

BEYOND THE CROSSROADS: TÜRKİYE'S REGIONAL BALANCING BETWEEN EURASIAN CONNECTIVITY AND SECURITY AUTONOMY IN THE BLACK SEA

Türkiye utilizes transport, digital, and energy connectivity projects to enhance its regional influence and resilience in the Black Sea, striking a balance between Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian institutional influences. The analysis critically assesses Türkiye's evolving strategic posture, focusing on new logistical corridors (the Middle Corridor and BRI adaptation), its multipolar diplomacy, and the legal and operational limits set by the Montreux Convention. It examines how Turkish policies mediate between integration and autonomy, with broader implications for the Eurasian security architecture and the regional response to shifting great power rivalries.

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I. Introduction

The Black Sea region stands at a pivotal juncture where Türkiye's strategic choices will shape not only national outcomes but also Eurasia's broader security and connectivity architecture. Building upon the analytical foundation and narrative arc established in earlier work, this article moves beyond theories of guardianship, equilibrium, and multi-vector adaptation to examine

in detail how Türkiye's agency has evolved into the proactive orchestration of regional infrastructural corridors and innovative diplomatic partnerships. In the aftermath of sustained legal resilience and narrative contestation, Türkiye's policy has noticeably pivoted toward maximizing the intersection of logistics, law, and diplomacy, leveraging trans-Eurasian projects (notably the Middle Corridor and adapted BRI alignments) to consolidate both strategic autonomy and cooperative

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leverage in an increasingly competitive geoeconomic environment.

This new focus arises from the recognition that traditional constructs of order, rooted in legal regimes such as the Montreux Convention, now operate within rapidly shifting frameworks of interdependence, contested sovereignty, and hybrid influence. As recent research has shown, the performance and power of national narratives—whether cast in the language of “resilience,” “partnership,” or “regional ownership”—directly influence the success of integration and the durability of sovereignty claims. Accordingly, the present commentary analyses Türkiye's pragmatic approach to blending institutional continuity with forward-leaning adaptation. It assesses the interplay of regional connectivity, legal stewardship, and strategic communication with reference to both supportive and rival narratives—exploring how Türkiye navigates the between-space of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian institutions while actively crafting its own path.

Finally, this study sets the stage for future investigations by outlining the practical and conceptual implications of Türkiye's evolving regional posture. It highlights the lessons and unresolved tensions that emerge from balancing “integration without subordination,” and charts a research agenda for understanding how adaptive, law-rooted regionalism might empower mid-size actors to manage the complexities of global rivalries in other contested regions. By bridging accumulated

legal, operational, and discursive experience with novel geoeconomic realities, this article establishes a clear framework for the next phase of Black Sea analysis—one grounded in the synthesis of autonomy, connectivity, and soft-power strategy.

II. Infrastructural Corridors and Geopolitical Stakes

The study of narrative in international security has evolved considerably, foregrounding how state and non-state actors employ discourses to construct threat perceptions, legitimize policy choices, and compete for influence over regional orders. Strategic narratives—deliberate storylines about identity, threat, and legitimacy—have become essential tools for shaping both domestic consensus and foreign policy alignments. Scholars such as Alexandra Homolar and Oliver Turner emphasize that narratives serve as “discursive foundations” for international alliances, with language not simply reflecting, but producing security realities and alliance cohesion. Pre-existing narratives, in turn, both constrain and enable new security postures, affecting how states like Türkiye position themselves amid shifting great power rivalries.¹

Within the Black Sea context, the literature underlines that competing narratives—from the EU's strategic messaging on “resilience” and “connectivity,” to Russia's historicist and revisionist framings—directly impact regional security regimes and governance frameworks. Recent analysis emphasizes that states facing intersecting Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian pressures are particularly reliant on well-calibrated narrative strategies, not merely military or material capabilities. M. Aydın's comparative work on Eurasian rivalry demonstrates that Türkiye's use of long-standing legal instruments such as the Montreux Convention, combined with selective integration into regional cooperation initiatives, is embedded in an ongoing discursive contest over regional agency, sovereignty, and norms of intervention.²

Contemporary theory also recognizes the rise of “narrative sovereignty”: the capacity of a state to control, adapt, and project its preferred storyline concerning national interest and legitimacy, both in digital and traditional media spheres. This is especially relevant for Türkiye, whose Black Sea policy is invested in balancing its formal legal commitments (Montreux), visible



operational conduct (such as the proactive closure of the Straits), and narrative framing of itself as both a prudent mediator and an autonomous Eurasian actor. The performative aspect of Turkish statecraft—the way discourse is coordinated across ministries, embassies, and presidential interventions—demonstrates the synergistic quality of narrative power as a tool of both resilience and influence.³

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III. Legal Resilience: Montreux and Regional Order

Türkiye's evolving strategic posture in the Black Sea is deeply anchored in the legal and institutional

framework of the Montreux Convention—a treaty that not only regulates naval passage through the Turkish Straits but also symbolizes Türkiye's unique stewardship over regional order. This legal regime, negotiated in the interwar period, continues to provide Türkiye with sovereign prerogatives that are critical in balancing competing Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian influences while preserving regional stability. Recent developments, including Türkiye's active closure of the Turkish Straits to Russian warships during the Ukraine conflict, underscore how these legal instruments translate into operational advantages and diplomatic leverage.⁴

The Montreux Convention's robust clauses—limiting non-littoral warship tonnage, duration, and armament, particularly during wartime—have effectively curtailed extra-regional military escalation in the Black Sea basin. This legal resilience is complemented by contemporary Turkish policies that judiciously mediate between

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integration with Western-led initiatives (such as the EU's Black Sea Maritime Security Hub) and asserting autonomy rooted in treaty rights. However, EU strategies occasionally overlook or underappreciate Türkiye's treaty-based authority, as the proposed Security Hub largely centralizes control without explicit recognition of Türkiye's custodial role, which risks undermining the hard legal-political pillars of regional order.⁵

Furthermore, Türkiye's integration of logistical infrastructures like the Middle Corridor, alongside its pragmatically adaptive diplomacy vis-à-vis the Belt and Road Initiative, signals a legal-operational modus vivendi balancing sovereignty and connectivity. This balance maintains Türkiye's narrative sovereignty while advancing regional economic integration under Türkiye's auspices. By actively managing and innovating within the Montreux framework, Türkiye sustains a unique blend of legal resilience and operational flexibility that regional rivals seek but cannot easily replicate.⁶

Indeed, the careful defence and adaptation of Montreux underscore a broader pattern: regional order in the Black Sea hinges not only on hard power or strategic calculation, but on entrenched legal norms held legitimate by influential littoral actors, with Türkiye foremost among them. As Turkey navigates external

pressures from Russian revisionism, Western institutional ambitions, and China's commercial designs, preserving the primacy of this legal architecture emerges as both a strategic imperative and a normative anchor—ensuring the Black Sea remains a domain of measured regulation, shared responsibility, and sovereign initiative.

IV. Diplomatic Balancing and Multipolar Engagement

Türkiye's diplomacy in the Black Sea has entered a new era of flexible, issue-based coalitions and strategic mediation—grounded in infrastructure, economic interdependence, and legal traditions. Instead of blanket alignment, Türkiye pursues “active non-alignment,” positioning itself as a facilitator between competing regional and extra-regional actors and institutions. This approach has enabled Türkiye to extract leverage from its unique geography and legal regime while avoiding entrapment in rigid bloc politics. The 2025 Global Transport Connectivity Forum in Istanbul, where Turkish, European, and Asian policymakers convened to coordinate Middle Corridor and Black Sea logistics, showcased the diplomatic dividends of such engagement—Türkiye as both convener and agenda-setter for multilateral initiatives beyond traditional security frameworks.⁷

A defining feature of Türkiye's Black Sea engagement is its pragmatic pursuit of multipolar partnerships. Türkiye's harmonization with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), development of the Middle Corridor, and participation in the EU's updated connectivity agenda all reflect a nuanced game of "hedging without bandwagoning." This multipronged strategy grants Türkiye agency in shaping regional supply chains and trade flows, reinforcing its role as an indispensable node for Eurasian and global commerce. Türkiye's full "Strategic Partner" status in the Three Seas Initiative, accepted at the 2025 Warsaw Summit, further formalized its pivot to cross-bloc economic diplomacy—bridging coastal, continental, and institutional stakeholders in a dynamically integrating region.⁸

However, this diplomatic balancing act is not without tension. EU's new Black Sea strategy and regional security hub initiatives, while celebrating connectivity and partnership, sometimes under-appreciate Türkiye's treaty-based prerogatives and operational boundaries. Turkish policymakers have consistently insisted on full recognition of Montreux Convention limitations and protection of regional agency within EU agendas. Joint statements from recent Turkish-EU negotiations emphasize the need for co-determination, consultation, and legal-political symmetry, underscoring Türkiye's leverage as a negotiating actor rather than a simple recipient or rule-taker.⁹

Energy diplomacy and contestation over Black Sea gas developments provide an additional axis of balancing. Türkiye's leadership of regional formats, such as Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), as well as recent trilateral energy and pipeline negotiations, enable Türkiye to mediate recurring crises, broker mutually-beneficial arrangements, and translate transit power into diplomatic capital. By foregrounding "resilient interdependency" and emphasizing the indivisibility of connectivity, security, and prosperity, Türkiye amplifies its voice amid multipolar rivalry and crisis-induced realignments.¹⁰

Türkiye's ability to successfully combine non-aligned diplomacy, legal stewardship, and infrastructure-driven multipolarity is not merely reactive. It is the outcome of decades of institution-building, strategic learning, and integrative statecraft, which collectively help insulate Black Sea governance from destabilizing zero-

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sum dynamics. As new regional and global disruptions emerge, Türkiye's approach offers an adaptive template—rooted in regional ownership, cooperative integration, and unyielding insistence on internationally-anchored legal sovereignty.

V. Policy Synthesis and Forward Challenges

Türkiye's current trajectory in the Black Sea demonstrates that regional equilibrium and influence can only be sustained through continual adaptation at the intersection of law, narrative, infrastructure, and diplomacy. As the analyses in this article make clear, Türkiye's success results from the strategic fusion of legal stewardship rooted in the Montreux Convention, proactive infrastructure-led integration (notably the Middle Corridor and collaborative energy connectivity), and a distinctive "active non-alignment" that harnesses multipolar partnerships without surrendering autonomy. The performative power of Turkish strategic communication—synchronizing statecraft across ministries and media—adds yet another protective dimension to Türkiye's evolving regional posture.

Yet, new challenges loom. As global disruptions—gloeconomic competition, energy insecurity, digital transformation—intensify, Türkiye must continue to renew its rule-setting role in the Black Sea while guarding against dilution of its narrative and legal sovereignty within multinational projects. The EU's evolving Black Sea strategy and the operationalization of the Security Hub illustrate how external partners may advance integration agendas that help—but can also sideline—Türkiye's leadership if legal and institutional balance is not explicitly safeguarded.¹¹ Meanwhile, Russia's drive to re-nationalize the regional security order and China's strategic entry through commerce and logistics



Türkiye's primary policy imperative will be to deepen participatory mechanisms—across energy, logistics, digital, and environmental governance—that reinforce its convening authority while keeping the region's sovereignty norms robust.

present both opportunities for brokerage and risks of marginalization if Turkish agency is not reinforced through continuous policy innovation and regional coalition-building.¹²

Looking ahead, Türkiye's primary policy imperative will be to deepen participatory mechanisms—across energy, logistics, digital, and environmental governance—that reinforce its convening authority while keeping the region's sovereignty norms robust. Maintaining trilateral and minilateral flexibilities with Romania, Bulgaria, and other littoral states, and linking BSEC structures to broader Eurasian connectivity, will be pivotal for real, not rhetorical, resilience.

As this article bridges three foundational trajectories—legal guardianship, operational adaptation, and discursive agility—it provides a roadmap for sustaining Turkish influence in a Black Sea security environment where the only constant will be change. The Turkish experience offers a model for adaptive, law-based regionalism, with wider lessons for other mid-sized actors navigating great power rivalry on complex strategic frontiers.

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