Armenia are taken into consideration, it is assessed that this relationship will continue in the short term, and that its influence in the region will decrease in the long term as its economy weakens. The economy, which was relieved by the increase in oil prices, started to experience problems again with the decrease in prices, and it has become one of the countries most affected by the economic crisis that has engulfed the world. However, as time goes by and considering that oil and natural gas reserves will decrease, it can be expected that prices will increase again. With the decrease in reserves, states will first turn to meeting their own needs, and at this stage, disagreements with Western oil companies will grow. In this future situation, the West, which wants to strengthen its hand, is making every effort to settle in the Eurasian Region. Russia's efforts are aimed at preventing this settlement, but since it is very inadequate against Western powers in terms of economic and military power, it seems difficult to achieve this. Aware of this, Russia is trying to prevent the EU from becoming an effective power in the region by making agreements with Germany and Italy with the idea of dividing Western powers. In order to reduce China's influence, it is again becoming an ally with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization by targeting the USA. However, the very high level of US influence in the Chinese economy keeps this relationship in a security dimension rather than an economic one. In short, the RF cannot carry the weight of its enormous geography and it is evaluated that it will face division in the medium term. The great powers are making preemptive moves to control the states that will emerge, and efforts to gain ground for the big move to be made in the future are continuing to intensify.

In all this struggle, the Black Sea will continue to be one of the main centers of struggle and will maintain this importance in the future. Türkiye has grasped the importance of the Black Sea. However, its interests in the region are currently aligned with Russia's, against the interests of its ally, the United States. The interests aligned with the United States against Russia's demands after World War II have reversed for today. The location of the Turkish Straits, especially the fact that it passes through the middle of Istanbul, where nearly 20% of the Turkish population lives and is the lifeblood of the economy, will always remain a risk for Türkiye. The Straits, which were closed to external powers for 300 years during the period when the

Ottoman Empire was strong, are no more than a dream to gain the same status today. However, for the security of Istanbul and, accordingly, Türkiye, arrangements to be made within the scope of the Montreux Convention should not be avoided.

Since the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), unsolved local conflicts in Trans-Dniester in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and the Donbass Region in Ukraine have transformed the Black Sea into a region with an unpredictable future due to increasing insecurity, threat perceptions, and militarized international geopolitical competition. Russia has become a central actor in the unresolved conflicts in the region and has played a leading role in shaping the security dynamics of the Black Sea since the early 1990s. In order to understand Russia's threat perception and security policies, it is important to examine the impact of developments in the international system after 2000. The September 11 attacks against the US in 2001 had a great impact on the changing balances in the Black Sea. Following the war that began with the entry of US and UK-led armies into Iraq in 2003, NATO and the EU adopted expansion strategies towards the East [Partnership for Peace Program (BIO), North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC); The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Eurosphere has accelerated. The rapprochement process of Ukraine, a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with NATO and the EU has begun. The Georgia-South Ossetia War in 2008, the Syrian War in 2011, the transfer of the missile shield by the US to NATO, and the developments that occurred with the crisis that began in Ukraine at the end of 2013 created new balances in the Black Sea and were met with a new dynamism in Russia's Black Sea policies. All these developments have also been an indication that the reset policy initiated between the US under Obama and Russia under Medvedev in 2009 has not achieved its goal (Özdal, 2015).

With the addition of Georgia and Ukraine to the Euro-Atlantic expansion agenda, global actors have come to the end of Russia's acceptable regional borders in the Black Sea region. NATO's development of relations with former Soviet countries in the Black Sea has caused Russia to worry, become more aggressive in its foreign policy and created new tension points in the Black Sea.

The war between Russia and Georgia in South Ossetia in August 2008 resulted in Moscow using force when Russia felt threatened in its immediate vicinity due to NATO's good relations with Georgia, which it viewed as an area of influence. Similarly, Ukraine's efforts to develop a dialogue with NATO and the EU transformed the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community into a political crisis in 2014, leading to Russia's annexation of Crimea and increased instability in Eastern Ukraine. The Black Sea has become a competitive environment between Russia and the actors of the Euro-Atlantic system (NATO, EU) (Erol, 2014).

Geopolitics is a discipline that states use to determine their strategies in the international system. Various theories have been developed in the historical process of geopolitics, which is a sub-branch of political geography. Theories developed as Land, Sea, Air, Border Zone Dominance are used both in possessing power, which is the basic element of international relations, and in interpreting international issues. Many geopolitical theories see the Eurasian geography as the key to establishing global dominance. Since Eurasia is the largest continent on Earth, it is thought that the power that establishes dominance in this region will also own a large part of the world economy.

The fact that the Black Sea is an inland sea of Eurasia brings the geopolitics of the Black Sea to the forefront. The power vacuum that emerged in the Black Sea basin, especially after the Cold War, has attracted the attention of states aiming to become global powers. According to classical geopolitical theorists, the Black Sea basin is one of the most important places for ensuring security in Eurasia. The energy-transportation lines and natural resources of the basin increase the sensitivity of the region. Dominance to be achieved in the Black Sea basin, which is the intersection of the Heartland and Border Belt theories, will also ensure Eurasian domination.

The research analyzed the rivalry among the US, the EU, and Russia in the area, while also looking into Türkiye's past and present strategies, and considered potential future moves.

### **Literature Review**

Today, with the rapid advancement of technology, we observe that societies are getting closer to each other socially, politically and economically. With the acceleration provided by globalization, an interdependence has formed between individuals, businesses and states living in different regions. These changes have also brought about various methods and concepts regarding the power struggle between the parties.

The increase in international relations has caused not only individuals and societies but also the problems experienced to be similar. Military, social, economic and geographical issues have become more interdependent than ever before. With developing communication, communication etc. technologies, the struggle of societies or countries for existence necessitates the evaluation of many areas by taking geography into consideration. In this context, geopolitics is considered as a method that focuses on geography and evaluates other variables (social, economic, military etc.) as a whole and tries to solve the problems that arise from this power struggle (İlhan, 1997). Especially with the Industrial Revolution that started in England, the need for cheap raw materials and labor to feed the growth of rapidly developing countries has brought geopolitics, a relatively new branch of science, to an important position in the relations of the relevant countries on these areas (Külebi, 2009). Geopolitics, as a theory and practice, is directly related to the establishment of states and multinational states where sovereign political structures emerge. Theories produced, especially regarding "Classical Geopolitics", emerged as a result of the struggle of powerful sovereign states at the end of the 19th century.

Although geopolitical terminology has a history of a little over a century, political thinkers have had a geopolitical perspective from ancient times to the present day. In terms of meaning, geopolitics, as a political interpretation of geography, dates back to ancient times. In ancient Greece and Rome, philosophers and historians such as Thales (625-547 BC), Anaximander (610-47 BC), Herodotus (485-425 BC), Plato (427-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), and ancient Roman strategists Cicero and Strabon (63 BC-24 AD) have works that relate state policy to the geography in which they are located (İşcan, 2004).

The concept of geopolitics has its roots in both Western and Eastern civilizations, with important contributions from thinkers such as Farabi and Ibn Khaldun. Farabi, who was active between 870 and 950 AD, suggested a causal relationship between politics and geography by relating sociopolitical events to environmental conditions. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD) influenced modern geopolitical theories by providing insights into the geography and socio-cultural differences of various groups in North Africa and the Middle East. Montesquieu

(1689–1755) also emphasized the connection between styles of government and geographic climate in his work *The Spirit of the Laws*.

When geopolitics is evaluated etymologically, it is seen that it is formed by the combination of the words “geo” and “politic”. “Geo” means earth or world, while “politics” is derived from “polis”, which is used as “city” or “state” in Ancient Greek (Karabulut, 2005).

The Turkish Language Association (TDK) has three separate definitions for geopolitics: “geopolitic” in English, “geopolitik” in German, and “geopolitique” in French. All three definitions emphasize the relationship between geography and state policy or politics. According to TDK, geopolitics is defined as the relationship between the politics implemented by a region or state and the geographical features of that region (TDK, 2023).

Geopolitics emerged as a major concept in the late 19th century, reshaping the global political landscape amid imperial rivalries from the 1870s to 1945. Influenced by Darwin's ideas, German geographer Friedrich Ratzel proposed the ‘Organic Theory of the State’ in 1887, which depicted the state as a living organism that necessitated expansion and justified war. The term ‘geopolitics’ was coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899. His ideas were later adopted by Karl Haushofer, who emphasized the spatial expansion of states for survival; the concept was later adopted by Nazi Germany in its foreign policy and propaganda.

The concept of geopolitics, although relatively recent as a modern geopolitical theory, has generated a significant body of literature. Researchers from a variety of disciplines, including history, political science, and geography, have offered a variety of definitions of geopolitics reflecting different social and geographical contexts. İlhan (1997) describes geopolitics as a scientific field that investigates how geographical variables affect political decisions. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the interaction between geography, politics, and power in shaping political choices, emphasizing the importance of geopolitics in decision-making processes.

Agnew (2003) outlines a three-stage conceptualization of geopolitics, beginning with the ‘Geopolitics of Civilizations’, characterized by state competition in Europe and beyond in the 19th century. This evolved into ‘Natural Geopolitics’ in the early 20th century, focusing on territorial struggles influenced by economic interests and race. The final stage, ‘Ideological Geopolitics’, emerged during the Cold War and reflected a bipolar world and a unified geographical perception rooted in Renaissance Europe. Each period presents a distinct geopolitical perspective, emphasizing the evolution of geopolitical thought over time.

Defay (2005) defines geopolitics as an interrelationship between politics and geography that affects not only national power but also economy and culture.

Flint (2016) explores the definition of geopolitics to better understand contemporary world dynamics and emphasizes the need for diverse definitions, similar to Tuathail (1996). He initially associates geopolitics with statism, defining it as competition among states for resources in specific regions. Flint expands this definition to include not only the territorial struggles of states, but also the involvement of non-governmental organizations, terrorist groups, and private corporations in the pursuit of territorial control. This comprehensive approach emphasizes the multifaceted nature of geopolitical interactions in today's world.

Dodds (2007) explores the concept of geopolitics, which has not been defined by experts, as a way of visualizing the world through maps, charts and photographs. This approach simplifies complex political landscapes into easily digestible models using geographical metaphors and templates such as the 'iron curtain' and the 'third world'. Such simplifications are common in the media, where political entities are often reduced to basic descriptors such as 'London', 'Washington' or 'Moscow'. This reductionist view plays an important role in shaping public perception and understanding of global politics.

Geopolitics, as defined by Lacoste (2008), refers to the impact of geography on people and the resulting power dynamics involving various entities, such as states, organizations, or terrorist groups. This concept remains valid regardless of the size of the territory in question. Lacoste emphasizes that geopolitics not only communicates ideas, but also shows the connections between different events. As a result, it reflects internal conflicts within a nation and helps make informed predictions about future developments.

Külebi (2009) defines geopolitics as the relationship between people and geography, emphasizing how a state's policies adapt to the geographical context, including socioeconomic, military and cultural factors.

Yilmaz (2015) emphasizes that there is no universally accepted definition of geopolitics and emphasizes the role of geopolitics as a tool in analyzing foreign policy through the lens of geography and helping to understand and predict international relations.

Caldara and Iacoviello (2018) discuss the evolving definition of geopolitics, which Flint (2016) initially defined as competition between states for territory. They argue that this definition is outdated and needs to be updated to reflect contemporary realities. In recent years, the concept of geopolitics has expanded to include a broader range of actors beyond just states, such as institutions, non-state organizations, rebel groups, and political organizations. This diversification highlights the complexity of geopolitical struggles in the modern world.

Arı (2018) emphasizes the deterministic link between geography and state foreign policy, emphasizing that proximity to resources and the sea significantly affects international competition.

Mutluer (2019) argues that geopolitics should be addressed in a broad manner, encompassing not only politics and geography but also cultural, identity and historical factors.

Professor of geography Blij (2019) aims to define geopolitics from the perspective of geographers and highlight their focus on political action from a spatial perspective. He positions geopolitics as a historical sub-branch of political geography that has recently moved away from its association with Nazism. In doing so, he elevates geopolitics to a major aspect of political geography and defines it as a fascinating field encompassing a wide range of topics, from border studies to power struggles. This redefinition highlights the relevance and complexity of geopolitics in contemporary studies.

Although geopolitics is often seen as synonymous with political geography, it is also recognized as a separate discipline, especially in developed countries.

### **Strategic Importance of the Black Sea**

The Black Sea has been a passageway between Asia and Europe for centuries, and regions where different tribes lived together have formed on it. This rich mixture has given way to chaos with the emergence of nationalism. Today, the events in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Ukraine have become a tool in the struggle of great powers with each other within the scope of micro-nationalism, and it is evaluated that a definitive solution to the problems will not be found in the near future.

### **The Importance of the Black Sea as Geographical Location**

The Black Sea is the largest inland sea in the world with its length of 1200 km, width of 615 km and area of 420,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The maximum depth in the basin of the Black Sea is 2212 m and the average depth is 1300 m. Salinity is around 18-19% on the surface and 22.5% at 2000 m. The Black Sea is connected to the Mediterranean Sea via straits in the south and to the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait in the north. One of the most important oceanographic features of the Black Sea is that the freshwater input is greater than the water loss due to evaporation. The freshwater input from rivers and precipitation is approximately 350 km<sup>3</sup>/year and 300 km<sup>3</sup>/year, respectively, while the loss due to evaporation is around 350 km<sup>3</sup>/year. Most of the areas shallower than 200 meters in the Black Sea are located in the northwestern region and constitute 27% of the entire area. The total volume of the sea is 537,000 km<sup>3</sup>, 90% of which is covered by deep oxygen-free water. Under the oxygenated upper water layer, which is 60-80 meters thick on average, is the world's largest hydrogen sulfide water mass.

It has significant geopolitical importance, as emphasized by various theories such as Mac-kinder's Land Dominance Theory, Spykman's Marginal Zone Theory, and Mahan's Maritime Dominance Theory. Mackinder emphasizes the region's strategic access to the core regions, while Spykman describes it as an important link between Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Mahan's theory proposes that control over the Black Sea is equivalent to wider maritime dominance, emphasizing its strategic importance in global geopolitics.

The Black Sea region is seen as an important factor that strengthens the existing relations between culture and civilization, people and country, as Huntington's argument in his thesis "Clash of Civilizations", and is geographically located on a line separating the Muslim world and the Orthodox world, and in this respect, it causes the formation of a geostrategic line in the region. Similarly, since it is located in a strategic position in Mackinder's geopolitical center, the Black Sea region has played an important role in the shaping of many ethnic and political issues as well as European history.

From a historical perspective, it can be observed that this region has been the scene of various power struggles since the conquest of Crimea by Mehmet the Conqueror in the 15th century and that these power struggles continue today. When the importance of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits is considered, these power struggles become more meaningful.

The Black Sea, an important sea of the Eurasian region, is located in the southeast of Türkiye and Northern Europe. There are various definitions of the Black Sea region. The narrow and wide Black Sea definitions are used for the region. However, there is no consensus on the definition of the region. The narrow definition includes Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, RF, Ukraine,

Türkiye and the Black Sea coasts. On the other hand, the wide Black Sea region includes Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan and these six countries. According to Aydın, the Black Sea region, which is a political formation rather than a geographical area, surrounds countries that may be affected by political developments in the region and coastal countries to Southeastern Europe and the Caspian coast. There are also views that define the Black Sea region as a part of the "Wider Middle East" Project and the Eastern border (Aydın, 2004). In addition, there is the phrase "Extended Black Sea Region", which has been used more frequently recently and includes not only coastal countries but also their neighbors. The Black Sea has coasts with six countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Türkiye and Georgia (Aşık, 2010). To put it more clearly, in addition to the countries mentioned above, there are also states such as Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece in this region (Aşık, 2010). The Black Sea region, which includes many states and has such an important geographical location, constitutes one of the important subjects of study in terms of political, economic and military fields.

### **The Importance of the Black Sea in International Political Economy**

The importance of the Black Sea has also been emphasized by geopolitical thinkers who study the influence of geographical factors on political actions. According to the Heartland Theory of Mackinder (1962:150), Spykman's Rimland Theory, Schaklian's Air Power Theory, and Mahan's Sea Power Theory, the power that dominates the Black Sea is geographically positioned to control the Heartland and the World Island. Additionally, Samuel Huntington argued that the dividing line between the Muslim world and the Orthodox world passes through the Black Sea, and that the region also serves as a kind of fault line separating countries that integrated with the West after the Cold War from others. In light of these assessments, due to the increasing importance of the Black Sea region in terms of energy, a new geopolitical expression can be adapted to reflect today's reality: *"He who controls the export routes controls oil and gas, and he who controls oil and gas controls the Heartland"* (Demir, 2012).

The close relations established by countries that gained their independence after the Cold War with international organizations have caused the number of actors in the region to increase and geopolitical and geostrategic steps to become more complicated (Okman, 2018). This situation has made it necessary to establish new balances. With the development of technology, the energy needs of societies have increased significantly. Today, we have developed a lifestyle dependent on energy not only in industry but also in every aspect of life. Countries need reliable energy sources in order to continue their development. An environment of mutual trust must be established between energy-producing and energy-consuming countries. However, in some cases, trade with a single country in the energy market can overshadow the economic independence of countries. Therefore, countries need to develop their own resources or diversify the countries they supply. According to external dependency data in energy, the EU average is 55%. Energy items such as oil, natural gas, coal, and LNG are included in the dependency calculation. Germany meets almost all of its natural gas needs from Russia. Russia's income sources consist of 50% of energy exports. The USA, on the other hand, wants to reduce the EU's dependence on Russia for energy resources by transporting Caspian energy resources from non-Russian regions to the world market and diversifying the EU's energy supply sources.

Establishing close relations with NATO and the EU, especially Romania and Bulgaria's EU membership and Georgia's security agreements with NATO, have caused the Black Sea to become the new center of international power display. The USA, the EU, Russia and the countries in the region have had to develop geo-political, geo-economics and military-geo-strategic policies in order to use the resources of the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the South Caucasus in line with their national interests (Hasanov, 2016).

Globalization is the redistribution of privileges, deprivation, wealth and poverty, resources and helplessness, power and powerlessness, freedom and restriction (Bauman, 1997). The current form of capitalism, which tends to produce more than can be consumed, is globalized capitalism (Amin, 1999). Especially in the post-Cold War period, the Balkans-Middle East and the Caucasus appear to be a "triangle of instability" (Okman, 1995).

After the Cold War, the first and only global power in the world was the United States. The short-term preservation of this superiority and its transformation into institutionalized global cooperation in the long term are directly proportional to the effectiveness in Eurasia (Brezinski, 1998).

When we look at the general conjecture in the Black Sea Region; During the Cold War; it can be said that it was surrounded by the USSR and its satellites, except for Türkiye, and closed to external influence, and that there was no security problem. After the collapse of the USSR; New Coastal Countries emerged: Ukraine and Georgia, the RF border has shrunk, multilateral cooperation has begun to develop: From BSEC to BSEC, it is seen that the international struggle has increased.

The three-stage strategy of the West after the Cold War can be briefly listed as follows (Aydın, 2004);

- Inclusion of Central and Eastern Europe into the transatlantic system - NATO and EU expansions,
- Establishing influence in the wider Black Sea,
- Expansion up to the borders of the Russian Federation - Inclusion of the Caucasus into the transatlantic system.

The reasons for the intense interest in the Black Sea are: the change in the US threat perception and Black Sea perspective after the 9/11 (September 11) and 3/11 (March 11-Madrid) terrorist attacks, an analysis study covering the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Caspian, Central Asia and perhaps a part of Iran in addition to the coastal countries, being seen as a back door opening to the Greater Middle East, being a strategic corridor between the Atlantic region and the troubled Middle East, which represents 65 percent of the world's oil reserves.

The power that is effective in the Black Sea in the middle of the Caucasus, Balkans, Russia and Türkiye quadrangle will gain great momentum in controlling Eurasia and even the Middle East. The aims of the Transatlantic Initiative in the region can be listed as: Limiting the Russian Federation to its borders, Democracy Support Programs, Breaking Armenia, Splitting the front by breaking Iran and Russia, Splitting the front by breaking Russia and China, Approaching the energy basins, filling the empty regions. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, wants to develop the Nearby Doctrine, increase conflicts: Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, and use the energy card.

In the 20th century, the use of power from sea to land (Power Projection) has become increasingly important as a naval mission. The freedom of the sea environment and the ability to reach anywhere in the world even in a peaceful environment, combined with today's high military technology, allows the transfer of all kinds of power from sea to land (Tarakçı, 2005). The Black Sea has come to the fore for this reason. A great power that will pass through the straits will be effective in the Balkans, Crimea, the Caucasus, the Caspian and even Central Asia.

For the EU, the Black Sea and its surroundings are an important transition geography on the way to becoming a global actor and an area where it must solve the problems it will have to face in the future from today. In this context, the Black Sea countries cover the only geography in Europe's opening to the East by land. It is evaluated that a Europe that is not effective in the Black Sea will not be able to be effective in Central Asia and the Middle East in the long term. On the other hand, the economic rise of the East forces the EU to be close to this geography uninterruptedly and economically. In this direction, the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor Project (TRACECA) developed by the EU covers a large area from the Balkans to the interior of Asia. The EU's interest in the region has been constantly increasing since the Cold War. The Black Sea has been a region separating conflicts between Europe and Asia.

One of the most important obstacles to the realization of the idea of the US being effective in the Black Sea is the Montreux Convention. This agreement is being tried to be melted and changed in different scenarios. In the event that the US cannot enter the Black Sea with its own flag in the short term, plans for a "soft transition" under the NATO flag are also on the agenda. However, Russia is very concerned about this. Today, not only the US and Russia, but also many global and regional powers, coastal countries and institutions are fighting for this strategically deep sea.

The Black Sea; with its coasts and hinterland, covers a population of over 320 million, a region of 20 million square kilometers, the richest natural gas reserves in the world after the Gulf region, and also gave its name to the BSEC, which had a trade volume of 300 billion dollars at the time it was founded. With the establishment of the BSEC, the issue of how to transport the oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian basin, primarily Azerbaijan, to the West came to the world's agenda. There were two important options for this at the beginning. One was to establish a pipeline from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast of Türkiye, and the second was to transport this oil by pipeline to the ports of Russia on the eastern Black Sea and from there to tankers via the Turkish Straits. Later, a third option emerged in which both of these options would be implemented together. In the first option, extending the pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan was deemed both long-term and costly. Secondly, the irreparable damage that would be caused to the people living in the settlements on these coasts and to the environment through the continuous transportation of dangerous oil through the Turkish Straits, where many maritime accidents had occurred until then, was put forward as a significant drawback.

The Black Sea and its surroundings have become and will continue to be one of the centers of the world's fundamental problems. Türkiye must be a strong state in this region in every way and defend its rights, and it must do this by implementing peaceful policies and prioritizing economic relations. The countries' interdependence should be increased with the transportation to be developed on the Black Sea, but Türkiye should be on the side that can use its power effectively.

### **Key Players' Struggle for the Black Sea**

The actors involved in the Black Sea Basin are Türkiye, Russia, the US and the EU. Since the actors care about their interests due to the geopolitical and geostrategic location of the Black Sea, they need to develop policies for the basin. This situation sometimes creates a competitive environment where interests clash and sometimes creates a cooperative environment where common interests are taken into account. Therefore, the Black Sea stands out as an area where the actors are in conflict.

### **Black Sea Policy of the Russian Federation**

In the 17th century, goods imported from Russia to Europe began to come from North America, which was safer than the northern sea route, and the importance of the north decreased again. During the same period, products previously specific to the Russian North, such as fur, timber, and whale oil, entered the European market from the French colony of Canada, and this caused prices in the Russian domestic market to fall. Russia under the rule of Peter the Great both lost the importance of the northern trade route and had to struggle with the deteriorating trade balance. The Great Northern War, which began on February 22, 1700 and would last for twenty years, was the first time the importance of protecting and securing the borders of the region was understood. This war was the war initiated and won by the alliance formed under the leadership of Russian Tsar Peter I (Hanover, the Kingdom of Great Britain, Poland, Saxony, and Denmark-Norway) to prevent the expansion of the Swedish Empire. Most of the war took place in the northern regions, and after 1721, Russia proved to be one of the most important empires. Russia, which entered the 18th century with a strong presence, made a great leap forward in the metallurgical industry, also under the influence of the Northern Wars, and in the extraction of iron ores, which were concentrated especially in the northern parts of Siberia, France and Britain, the empires that exported the most iron, provided financial support. Accordingly, since Britain met 84% of its iron needs from Russia in 1754, mutual dependency emerged (Kagarlitsky, 2007: 256-260). The increase in importance of the Arkhangelsk Port in the north for the empire also coincides with the same period. The quota limitation applied to the port, which was kept in the background for the development of St. Petersburg for many years, was lifted in 1727 and the port was used especially for grain, flax and hemp trade to Northern Europe. However, towards the end of the century, with the establishment of the cities of Sevastopol and Odessa on the Black Sea coast, both the navy and trade were shifted to the south and the Northern region lost its importance for a long time. In this context, it is also important that Alaska was the first land sold. As a result of both the change in foreign policy and the emergence of new trade routes, Alaska, which was once important in trade, was sold to the USA for 7.2 million dollars on March 30, 1867 due to the excess foreign debts incurred as a result of the loss of the Crimean War (1853-1856). Known as Russian America at the time, Alaska was the first place to be sacrificed from the imperial territory due to both the fact that it could not be completely conquered and the difficulty of ensuring its military security. With the great defeat in the Crimean War, the idea that the Tsardom would not be able to protect its lands in Alaska emerged; it was thought that it would be a wiser decision to sell it rather than have it occupied by the United Kingdom or France (Çalık, 2025).

For the Russians, the Black Sea has always been a strategic region at the heart of their foreign policy, regardless of the years. The importance of the Black Sea in terms of access to

natural resources today has also been a feature that has increased the strategic position of the Black Sea in past periods. From the Tsarist period to the present, the Black Sea has been a geography that Russia has considered equal to its regional and national interests, and over the years it has not lost any of this value, on the contrary, it has become an axis of increasing importance in the international arena.

In the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire was the dominant power in the region, ruling over most of the surrounding areas. Therefore, the Black Sea was considered a 'Turkish lake'. Until World War I, the struggle for sovereignty over the Black Sea region continued between the Russian and Ottoman empires. The desire to access the Black Sea through the straits and control the region through the straits has been a strategic issue dating back to ancient times.

Russia's Black Sea adventure first began with the capture of Ukraine in the 17th century. From that date on, Ukraine began to be shown as a part of Russia. It is even known that certain segments of the Russian population (merchants, craftsmen, workers, etc.) were collectively settled in Ukraine for this purpose (Ereker and Özer, 2013). Again, during this period, the Russian navy established in the Caspian Sea by Tsar Peter was one of the key moves for the Russians' presence in the Black Sea. Another critical step that shaped the Russians' Black Sea dominance was the capture of Crimea in 1784. The foundations of the navy in Sevastopol, which still maintains its critical importance for Russia today, were laid in these years. 14 years after the construction of the navy, Russia gained the right to pass its Black Sea navy through the straits for the first time during the war period, in accordance with the Istanbul Treaty signed with the Ottoman Empire. Being able to use the straits is one of the main goals of Russia's Black Sea policy.

The successor of Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, pursued a Black Sea policy similar to the goals and policies of the Tsarist period. The control of the Black Sea and the straits were the most important security issues in the Soviet period, as they were in Tsarist Russia. The Soviet Union was concerned about the Turkish Straits falling under British control. At that time, the status of the straits was subject to an agreement determined by a group of states including Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Türkiye. In the London Straits Convention, it was agreed that warships would not pass through the straits during peacetime. With this agreement, England planned to reduce Russia's mobility in the Black Sea and aimed to prevent the possibility of Russia reaching the Mediterranean and hindering England's imperial goals. Russia, on the other hand, intended to take every opportunity to prevent these hindering efforts against it.

The Soviet Union, which took advantage of Türkiye's need for external support during the years of the War of Independence, forced the Turkish government to accept that the straits would be controlled only by countries on the Black Sea coast. However, the states that did not have a coast on the Black Sea and had control over the straits until then, under the control of Türkiye and Russia, did not want to accept this agreement and brought this issue to the agenda at the Lausanne Conference held after the war. At the Lausanne Conference, Türkiye accepted the article that allowed warships to pass through the straits (in times of war and peace) under certain conditions. The Montreux (1936) Straits Convention, signed 13 years after the conference, imposed certain restrictions on the waiting times and the amount of cargo that warships of states without a coast on the Black Sea could carry. Although the fact that war and peace were addressed under a separate heading in the Straits Convention reduced the risk of threat to the Soviet Union's navy in the Black Sea, it did not eliminate it (Ereker and Özer, 2013).

The Soviet Union wanted to have control over the straits. The Soviet Union's insistence on this issue was not unfounded. Half of the Soviet Union's trade passed through the straits, and in addition, two of the attacks in the history of the Black Sea came from these areas until that period. For this reason, the strait issue became the main agenda item in foreign policy during the Soviet Union period, just as it had been during the Tsarist period. However, it is thought that the Union's insistence on this issue alienated Türkiye from itself (Gökay, 2006). As a result of Türkiye's distancing itself from itself and getting closer to the US, Soviet Russia reduced its emphasis on the straits issue, but the issue of the security of the straits continued to occupy a strategic position in foreign policy. In order to ensure the security of the Black Sea fleet and the continuation of trade from the Black Sea, the Soviet Union never left the straits issue aside and continued to develop alternative trade routes in this regard. The Soviet Union, which produced the canal project connecting the Danube River and the Black Sea, created a trade route between Eastern Europe and the Black Sea (Ereker and Özer, 2013).

Before touching upon Russia's Black Sea policy, it would be useful to briefly touch upon the Soviet Union's pre-Cold War relationship with NATO. After World War II, the world was divided between two ideologically and politically different poles, and this led to the emergence of security-based policies and mechanisms on both sides. In the 20th century, the USSR displayed an alternative stance against the capitalist system. While Europe was struggling to repair the economic and military effects of the destruction after the war, its armies had run out of power, and on the other side, the Soviet Union posed both a military and ideological threat to Europe with its armies that maintained their power in the countries it occupied. The Soviet Union's goal was to include Europe in its sphere of influence (Jafarov, 2007).

The first large-scale military exercise that Russia conducted in the northern region after the USSR period was Vostok-2010, which took place between June 29 and July 8, 2010. The Pacific Fleet, along with the Far East, Siberia and Volga-Ural military regions, participated in the exercise, and for the first time in Russian history, a military exercise was held with the participation of three war fleets (the Black Sea Fleet, the Pacific Fleet and the Northern Fleet). The Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Colonel General Nikolay Yegorovich Makarov, gave a strong message against China, saying, "There may be an army of billions in the East. Therefore, this exercise is very important to develop our combat capabilities, personnel and firepower" (Xinhua, 2010). In addition to a possible war against China, the arrival of illegal Chinese immigrants and the increase in the smuggling of precious metals in the region are also reasons for the exercise. After the Vostok-2008 exercise, which was small-scale (8,000 soldiers), the first sign of increased security in the region was the 2010 exercise (Çalık, 2025).

As a result of this Soviet threat, NATO was established in 1949 to protect the North Atlantic Region. During this period, the West's perception of the Soviet Union as a political and military security threat as a result of the Soviet Union's increasing military capacity was one of the factors that triggered the establishment of NATO. Five years after its establishment, NATO included the use of mass weapons in its new strategy in order to be in line with the US's strategy at that time and to reduce military spending. With this strategy, NATO gave the message that it could use nuclear power in the event of an invasion attempt by the Soviet Union, regardless of whether the Soviet Union used nuclear weapons or not (Jafarov, 2007).

In 1955, West Germany became a member of NATO, which led the Soviet Union to sign the Warsaw Pact with the Eastern Bloc countries on the grounds of protecting the security of

the countries in Europe. In addition to the USSR, the member states of the pact included Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Albania and East Germany. It was decided that in the event of an attack on any of the Warsaw Pact member states, the armies of the member states would act as an allied force. After the Warsaw Pact was established, a polarization along the East-West axis began in the military structures in Europe. This situation was the first sign that the Cold War had come. The Cuban Crisis in 1962 highlighted the Soviet Union's advanced technology in the field of nuclear weapons. This development was perceived as a significant challenge to the balance of power by the USA and Europe. In response, NATO moderated its policy towards the Soviet Union and maintained this flexible policy until the mid-1980s (Jafarov, 2007).

Among the factors that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the gap between the government and the people in domestic politics and America's efforts to undermine it in foreign policy were at the top of the list. Trust in state institutions has decreased significantly. Economic developments in Europe and America have caused unrest in the USSR societies that were experiencing economic problems. The nuclear warheads that America placed in Europe and Moscow's involvement in the space race increased the USSR's defense spending and accelerated the deterioration of the union. Gorbachev, who rose to the leadership of the USSR in 1985, implemented the new idea called "Novaya Mishleniye" in foreign policy. The new idea was a policy that looked favorably on cooperation with Europe, had liberal characteristics, and argued that the development of the Union could not be considered independently of Europe (Özdal, 2015).

Although the Gorbachev era attempted to keep the union alive with new projects for domestic and foreign policy, these practices were not enough to convince the society that had turned its back on the government for a while. The Berlin Wall fell with the unstoppable disintegration that first started in Eastern Europe in 1989, and this process culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eurasian ideological framework, advocated by ideologist Alexander Dugin, has profoundly influenced the development of Russia's contemporary foreign policy. Dugin, who maintains a consistent skepticism towards NATO and the West, has been instrumental in this ideological transformation. Motivated by a desire to replicate the peak of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Russia's ruling elites and ideologists have focused their efforts on rehabilitating the image of a distinguished Russia. As a result, since the mid-2000s, Russia has gradually shifted away from its policy of normalization with the West, which had been established since 1990, particularly regarding its relations with the United States and NATO. This change in policy has been primarily led by Putin, who took over the presidency from Boris Yeltsin (Demir and Gürson, 2024).

The National Security, Foreign Policy and Military Doctrine documents announced in the early 2000s set out the directions of Russian foreign policy. It was stated that the near abroad strategy adopted in the 1990s would continue. It was mentioned that relations with the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) should be developed in order to develop relations with the states that gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that the rights of foreign citizens should be protected. In bilateral relations to be established with states, strategic partnerships compatible with security and interests and good neighborliness were emphasized. It also expressed its discomfort with the relations that Western actors planned to develop towards their near abroad. It is seen that it is trying to regain its power with an active policy to be carried out in the Black Sea Basin.

Since Russia sees the Black Sea as an opportunity for itself, it is of great political, economic, historical and cultural importance. In addition to being a gateway to the Mediterranean for Russia, the Black Sea is also important in terms of its location in transporting energy resources in the Caspian Basin to international markets and the security of its southern borders. Russia's increasing interest in the Black Sea Basin reveals how much importance it attaches to the basin with the policies it develops. However, it is also noteworthy that Russia is also interested in institutions for cooperation established in the basin in line with its interests. Especially after Putin came to power, its immediate surroundings in the basin are given even more importance. Until the 2000s, it is seen that Russia continued to regain its dominant position and leadership in the Soviet period in its Black Sea policy, to have a say in the problems experienced in the basin by intervening and to maintain its stability (Ereker and Özer, 2013). Russia's interests in the Black Sea Basin are listed as maintaining its key position against the increasing interest of both global and regional actors in the basin, ensuring that it is under control of energy lines and preventing projects outside of its own, taking precautions against anti-Russian formations, preventing NATO's advancement, and fighting against terrorism and separatist activities (Çelikpala, 2010).

Russia also sees the Black Sea as a natural security area. The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the South Ossetia and Abkhazia issues that started as an internal issue of Georgia and led to war with Georgia in 2008, Russia's support for Transnistria in the conflicts in Moldova, the process leading to Russia's annexation of Crimea in the developments in Ukraine have threatened the security of the basin and the issues have been frozen and the solution has been postponed. Due to the presence of frozen conflict zones in the basin, Russia has seen the situation in question as a potential threat that will spread towards itself. The destabilizing function of the situation has allowed Russia to maintain its presence in the basin with its defense policies.

As a result of the developments in the basin after the Cold War, the increasing military and economic influence of Western countries on the newly independent states, the expansion policies of both the EU and NATO, their becoming coastal states in the basin and their policy implementations disturb Russia and it thinks that it will be surrounded by the expansion and neighborhood policies pursued. In the process that started with the development of relations with Western states in the Black Sea Basin, the expansion steps of the EU and NATO in the basin are met with anxiety from Russia and create a feeling of being surrounded. In particular, NATO's expansion into Russia's immediate vicinity by increasing its areas of activity in the basin creates a sense of encirclement in Russia and the idea that its mobility will be limited. In contrast, Russia has held talks on not including Ukraine and Georgia, which it sees as its backyard, in the institutions, has used the energy card as a political tool and has even made military interventions that will lead to a state of war (Bozkurt, 2008). Speaking at the 43rd Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin stated that Russia would fight against elements it would see as threats to its interests, that it did not accept the US and the unipolar world order, that the system consisted of a multipolar world order in which Russia was among the global actors, and that it would exert its influence in power struggles in its immediate vicinity. However, the process shows that Russia would act in accordance with its interests in the Black Sea Basin and that it could be in competition with Western states. When the NATO membership process of Georgia and Ukraine came up in 2008, Russia reacted strongly to the situation in question. This situation

also led Russia to watch the process carefully in the projects developed by the EU for the basin with the European Neighborhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, and Black Sea Synergy programs.

In the Foreign Policy Concept published in 2008, while focusing on relations with the CIS and Russian minorities, it also states its discomfort with the West developing relations in its immediate vicinity. It wants to be under its own control in its relations with the states in its immediate vicinity in the Black Sea Basin. The era of tranquility brought about by the so-called 'benign hegemony' of the United States following the conclusion of the Cold War has been undermined by actions from both the United States and Russia. The Russian Federation has sought to reestablish itself as a global power reminiscent of the former Soviet Union's prominence. Additionally, it has aimed to exert complete control over the newly independent states that emerged from the Soviet Union. To achieve these objectives, Russia has engaged in overt military interventions, disrupted political stability, and compelled governmental changes, all in accordance with its 'near abroad doctrine' (Demir, 2022).

The Russian Federation has aimed to assert comprehensive dominance over the newly sovereign nations that arose following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Identified as a revisionist state since the early 1990s, Russia has utilized a range of subversive tactics against its neighboring countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. These tactics encompass harmful propaganda, economic and political sanctions, the strategic manipulation of migrant movements to challenge territorial integrity, backing for separatist movements, efforts to destabilize political order, coercion for governmental changes, and, ultimately, direct military interventions as part of its policy concerning the "near abroad" (Demir and Gürson, 2024).

The necessity of preserving the established identity of the BSEC and developing cooperation mechanisms among the states in the basin is emphasized. In the National Security Strategy announced in 2009, the expansion of Western actors towards the Black Sea Basin is opposed. In the Military Doctrine of 2010, NATO's expansion policy is given first place to Russia's external threats. Priority is given to the modernization of the naval elements of the fleet in the Black Sea and the increase of their capacities. With the Russia-Georgia War, it has become an indication that the possibility of the West being present in the Black Sea Basin, especially in its immediate vicinity, is intolerable.

The Black Sea Basin is emphasized in the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept. It mentions the development of mutual relations between Russia and the states in the basin, while respecting their national interests. It supports the necessity of working on finding solutions to the problems of Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which concern the Black Sea Basin, and the resolution of the internal conflict in Ukraine through cooperation. It mentions the necessity of working with the states in the Caspian and Black Sea Basins, their commitment to the principles of the BSEC and the strengthening of cooperation mechanisms.

Russia, in response to NATO's expansion policy and the increase in its military presence in the Black Sea Basin, has prioritized the modernization of its fleet in the Black Sea and has sought to gain an important position in the basin. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia gained geopolitical advantage due to its geographical location and equipped its naval elements with missile systems. It aimed to keep the basin under its control with its military base in Crimea.

Since the Black Sea is an important corridor for transporting energy resources extracted from the Caspian basin to international markets, Russia wants the Black Sea to be in its sphere of influence. Therefore, it wants to maintain its important position in energy and maintain its strong position in political and economic terms. However, it sometimes responds to projects developed by other actors with a competitive approach. In contrast, Western states focus on projects that do not include Russia in order not to be completely dependent on Russia in transporting energy resources from the Caspian Basin to Europe and in energy security. Since Russia sees this situation as a loss, it prioritizes itself in projects regarding the transportation of energy resources. For example; while Russia focuses on the north-south corridor for transporting energy resources extracted from the Caspian basin to international markets, Western states are developing various projects on the east-west corridor (Stulberg, 2005).

### **Black Sea Policy of the Türkiye**

The Black Sea Basin has a position that has never lost its strategic importance for Türkiye in history. It has been considered as the intersection of transportation lines in the relations that Türkiye has developed with neighboring states in the Black Sea Basin since the 15th century. The basin, where states have struggled for dominance with each other, has been the scene of two world wars. The Black Sea, which has been between two blocs as NATO and the Warsaw Pact since the mid-20th century, has also made Türkiye feel the threat of being surrounded by the Soviet Union right next to it (Vasiliev, 2010). After the end of the Cold War, states have tried to develop policies in which they can play a more active role in the changing world.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye has become the center of uncertainty with the new states that have gained their independence in the Black Sea Basin. Since the Cold War, Türkiye has been trying to develop policies that will play a more active role in the political, economic, security and cultural areas in the basin (Balcer, 2012). Türkiye, which has gained the opportunity to make more independent decisions in its policies, aims to develop bilateral relations between states by taking steps to develop good relations with the states in its immediate vicinity. In addition, its location in the Black Sea Basin necessitates that it be interested in the political and economic issues of the basin. It is noteworthy that Türkiye, which is in a central position in the Black Sea Basin as a route for the transportation of energy extracted in the Caspian Basin to Europe, is important in the face of the unstable situations seen in the new states that have gained their independence in the basin. The problems of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria that have emerged in the Black Sea Basin put Türkiye and the basin's security in a difficult position, and they require it to come to the forefront in ensuring both its own security and the basin's security. In addition, it is necessary to give importance to the basin in terms of ensuring security in the Straits.

In order to make good use of the power vacuum that emerged in the basin during the post-Cold War period, Türkiye introduced mechanisms to develop cooperation among the states in the basin. It pioneered the establishment of the BSEC in 1992 and pursued policies to develop economic cooperation among the states in the basin. It brought together the states in the basin that were at two different poles during the Cold War and opened channels of communication between them; it helped to prevent the uncertainty and instability that emerged.

After the Cold War, Western countries, who did not want to be solely dependent on Russia for the transportation of energy resources in the Caspian Basin to the European market, presented projects for various transmission lines where energy security was prioritized due to the uncertainties that emerged in the power vacuum. Russia's determination of east-west energy routes through Türkiye as an alternative to the north-south energy line reveals that Türkiye cares about its economic interests and has the possibility of becoming an energy terminal (Vasiliev, 2010).

Since the 2000s, it has been observed that both the US and the EU have increased their interest in the Black Sea. However, it is noteworthy that they have been pursuing expansion policies towards the basin. Following the terrorist attacks, the US has taken the lead in the fight against global terrorism and has begun operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The fact that the US's operations in Iraq in 2003 were not allowed to be conducted through Türkiye has caused relations to go through a difficult period. During the same period, the expansion policies of the EU and NATO have begun to bother Russia. The process has required Türkiye to review its interests towards the Black Sea Basin. In addition to cooperation towards the basin, Türkiye has focused on initiatives that prioritize security (Aydın, 2004).

In addition to maritime security, the straits also hold an important place in Türkiye's Black Sea policy. In its policy towards the Black Sea, Türkiye attaches importance to the protection of the 1936 Montreux Convention regarding the straits. The Montreux Convention Regarding the Straits helps to maintain the balance of the basin and is seen as one of the cornerstones established for the preservation of stability in the basin. Since the request for the amendment and renewal of the convention could deeply shake the balance of the basin, Türkiye believes that the convention should remain untouchable (Aydın, 2004). Therefore, it is in favor of coastal states having a say in decisions regarding the security of the basin, while actors outside the basin should not be involved in the process. For example, the USA wanted to expand the Active Effort operation it conducted against terrorism in the Mediterranean within the scope of NATO to the Black Sea; however, Türkiye did not approach this situation positively.

The Russia-Georgia War in 2008 also affected Türkiye's policy towards the Black Sea. The tensions that emerged in the basin revealed the necessity of addressing the relations with Russia, the territorial integrity of Georgia and the frozen conflicts. In addition, as a result of the ground that was created, cooperation initiatives towards the Black Sea, energy transportation routes and energy security, and even the Montreux Straits Convention and the status of the Straits became open to discussion (Çelikpala, 2010). While Türkiye had to face these emerging realities, it mentioned the necessity of developing cooperation policies to address the problems peacefully and to ensure an environment of dialogue between states despite the difficulties. For example; in its policies towards the basin, it was proposed to establish a platform in order to prevent the problems in the Caucasus and to create an environment of dialogue; however, the desired effect could not be achieved. Stuck between the good relations developed with Russia, the important power of the basin, and the alliance relations with the USA, which wants to be present in the basin, Türkiye has difficulty in developing a discourse towards cooperation. However, he thinks that in the atmosphere of uncertainty in the basin, policies should be implemented to protect the ongoing order and prevent the emergence of new instabilities.

The developments that started in Ukraine in 2013 have deeply affected the security of the basin and the relations between the states. The next address of the tension that led to war

between Russia and Georgia in 2008 is between Russia and Ukraine. The expansion in the areas taken under control in the Black Sea with Russia's annexation of Crimea has changed the balances of the basin and has also affected Türkiye's interests in the basin. Türkiye's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and its policy of not recognizing the annexation of Crimea both drags the future of the basin into uncertainty and causes it to focus on the situation of the Tatars in Crimea. The discussions on the entry of NATO forces into the Black Sea and the Montreux Treaty, which came to the fore during the Russia-Georgia War in 2008, have resurfaced following the developments in Ukraine (Kasapoğlu, 2014). Therefore, Türkiye wants to maintain the balance between the EU, the US and Russia and, at the same time, strives to implement policies that will protect the balances in the basin and the security of the basin. Türkiye is trying to maintain a balance between its relations with Western states, as it is a NATO member, and with Russia, with which it cooperates in many sectors.

Türkiye's National Security Council (MGK) meetings are an indication that it is closely interested in developments in the Black Sea Basin. The developments that will be reflected on Türkiye by the situation that emerged in the basin with the crisis that Russia experienced with Ukraine in 2014 were emphasized. In the 2017 meeting, it was stated that the rights granted to Türkiye by Montreux, which is accepted as the guarantee of the security of the Black Sea Basin, will be defended. It is emphasized that the developments in the Black Sea Basin are closely followed and that Türkiye's defense of all kinds of rights determined by international law will be emphasized.

When Türkiye's policy towards the Black Sea Basin is examined in general, it is seen that policies are implemented in order for the states in the basin to cooperate. However, uncertainties and conflicts experienced in the basin sometimes restrict Türkiye's implementation of its policies. Türkiye believes that the development of the basin will be ensured by developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms aimed at preserving the current situation and balance of power in peace, as well as protecting the territorial integrity of the states in the Black Sea. Türkiye's policy towards the Black Sea is also linked to its integration into the EU and bilateral relations with Russia. While Türkiye attaches importance to the maritime security of the basin and the situation of the straits; it also carries out various initiatives to ensure rapprochement among the states in the basin in order to develop cooperation and to maintain the status quo regarding the straits.

### **Black Sea Policy of the United States of America**

After the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar system came to an end; a power vacuum emerged with the new states gaining their independence in the Black Sea. At the end of the Cold War, the US began to focus on policies that would fill the power vacuum with its leading position by maintaining its power. The US, which included the Black Sea Basin in its policies, began cooperation initiatives in which it would be in a leading position.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US viewed the basin as an area where it could exercise its hegemony towards the newly independent states in the Black Sea Basin. The problems that emerged in the Black Sea Basin gaining importance for the US included the need for security, being an important corridor for access to energy resources, maintaining the balance over a Russia that had lost its former power, and being a bridge in controlling the Middle

East and Central Asia (Erol and Demir, 2012). While carrying out its policies towards the Black Sea, the US opens a separate parenthesis to Europe. The US bases the importance of Europe for its interests on four elements: a Europe that is suitable for democratic and economic freedom; a Europe that is at peace with itself; a Europe that is not governed by states hostile to the US; and a Europe that is a partner in dealing with transnational challenges (Hamilton, 2008).

In the early 1990s, the US developed the Russia First discourse in its policies towards the Black Sea Basin, and focused on providing a Russia that was no longer powerful, with liberal elements, as a regional actor and giving priority to its immediate surroundings. Therefore, it thought that Russia's stability was important for its own interests. However, when the influence of the group advocating the Eurasian understanding began to be felt in the Russian government, changes were also observed in the US's policy towards the basin. Towards the end of the 1990s, the US's vital areas of interest were determined in the National Security Strategy for a New Century documents announced by the US. The US, which accepted the Black Sea Basin as one of these areas, emphasized the economic importance of the basin and emphasized the support it would provide to states regarding its energy corridor feature (Erhan, 2001). It is thought that security can also be ensured through cooperation it tries to develop indirectly between states by keeping its policies towards the basin at a low level.

Since the 2000s, the US has been shaping its policy towards the Black Sea by dividing it into three main elements: democracy and market reform; energy and trade; and security. After the Cold War, the US has been following policies aimed at encouraging democracy and market economy, where there is the rule of law, respect for human rights and transparency in the states that have gained their independence in the basin. Therefore, the states where Russia's influence has diminished have also tried to prevent Russia's former influence by putting themselves in the forefront. It is known that the US has had an impact on the changes of power known as color revolutions that have occurred in Georgia and Ukraine. The expansion of energy and free trade is very important in transporting energy resources in the Caspian Basin to international markets. In terms of diversifying energy routes in the basin by developing projects and ensuring security, on the one hand, the economic development of the basin is addressed, while on the other hand, the reduction of dependency on Russia is emphasized. Another basis for the US's approach towards the Black Sea is the issue of security. By security, the spectrum of security is kept wide, with issues such as combating threats such as separatist activities, terrorism, organized crime, and smuggling, as well as border security of states. In addition, maritime security is also important within the scope of security. As a matter of fact, with the bilateral relations developed by the USA in the Black Sea Basin, states are willing to be under the NATO umbrella (Çelikpala, 2010).

Following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001, the US has implemented a series of projects, programs and studies regarding the Black Sea. The US has initiated a project titled "Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region" within the scope of the German Marshall Fund. The project, which was carried out between 2004 and 2008 with the participation of scientists from the US, the EU and the states in the Black Sea Basin, focused on the development of Western strategies for the establishment of democracy and security (Geoana, 2004). Because the Black Sea acts as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, it has vital importance in the security and stability of the basin as well as in the formation of Western strategies for the Greater Middle East Project. While the cultural and ethnic diversity seen in the

Black Sea is similar to the Middle East, there are deep connections between the peoples of both regions (Geoana, 2004). Therefore, the US has developed its discourses regarding the Black Sea and defined the concept of the Widened Black Sea. With the expanded Black Sea concept, a Black Sea definition was created that includes the Black Sea coastal countries as well as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova.

The US, which has begun to re-evaluate its interests in the basin, has felt that it should be given importance in terms of political and economic strategic aspects and in terms of military within the scope of NATO (Çelikpala, 2010). The strategies followed by the US towards the Black Sea are broadly addressed as creating public opinion with democratization, gaining bases in the basin states, expanding under the NATO umbrella, developing new mechanisms among the states in the basin, keeping Russia under control so that it does not become a regional hegemon, energy transmission lines and security. In this way, it intends to display its policies that will allow it to have a say in the basin.

The US has developed policies in the states in the Black Sea Basin that are directly supported by democratization or indirectly supported by civil society groups. The presence of groups that can be in harmony with the US in power is very important in forming public opinion in line with its own interests. It achieved its goal with the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, when pro-Western governments came to power. It is obvious that the US, while shaping its policy towards the Black Sea, wants to be permanently present in the basin. In fact, in this regard, it has gained significant advantages with the possibility of intervening in problematic areas in the basin on the one hand and reaching strategic regions in the Middle East and Central Asia on the other hand, with the establishment of military bases in Romania in 2005 and in Bulgaria in 2006. The logistics and assistance required for operations can be easily provided through these bases.

The USA also carries out its activities in the basin within the scope of NATO, which it attaches importance to militarily. The new strategic concept of the organization was accepted at the NATO summit held just before the 2000s. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, it was decided at the summit held in Prague in 2002 that talks would be held to include seven Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria and Romania, in NATO and that they would join the alliance in 2004. Thus, a more dynamic outlook can be seen. At the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, it was decided to continue the expansion strategy, and at the Lisbon Summit held in November 2010, in accordance with the acceptance of the new strategic concept, it was decided to develop and maintain partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine through commissions established within NATO. NATO sees the Black Sea Basin as one of the areas that must be kept under control. In addition to being included in the organization through good relations developed with the states in the basin, their integration with the western system and values is also ensured through cooperation.

In the former Soviet geography, with NATO's expansion policy, with the membership of Bulgaria and Romania in 2004, its borders reached the western shores of the Black Sea. Especially when the membership of Ukraine and Georgia came to the agenda, Russia's reaction was quite harsh and it stated that it would not allow expansion to its immediate surroundings. However, the US demanded NATO elements to be present in the Black Sea, citing maritime security as the reason. With the energy policies developed by the US towards the Black Sea, it has tried

to save the basin from Russia's energy monopoly by creating a variety of resources and transmission lines, considering the interests of American energy companies, and to ensure energy security with various routes and resources.

The US has emphasized the need to develop initiatives that will play a role in developing good relations between the states in the Black Sea Basin by including the EU in the process, and has also put forward ideas for the establishment of various regional cooperation centers to be led by Bulgaria and Romania. However, the idea of expanding NATO's operational activities in the Mediterranean to the Black Sea has not been welcomed by Türkiye and Russia. Therefore, it is not possible for the US to carry out these attempts to control the Black Sea without the permission of Russia and Türkiye. Despite this, the US has developed different strategies to keep Russia under control; it has been desired that Russia be in harmony with the US's interests by ensuring its control. Russia, on the other hand, has continued to compete with the US by taking steps to maintain its former power in the basin.

The Russia-Georgia War in 2008 tipped the balance in the Black Sea Basin in Russia's favor. Russia felt surrounded by the bilateral agreements the US made with the states in the basin and the policies it implemented under the NATO umbrella. Accordingly, the security of the basin was in a difficult situation due to Russia's problems with the countries in the basin in its immediate vicinity. The competitive environment between Russia and the US in the Black Sea Basin was effective in the formation of pro-Russian administrations in the states in the former Soviet territories with Russia's recovery and in the development of relations with Russia. According to the new concept accepted at the NATO Summit in 2010, a collective defense approach was introduced among the states within the organization and the idea of establishing a missile defense system was accepted in order to protect the organization against emerging threats. However, this announced concept caused tensions in the relations between Russia and the US.

The US's activity in the basin has started to decrease due to the changes in its relations with the states in the basin. In addition, another factor in the loss of importance of the Black Sea Basin for the US may be its attention being diverted to crises emerging in other parts of the world. The crisis that started in Ukraine in 2013 caused the Black Sea to heat up. Separatist activities emerged with Russia's involvement in the crisis in Ukraine; however, the cooperation and security environment in the basin was damaged with Russia's annexation of Crimea. During this process, the US provided economic support to Ukraine; and imposed sanctions on Russia's companies in various sectors (Morelli, 2017). Following the tensions between Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine was invited to the NATO summit held in Wales in 2014, and it was emphasized that there was a strong partnership between Ukraine and the organization and that it needed to be strengthened, that Russia's annexation of Crimea should be ended, that eastern Ukraine should be evacuated, and that support for separatism should be cut off.

In 2016, the security policies developed by the USA within the scope of NATO for the Black Sea Basin included the placement of missile defense systems at Romania's Deveselu base. It is stated that the system, which aims to defend against ballistic missile threats, was established in response to the possibility of an attack from the Middle East and is not against Russia. Russia, which perceives the missile shield system established in Romania as a threat to itself in the Black Sea Basin, has expressed its discomfort with the situation at every opportunity. Due to the increasing tensions with Russia in 2016, another decision taken within NATO regarding

the Black Sea Basin was announced to strengthen the presence in the basin and to establish a multinational military unit in the Black Sea under the leadership of Romania. A formation was mentioned in which Türkiye would be included and where measures would be taken from land, sea and air.

Following the Ukraine crisis in the Black Sea Basin, the National Security Strategy Document published by the US in 2015 emphasized the need to take steps to prevent conflict between states. The document in question mentions that the territorial integrity of states must be protected due to Russia's aggression and annexation of Crimea, otherwise international rules will be jeopardized. While stating that they will support Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, it also emphasizes that they attach importance to energy security. In addition, it mentions that they should cooperate with states in the basin in areas of common interest. The National Security Strategy Document published by the US in 2017 states that Russia is implementing policies that will weaken the relations, institutions and governments between the US and Europe. The document in question emphasizes that Russia is trying to weaken the sovereignty of the states in the basin with its attacks on Georgia and Ukraine and that it poses a threat to its neighbors. Another striking element in the document is that Türkiye is not mentioned by name.

As a result, it is seen that the US develops cooperation with the states it is allied with in its policy towards the basin and attaches importance to NATO policies in terms of military. It is emphasized that the stability environment for the basin in general can be provided by cooperation to be established with the EU. In addition, the policies and initiatives towards the basin within the scope of the Extended Black Sea Project developed by the US have brought Türkiye and Russia closer together. It is thought that this rapprochement between Türkiye and Russia is at a level where they will compete in terms of their own interests.

### **Black Sea Policy of the EU**

With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the bipolar system ended; the Black Sea became increasingly important for the EU. The emergence of new states that gained independence in the Soviet geography created a power vacuum in the basin, and therefore these uncertainties in the states began to be seen as a problem. In line with this situation, the need for the EU to develop policies towards the Black Sea emerged.

The important position of the Black Sea Basin has made it necessary for states to develop new policies. The internationalization of ethnic conflicts that emerged in states after independence and their transformation into frozen conflicts that affected the security of other states have created an environment of instability throughout the basin. In addition, the Black Sea Basin has strategic importance for the EU due to its location as a junction for transporting energy resources extracted in the Caspian Basin to Europe; limiting Russia's influence in the basin; and acting as a bridge between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia (Tsantoulis, 2008). In addition, the Black Sea is also seen as a corridor for the threats of drugs, arms smuggling, organized crime groups, illegal migration and terrorism to reach Europe. The possibility of failure of the states that gained independence in the basin in transitioning to democracy and a free market economy may pose a threat to Europe. Therefore, the EU needs to develop multi-dimensional policies covering political, economic, energy, transportation and security issues towards the Black Sea.

After the terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001, the concepts of regional and global cooperation and security began to be used intensively. The EU also began to follow policies to control problems by intervening from the very beginning in problems that could cause instability and uncertainty in the union (Acar, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to develop policies for the Black Sea Basin, which covers a wide geography from the Balkans to the Caucasus, and to produce solutions to the problems that arise.

Following the end of the Cold War, the EU's policy towards the Black Sea region included developing and shaping bilateral relations with existing and newly independent states in the basin. When we look at the states in the Black Sea Basin after the Cold War, we see that in addition to states that felt the need to develop relations with Western states and get closer, there are also states that felt the need to establish close relations with Russia due to the pressure from Russia in the basin. In other words, the basin is surrounded by states that are members of both the EU and NATO, as well as states that are members of either the EU or NATO, or are not members of either, but feel the influence of Russia.

The EU has developed various policies for the Black Sea Basin in terms of its expansion policy. These policies are addressed from three different perspectives: the policy determined for membership, the neighborhood policy developed with the countries neighboring the Union, and the policy established on the strategic partnership it has developed with Russia. In the 1990s, the EU has pursued policies to expand the cooperation of the Union by developing its relations with the countries in its immediate vicinity. Unable to display a clear policy for the Black Sea Basin, the EU has preferred to conduct policies through bilateral relations with the states that have gained their independence in the basin and has tried to develop its relations through partnership and cooperation agreements signed with the states in the basin. In addition to this, the EU has developed various projects and programs in addition to its bilateral relations for the basin. In 1993, the East-West Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA), which attaches importance to the route security and stability of the Black Sea Basin with infrastructure projects in order to ensure the uninterrupted supply of energy from production to consumption, was established. In 1995, the Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe (INOGATE) program was launched for the basin infrastructure in order to develop hydrocarbon transportation from the Caspian Basin to Europe. In addition, in the same year, the Synergy (SYNERGY) program was established to establish an energy center for the Black Sea Basin. The development of these transportation corridors was evaluated as the revival of the Silk Road from Asia to Europe.

Since its establishment, the EU has gone through stages of expansion in order to ensure integration in Europe. Following the end of the Cold War, the Union has been following developments aimed at developing bilateral relations with the countries in the basin and integrating these states into the Union, as the Russian influence in Eastern Europe decreased. In 1999, negotiations were initiated with the countries in the basin regarding policies developed to ensure the EU's integration with the Black Sea, considering the strategic importance of the basin due to its location and its proximity to the EU. As a result of these negotiations, the fifth stage of the EU's expansion process was completed in 2007 with the membership of Bulgaria and Romania. Therefore, the EU has become one of the coastal actors in the Black Sea Basin with its participant country status, and the western part of the basin has been shaped by the EU. Türkiye was

granted the status of a candidate country to the EU in 2005, and if the result is membership, the EU will have expanded its borders in the western and southern parts of the Black Sea.

Following the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania, two Black Sea coastal countries, into the EU, the scope of the projects put forward in the 1990s was expanded. The scope of the SYNERGY program, which was launched in 1995, was expanded in 2007 and changed to Black Sea Synergy. Within the scope of the program, values such as democracy, respect for human rights and good governance, security, frozen conflicts, energy, transportation, technology, development, environment, maritime and fisheries were put forward; technical projects were developed in these areas and cooperation between the states in the basin was aimed to be expanded. However, the Black Sea Synergy could not meet the expected impact from the EU perspective, as it could not be consistent in its discourses within the union regarding the basin; the competitive environment in the basin; the continuing uncertainty and economic instability and even the frozen conflicts.

Following the expansion that began with the inclusion of the countries in Eastern Europe into the Union, the EU's border neighbors have changed. The changing borders of the Union have led the EU to think about developing its relations with its new neighbors and its security against possible uncertainties. The neighborhood policy, which was put into practice with the European Neighborhood Policy Strategy document published in 2004, plans to develop relations with its land and sea neighbors. The EU develops its relations with neighboring states on common values such as democracy, human rights, governance, and market economy. The EU's neighborhood policy includes developing political, economic, and social reforms in neighboring countries; ensuring compliance with the criteria that must be met before accession to the Union; expanding economic relations with a pragmatic approach; establishing a strong foreign and security policy; and developing cooperation with the states in the Black Sea Basin with its goals (Lippert, 2007). In addition, the EU's policies focus on developing relations with the states in the Black Sea Basin, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EU policies, which were on a low level regarding the Black Sea, have changed with the introduction of the European Neighborhood Policy document. The European Neighborhood Policy replaces the need for regional cooperation in the eyes of the Black Sea Basin countries and has so far been seen as a replacement policy for the "Black Sea dimension" in the eyes of the EU. Thus, with EU policies, the security and stability of the basin as well as of neighboring states have been tried to be strengthened.

The Eastern Partnership program, which was launched by the European Union in 2009 and covers six former Soviet countries, constitutes a revised version of the neighborhood policy towards the states in the basin. The aim of this program is to demonstrate a more results-oriented approach by the EU. The Eastern Partnership program covers four main priority areas: stronger economy, stronger governance, stronger connectivity and stronger society. Within the scope of this program, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which are basin countries, signed partnership and cooperation agreements with the EU in 2014. However, it is debatable whether the program in question has had the desired effect.

In January 2011, the European Parliament announced the EU strategy for the Black Sea. The document mentioned the need for a new strategy, considering the tensions experienced due to the EU not being able to develop a full strategic vision for the basin.

The EU focused on the Three Seas Initiative project, which includes the Black Sea, in 2015. It includes twelve EU member states located between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. The Three Seas Initiative dialogue was initiated with the summit held in 2016, aiming to develop economic development, European harmony and transatlantic ties. It is thought that the initiative will contribute to the development of the basin with the development of the member states in the Black Sea Basin.

While the EU is trying to show its influence throughout the basin with the neighborhood policies, projects and programs it has developed with the states in the basin, Russia is demonstrating policies that will increase its influence and keep it under control over the states it sees as its backyard in the basin. The policies developed by the countries throughout the basin sometimes cause the countries to compete.

The EU wants to see NATO's influence by acting together with the US in its policies towards the Black Sea. On the other hand, it opens a separate parenthesis in its relations with Russia. The main agenda item of its relations with Russia is energy. The fact that it provides a large portion of its energy needs through Russia has made it necessary for it to give special importance to Russia in the policies developed in the basin. Europe is also important in terms of being a large market where Russia can sell its energy. Placing the relationship between the EU and Russia on the basis of mutual dependency shows that the parties always need each other. On the other hand, Russia uses energy as a political tool against the theses developed against it in the basin; it prevents these theses with the influence it shows in frozen conflicts. In line with developments such as the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Russian influence in Transnistria and the lack of progress in the developed energy projects, the EU has not raised its voice in the basin much. However, the Ukraine crisis between Russia and the EU has changed the course of relations. The EU reacted to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and imposed sanctions against Russia. It also led to the suspension of steps taken towards cooperation between the two countries.

Following the end of the Cold War, Türkiye has made various cooperation attempts in order to prevent the power vacuum. Efforts have been made to establish various mechanisms in the basin, aiming to establish cooperation in political and economic terms and to ensure the security of the basin. From the EU's perspective, Türkiye stands out in terms of energy. Türkiye stands out with its central location in terms of the route for transporting energy resources in the Caspian Basin and the Middle East to Europe. Therefore, this situation can be effective in preventing Russia from monopolizing energy and reducing dependency on Russia. In addition, the EU can increase its influence in the basin by supporting Türkiye against Russia.

It is noteworthy that the EU has developed its relations with the states in the basin in the projects and programs it has developed for the basin, and that it also wants the basin to become European (Emerson, 2008). However, since a policy covering the entire basin could not be created, it has tried to develop policies through bilateral relations with the states in the basin. The EU's failure to develop a clear perspective on the uncertainties and instabilities in the basin has made the states' view of the EU skeptical.

### **Turkish-Russian Relations in the Context of Black Sea Security**

The beginning of Turkish-Russian relations dates back more than 500 years, with diplomatic relations established between the Ottoman Empire and the Grand Duchy of Moscow in

1492. From the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman and Tsarist Russian Empires, who faced each other in many wars in order to establish dominance in the Black Sea Basin, were in constant competition. This led to intense conflicts between the two states in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Black Sea region. The Republic of Türkiye and the Soviet Union, which emerged from the ruins left by World War I, were founded on the Ottoman and Tsarist Russian Empires. The relations between Türkiye and Soviet Russia, which developed during the War of Independence, were further developed with the "Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality" signed on December 17, 1925. The 1930s were considered the brightest period of their relations, and as a result of the political and friendly relations, their economic relations also improved. In addition to financial and technical support, textile factories were established with Soviet aid in Kayseri in 1934 and in Nazilli in 1935. With the Montreux Convention signed in 1936, an environment of peace and stability was established that would put an end to long-term competition in the Black Sea Basin (Tellal, 2009).

Following the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, the Soviet Union's attitude towards Türkiye changed. The extension of the friendship agreement signed in 1925 was rejected, and it made demands regarding the Straits and certain regions in Eastern Anatolia. This attitude displayed by Soviet Russia caused them to drift apart in relations and brought Türkiye closer to the USA. After the USA benefited from the Truman and Marshall Aid provided within the scope of the reorganization of Europe, and with its membership in NATO in 1952, Türkiye-Soviet Russia relations continued between the two blocs. After Stalin's death, Soviet Russia announced that it had given up its demands and tried to normalize relations. Credit assistance was provided with the agreement made in 1957, and a glass factory was established in Çayırova in 1961. In addition, agreements were made for directly connected railway lines (Tellal, 2009).

The period of détente that began in the Cold War with the Cuban crisis in 1962 was also reflected in Turkish-Soviet relations. During these years, the parties signed economic, technical and technological cooperation agreements with mutual high-level visits. With the positive course of relations in the 1970s, large industrial facilities such as an oil refinery in Aliğa, an aluminum factory in Seydişehir, a sulfuric acid facility in Bandırma and an iron and steel factory in İskenderun were built. It can be said that the détente between the two poles had a positive effect on bilateral relations until the Soviet Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The natural gas agreement signed between Türkiye and Soviet Russia on September 18, 1984 is considered a turning point in bilateral relations in economic terms. According to the agreement, Türkiye undertakes to purchase natural gas from Russia for 25 years. At the same time, the opportunity to operate in Russia in Turkish products and contracting sectors was achieved. Thus, Türkiye and Russia began to have long-term cooperative relations. Turkish-Russian relations, which have a long history, have experienced war, competition and cooperation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, efforts were made to improve relations with its successor, the Russian Federation.

After the end of the Cold War, states that were freed from the limitations of the bipolar system could more easily develop policies without feeling polar pressure in their relations with each other. Since 1990, Russia and Türkiye, the successors of the USSR, have emerged as two important states of the Black Sea Basin that can conduct policies directly towards each other rather than as states in different blocs. While Türkiye and Russia faced the necessity of over-

coming various dilemmas in their relations in the 1990s; they were effective in creating environments where new opportunities could be presented in their relations by being able to conduct policies towards each other. Since the 2000s, they have been pursuing policies oriented towards cooperation rather than competition in their relations. Despite the crises experienced in the Black Sea Basin, they are on common ground.

### **Conclusion**

During the Cold War, all countries bordering the Black Sea were under Soviet control, which led the USSR to describe the region as a "lake". In this context, NATO and the EU tried to implement their policies towards the west of the Black Sea through Türkiye. However, considering possible security problems, Türkiye did not want to be a direct party to NATO and the EU's regional policies. By adopting a balance policy, Türkiye emphasizes that the Montreux Convention provides a stable environment in the Black Sea.

During the Cold War, the Black Sea region was considered a relatively stable geography, but with the collapse of the USSR, power struggles began to rise. With the influence of regional dynamics, the West's influence increased as Central and Eastern European countries gained their independence and wanted to integrate into the EU, while the perception of threat from the Russian Federation (RF) strengthened. In the post-Cold War period, in a process where energy and many other factors were effective, the Black Sea region, whose geopolitical importance was increasing, became the scene of power struggles. The conflict between the RF's desire to strengthen its influence in the region and NATO's expansion efforts caused power struggles in different dimensions such as energy and cybersecurity.

The geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region in the post-Cold War era is based on a number of factors. These factors include the region's rich natural resources, hosting strategic trade ports, and serving as a corridor between the East and the West, being an important crossroads for energy and transportation routes. The dissolution of the USSR and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact opened the doors to power struggles in the region and led NATO and the EU to develop policies based on their interests and security concerns. These institutions pursued expansion policies in order to reach the region and increase their influence. There is a tendency among the countries in the region to view the economic, military and political developments of the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, with concern, and the possibility that the Russian Federation may want to return to its former sphere of influence shapes policies. This possibility has led the regional states to view NATO and EU membership as a kind of guarantee of their political, military and economic security.

The geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region has gained even more importance with the increase in counter-terrorism efforts following the September 11 attacks. The attacks on September 11, 2001 revealed the necessity of surrounding and controlling regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which are in a critical position in the US's fight against terrorist organizations. In this context, the existence of the Black Sea region and its access to the region are of great importance in this fight. The fact that all countries bordering the Black Sea were under Soviet control during the Cold War led to the region being described as a "lake" of the USSR. In this context, NATO and the EU have tried to implement their policies towards the west of the Black Sea through Türkiye. However, considering possible security problems, Türkiye has not wanted to be a direct party to NATO and the EU's regional policies. By adopting a balance policy,

Türkiye emphasizes that the Montreux Convention provides a stable environment in the Black Sea. While the Black Sea region was considered a relatively stable geography during the Cold War, the struggle for influence has increased with the collapse of the USSR. With the effect of regional dynamics, the West's influence has increased as Central and Eastern European countries gain their independence and want to integrate into the EU, while the threat perception has strengthened for the Russian Federation (RF). In the post-Cold War period, in a process where energy and many other factors are effective, the Black Sea region, whose geopolitical importance is increasing, is the scene of power struggles. The conflict between the RF's desire to strengthen its influence in the region and NATO's expansion efforts is causing power struggles in different dimensions such as energy and cybersecurity.

The geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region has gained even more importance with the increase in counter-terrorism efforts following the September 11 attacks. The attacks on September 11, 2001, revealed the necessity of surrounding and controlling regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which are in a critical position in the US's fight against terrorist organizations. In this context, the existence of the Black Sea region and its access to the region are of great importance in this fight.

In addition, the direct threat posed by terrorist attacks to the European continent has intensified the efforts of the international community in the fight against terrorism. In particular, the attacks that took place in Spain on November 3, 2003 and in England on July 7, 2005 have shown that security is not limited to geographical borders and have emphasized that all geographies are at risk of being affected in the fight against terrorism. In this context, the geopolitical location of the Black Sea serves as a corridor facilitating NATO's passage to the Middle East and Central Asia. The strategic importance of the region plays a critical role in the international community's efforts in the fight against terrorism and security, as well as in the protection of energy and trade routes. For this reason, the Black Sea region is considered a region of great geopolitical importance.

The Black Sea region has a strategic position in a possible intervention against Iran within the framework of the tense Iran-US relations. Its geographical location and proximity to the region play an important role in military interventions against Iran. The region can be used as a surveillance center for military bases, radar stations and spy planes, therefore it is of great importance for NATO and the US. Due to its geopolitical location, the Black Sea region is also important in terms of its proximity to the Caspian Region and therefore its rich energy resources. The region, which contains a large portion of the world's oil and natural gas reserves, is in a critical position in terms of the security of energy supply. Considering all these factors, the Black Sea region has great strategic value in terms of regional and global policies. In terms of energy security, military operations and geopolitical interests, the region will continue to attract the attention of the international community.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO felt the need to develop new strategic concepts against new threats and expanded its area of responsibility geographically, becoming a comprehensive security organization. NATO's expansion process continued in the post-Cold War period and gained a significant advantage in the region by taking advantage of the westward approach of the former Soviet Republics bordering the Black Sea. While Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO in the first expansion period, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania joined as member states in the second expansion period.

This expansion process, especially with Bulgaria and Romania becoming members of NATO, caused Ukraine and Georgia's increasing relations with the West to be perceived as a threat by the Russian Federation. This situation increased the power struggle in the region and further increased the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region. NATO's expansion policies continue to affect the balances in the region and cause security concerns among the countries in the region.

When evaluated from a realistic perspective, the changes experienced by the Russian Federation in the geography it considers a priority in terms of security in the post-Cold War period have been effective in shaping the perception of threat and in forming its policies towards this region with increasing sensitivity. Factors such as the strategic port losses it has experienced in the Black Sea region and the withdrawal of Bulgaria and Romania from its sphere of influence after NATO membership have increased Russia's security concerns. The power struggle in this region is carried out between NATO and the Russian Federation through various means. NATO is trying to increase its effectiveness by establishing military bases in Romania and Bulgaria. In addition, the USA is trying to have more military presence in the region in order to increase its effectiveness in the Black Sea and wants to affect maritime traffic in the region by making changes to the Montreux Convention in this direction.

In the post-Cold War period, the Russian Federation (RF) developed policies to maintain its dominance in the Black Sea basin by viewing it as a living space. The power vacuum and new regime structures that emerged in the region in the early 1990s caused the RF to struggle with internal problems. The RF wanted to maintain its superiority in the region against NATO and the EU and, in line with this, created a strategy called the "Near Neighborhood Doctrine", aiming to regain its former effectiveness. On the other hand, in the post-Cold War period, the RF made efforts to overcome the political and economic collapse period by maintaining its relations with the EU. In order to ensure the continuity of energy supply, it aimed to keep its relations with the EU in balance and to overcome the recovery process with the least damage. Thus, the RF's policies in the Black Sea basin reflected its goal of maintaining its dominance in the region with the concept of living space and followed a balance policy in its relations with NATO and the EU. These strategies reflect the RF's efforts to strengthen its geopolitical position and overcome its internal problems.

The increase in oil and natural gas prices in the early 2000s and Vladimir Putin's rise to power significantly increased the influence of the Russian Federation (RF) in the region. Names such as Aleksandra Dugin, who are mostly bureaucrats with Eurasianist ideas, have made significant contributions to Putin's rise to power. During the Putin era, more concrete steps were taken in the areas of the Near East and Eurasianism. The EU and NATO's expansion and containment policies towards the region were responded to with stronger instruments. Unlike the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras, the Putin administration has tried to maintain relations with the West on a more pragmatic basis. The Putin administration's foreign policy, which differs from movements such as New Westernism, Extreme Eurasianism and Russian Nationalism, has been defined as moderate or pragmatist Eurasianism, democratic state image and reconciliation of geopolitical strategies. Thus, it is observed that there has been a significant transformation in the influence of the RF in the region.

With the support it gave to the US after the September 11 attacks, the Russian Federation (RF) took an important step towards strengthening its relations with the West. The RF

started a period of softening in bilateral relations by emphasizing that the fight against terrorism was inevitable. However, NATO's desire to shift its military equipment and troops from the Mediterranean region to the Black Sea basin within the framework of the fight against terrorism caused tensions in relations again. NATO's attempt to support the revolutions taking place in Georgia and Ukraine, countries bordering the Black Sea, and to make these states candidates for NATO membership clashed with the interests of the RF and was met with military policies in the region. During this process, NATO's policies aimed at expanding its sphere of influence provoked a reaction from the RF and were met with policies that included military elements.

NATO's increasing influence in the region was seen as a survival issue by the Russian Federation (RF), which led to the Russian Federation intervening in Georgia in 2008. In 2013, Ukraine's pro-Western policies were also considered a threat by the Russian Federation, which led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Following Romania and Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine's aim for NATO membership, and the Black Sea becoming a sea surrounded by NATO countries, posed a security threat to the Russian Federation. For this reason, the Russian Federation, which clearly opposes NATO's settlement in the Black Sea and the Caucasus through Georgia and Ukraine, made this intention clear with the operation it carried out in Georgia in 2008. Georgia's NATO membership was suspended due to the fact that Ossetia and Abkhazia, which declared their independence, were elements of instability in the region and posed a risk to other NATO countries.

After the annexation of Crimea, the EU imposed various sanctions against the Russian Federation. However, the EU's dependence on Russia for its natural gas needs and Russia's use of this energy source for political purposes have become a source of insecurity. During this process, the problems of Georgia and Ukraine continue and have remained frozen conflicts. It is anticipated that these problems may still pose a threat to the Russian Federation in the future. NATO's aid and support policies for coastal countries in the region and the statements that the processes for NATO membership of these countries are ongoing suggest the possibility that NATO and the Russian Federation may come face to face again in the region in the future. As can be understood from the examples of Georgia and Ukraine, the Russian Federation has implemented its policies with various tools to ensure its security against NATO's activities in the Black Sea region and has responded to the elements that pose a threat to its security. The Russian Federation has demonstrated how critically important the region is for its own security and has demonstrated its will that it will not hesitate to use all elements of hybrid warfare to ensure the security of the state.

The states aiming to establish peace and stability in the Black Sea basin are trying to unite under a common structure in order to create a balance between NATO's expansion efforts and the oppressive policies of the Russian Federation. In this context, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), which is among the first formations in the region economically, was established with the aim of revitalizing the economy and developing cooperation among member states. However, the main purpose of the BSEC is to establish peace and stability in the region and to create an environment of non-conflict between countries that have coasts and connections to the Black Sea region. BSEC is also seen as a platform to increase cooperation in the region and where member states within the scope of the expanded Black Sea region can complement each other economically. This organization aims to take the region to a higher level by encouraging cooperation in commercial, scientific and technological fields. Due

to the proximity of the member states to each other, it is expected that they will work together to develop their economic relations and support regional development. BSEC stands out as an important initiative that aims to strengthen the stability and prosperity of the Black Sea region by increasing harmony and cooperation between regions.

The Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force, established to ensure stability in the region, has a similar structure to support cooperation and peace between coastal states. This task force has a structure similar to NATO's naval fleets in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, and was established by coastal countries to conduct patrol activities in the Black Sea. The fact that three of the coastal states are NATO members indicates that there is an indirect relationship between NATO and this task force. However, preserving the balance regime brought by the Montreux Convention in the region is an important issue, and Türkiye and the Russian Federation consider NATO's entry into the region as a destabilizing element. Türkiye and Russia aim to avoid steps that will disrupt the balance in the region and to maintain the stability of the region. For this reason, different opinions and threat perceptions arise among the members.

The Black Sea Maritime Cooperation Task Force is an important step in strengthening peace and cooperation in the region, but the indirect influence of NATO and the sensitivities regarding the protection of the Montreux Convention should be taken into consideration. Such cooperation requires a careful balance and cooperation policies to be adopted in the security and stability issues of the region. The EU, which aims to limit the power of the Russian Federation in the energy supply in the region, aims to support projects that diversify energy supply by reducing its dependence on Russia to a large extent in natural gas imports. Diversification of energy sources and reducing dependence on a single source are also important for the energy security of other states in the region. The Russian Federation directs its energy policies with security-related considerations and uses them as a tool in this regard. For this reason, the EU supports initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy and GUAM in order to break its influence in the Black Sea Region with different policies and to secure energy supply.

The importance of the geopolitical position of the Black Sea has increased through various factors. The region has been at the center of policies in different areas such as energy security and the fight against terrorism, and has witnessed a power struggle between the Russian Federation and NATO. The importance of the region will continue to be high in the future. The Russian Federation perceives the region as part of its state survival and is making efforts to increase its effectiveness. Similarly, NATO is taking steps to strengthen its presence in the region and increase its effectiveness. However, these policies may increase the risk of instability in the region and play a role in the emergence of new problems.

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

After the Cold War, Turkish-Russian relations in the Black Sea Basin have been seen to have a volatile and changing structure. Both states have experienced serious difficulties during this period and have been trying to find a place for themselves in the changing international system. Following the collapse of the USSR, the interest of the EU and the US in the basin has been increasing. The increasing interest of Western actors in the basin has also affected the general course of Turkish-Russian relations. The increasing influence of Western states in their close circles and developments such as the occupation of Iraq have caused Turkey and Russia to feel disappointed with the West. However, the rapprochement in bilateral relations between the states is not only due to Western states. Because, contrary to this intersecting situation, there is a unique development in bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. It should not be overlooked that the cooperation established in different sectors and the developing economic ties between Turkey and Russia stem from the mutual desire and determination of policy makers. Strengthening the economic, commercial and energy ties between them plays an important role in reducing tensions between the two states and preventing suspicion and distrust towards each other. The changes in power seen in both states since the 2000s play an important role in this. It is believed that it is an important and positive choice for the parties to reach a compromise with each other. In the Black Sea Basin, states feel that each other is necessary in strengthening political and economic ties between the states. Both Turkey and Russia prefer cooperation that will provide each other with political and economic benefits in their bilateral relations, not out of necessity, but willingly. Therefore, the hypothesis that “the developing relations between Turkey and Russia have a unique situation outside of the obligations originating from the West” is confirmed.

Considering the increasing Russian influence in the basin, it is thought that Turkey's cooperation with Russia will continue in the future as long as the current military, economic and security trends continue. As a result of the developments in 2008 and 2014, it is seen that Russia focuses on absolute gains rather than relative gains in its relations, even under conditions where it has increased its influence in the basin. When cooperation based on absolute gains is carried out, Turkey will be able to strengthen its political, economic and military dimensions while ensuring its own security in the basin. Instead of pursuing policies that prioritize their own gains in the emerging opportunities, states acting by considering long-term cooperation will be effective in achieving common gains that will cover the entire basin. Turkey is aware of its potential weakness compared to Russia. Instead of competing with Russia, it is trying to increase its gains by choosing cooperation.

The fact that the Black Sea countries have remained under the sovereignty and influence of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union for the last two centuries, and that the Russian Federation may want to return to its former sphere of influence after recovering in the economic, political and military fields in the coming decades, has led these countries to see NATO and EU membership as the most important guarantee of their future political, economic and military security. The weakness of the Black Sea countries' capacity to provide national security on their own also leaves them in need of strong external support. In addition, while the Black Sea countries are increasingly moving towards democracy, pluralism and the free market, the concern felt towards the Russian Federation has led these countries to prioritize security over economic cooperation.

Today, Russia, which has a population of 143 million, occupies 17 million km<sup>2</sup> of land. Although 30 million Russians live in other countries, 30 million of its own population are of different ethnicities. According to different reports, its population in 2050 will be between 100 and 120 million. China, which is estimated to reach a population of 1.5 to 1.8 billion in 2050, has a land area of 9.6 million km<sup>2</sup>. In the long term, China may see Russia's Asian lands as a living space. The USA's current Asia policy is based on proactive behavior and attempts to settle in the intermediate regions between Russia and China in order to prevent this idea from China. It is evaluated that Russia may want to join NATO in the medium term in order to prevent this division and to ensure its own security and territorial integrity.