

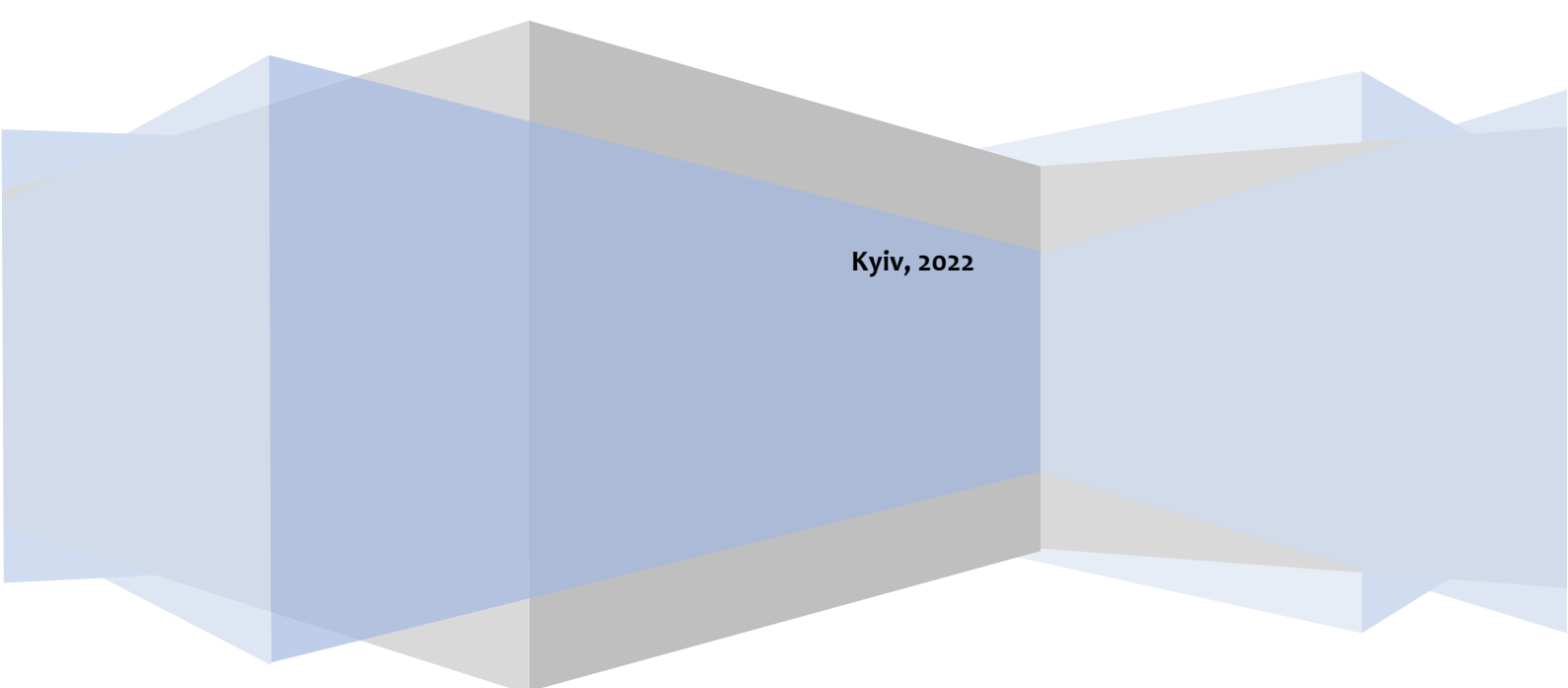
Experts for Security and Global Affairs

**UKRAINE - ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVES OF MARITIME
COOPERATION**

Policy brief

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UKRAINE - ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVES OF MARITIME COOPERATION

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Ukraine and Romania have shared the vision of the Black Sea security, maritime development and the necessity to increase regional cooperation for quite a long time. Nevertheless, due to objective and subjective reasons, maritime cooperation has never been at a sufficient level. With the Russian blockade of the Black Sea and rapprochement in Ukraine-Romania and Ukraine-EU/NATO relations, there is a new window of opportunity to boost such cooperation, including long-term perspectives.²

Pre-war level of cooperation

De facto cooperation between Ukraine and Romania in a security sphere was absent until 2014. In Ukraine, some experts and politicians, in an attempt to cover Russian malign activities, portrayed Romania as a possible threat, especially in times when the interstate dispute regarding Snake Island was in ICJ. These manipulations led to wasted opportunities when two neighbouring littoral states have not been developing the potential of maritime cooperation - both in navy and civil dimensions.

At the same time, Ukraine and Romania shared their view on the necessity to increase NATO presence in the Black Sea and develop a separate Black Sea Strategy of the Alliance. Among others, after 2014, this included the greater presence of NATO ships in the region to prevent Russian plans from projecting their power. Even more, yet back in 2010, it was Romanian leadership who openly stated that the prolongation of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationing in Crimea (the so-called Kharkiv agreement) was a threat to the Black Sea security.

After 2014, the security cooperation of the two states increased, particularly focusing on the maritime domain, including the Danube River. Considering the Danube strategic importance, it is impossible to separate it from the maritime domain in case of two countries' relations because it allows the second "entrance" to the Black Sea but also an additional navigation route in times of the sea route blockade. For example, since 2018, two countries have had annual exercises Riverine that allowed better interoperability of the two countries' navy and coastal guard.

Navy of two countries

Three components define the navy capabilities of the state – physical capabilities of the platforms, first of all, warships, the existence of the navy bases, and participation in the different security arrangements (organizations, etc.), as well as mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral

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cooperation. Navy potential includes not only maritime components (ships) but also aviation, marines, and coastal artillery.

As of today, Romania does not have serious navy capabilities, however, it has been in the process of its navy modernization, even if slow. At the same time, the Romanian strategy for navy development was always connected with its obligations within NATO. Most of the Romanian ships were built in the 1970-1980s, and only recently the upgrade has been initiated, what was partially triggered by the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and partially by a desire to have more weight within NATO. That is why Navy representatives usually explain development plans to have the capacity and capability to join any NATO operation in blue waters in case of necessity beyond the Black Sea. Having this in mind, in 2018, it was announced about buying four new ships and three submarines with deliveries up to 2024³.

Romanian Navy consisted of a navy fleet and river fleet based on the Danube. Platforms are one submarine, six frigates, three corvettes, three missile boats, four mine layers, eight river boats and additional auxiliary and logistical ships⁴. In 2019, the Ministry of Defence of Romania announced a contract signing with the Franco-Romanian consortium regarding the construction of 4 new frigates, modernization of 2 corvettes and the creation of the logistical and training centres for the Navy.⁵

The main navy base is in Constanta, as well as stationing locations in Tulcea, Braila, and Mangalia. Two US bases are also located in Romania – Black Sea Area Support Group (formerly Joint Task Force-East) – but they are air and land forces bases.

Ukrainian navy lost 75% of its potential in 2014 due to the annexation of Crimea, but since then, it both adopted a Navy development strategy in 2018 and went ahead with its fleet modernization. This also included the purchase of Gurza-type boats and acquisition from the US of different rocket boats⁶, as well as later contracts with the UK and Turkey on constructing new ships for the Ukrainian navy (what has not been fulfilled due to the start of the Russian invasion in 2022). Yet, in June 2022, a decision to deliver 18 patrol boats to Ukraine as a part of US aid was announced⁷.

Ukraine had two navy bases in Odesa and Berdyansk, with additional stationing in Pivdenny, Mykolaiv, Mariupol, Genichensk, and Ochakiv. For 2022 the building of the two additional bases was planned in Berdyansk and Ochakov with the financial support of the United Kingdom⁸.

Both countries' navies needed improved logistics, reconnaissance and monitoring capabilities, and coastal defence, making Northern Black Sea quite vulnerable.

³ Romania to buy 3 sub, 4 ships to bolster Black Sea ops, Defence news, 9 February, 2018, <https://www.defencenews.com/naval/2018/02/09/romania-to-buy-3-sub-4-ships-to-bolster-Black-Sea-ops>

⁴ Naval Ships, Forte Navale Romane, https://www.navy.ro/despre/nave_en.php

⁵ Romania chooses the joint offer of Naval Group and Santierul Naval Constanta for the corvettes programme, Naval Group, 3 July 2019, <https://www.naval-group.com/en/romania-chooses-joint-offer-naval-group-and-santierul-naval-constantia-corvettes-programme-666>

⁶ Island-class boats granted by US join Ukraine's navy, Kyiv Post, 13 November 2019, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/Island-class-boats-granted-by-us-join-ukraines-navy.html>

⁷ U.S. sending 18 patrol boats to Ukraine as part of latest aid package, USNI News, 23 June 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/06-23/U-S-sending-18-patrol-boats-to-Ukraine-as-part-of-latest-aid-package>

⁸ Ukraine plans Black Sea bases as US steps up presence in region, Stars and Stripes, 10 February 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/Ukraine-plans-Black-Sea-bases-as-US-steps-up-presence-in-region-1.661679>

Romania and Ukraine participated in two navy initiatives in the 2000s - BLACKSEAFOR and the Black Sea Harmony. The initial idea of increased navy cooperation of six littoral states was undermined in 2008 with Russian aggression in Georgia and almost stopped in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. In 2016 Romania announced its initiative to create a Black Sea Fleet that should unite Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine, however, Sofia refused this format as anti-Russia, and de facto blocked the initiative's development.⁹ Thus, the two states turned their navy cooperation into a bilateral format.

The two countries' Navy established working dialogue with regular exchange visits, information and experience sharing, joint exercises, and assisting Ukraine with NATO standards implementation.¹⁰ NATO membership of Romania has always remained an important factor for joint cooperation.

Romania launched a new initiative in 2022 – The Black Sea Maritime Forum, whose first edition took place in Bucharest on 24-25 February 2022. It was organized in collaboration with the US Naval Forces and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples and modelled after the Baltic Maritime Forum¹¹. Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine joined the meeting that started exactly on the day of the Russian attack on Ukraine. With good potential for increased regional cooperation, the Forum will need to adjust its agenda depending on the development of the war situation.

Commercial ports and safety of navigation

Both countries have been active in maritime trade, using the capacities of their ports, which often were competitors for the cargo.

Romania operates four ports on the Black Sea (Constanta, Mangalia, Midia and Sulina), four ports and the Danube-Black Sea canal, and numerous ports on the Danube River. Constanța is the main port with 61.2 million tons of goods traffic from 67.5 million in total for all Romanian ports. 2021 saw an 11.7% increase, representing the biggest traffic in the history of the Romanian ports. The highest share of goods is for cereals (37.7%), crude oil (10%), petroleum products (8.1), etc.¹²

Constanța port is connected with Pan-European Transport Corridors IV (railway) and VII (Danube). The port has been actively developing for the last few years. With the blockade of grain export from Ukrainian ports since February 2022, Constanța opened its facilities to assist.

Ukraine has 13 seaports and five ports in the occupied territory of Crimea. As of June 2022, due to the Russian blockade and military actions, only three small ports of Reni, Izmail and Ust-Dunaysk, which are situated at the Danube River. Other ports tried to operate in March without a maritime component, but in many cases, it was considered dangerous due to the constant shelling.

⁹ Bulgaria refuses to join NATO Black Sea fleet against Russia, Euractiv, 16 June 2016, <https://www.euroactiv.com/section/global-europe/news/Bulgaria-refuses-to-join-NATO-Black-Sea-fleet-against-Russia>

¹⁰ The delegation of the Naval Forces of Romania visited Naval Forces of Ukraine. Navy of Ukraine, 8 November 2018, <http://navy.mil.gov.ua/en/dlegatsiya-morskyh-syl-zs-rumuniyi-vidvidala-vijskovo-morski-syly-zs-ukrayiny>

¹¹ Black Sea Naval Leaders, NATO Convene Maritime Forum in Bucharest, NATO, 25 February, 2022, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/newsroom/news/2022/Black-Sea-Naval-Leaders--NATO-Convene-Maritime-Forum-in-Bucharest>

¹² The highest freight traffic in the history of Romanian seaports, 67.5 mil tons, reached in 2021/ Port of Constanța, 02 February 2022, <https://www.portofconstanza.com/pn/en/stire/1/0/19075>

The biggest ports were Odesa, Pivdenniy, Chernomorsk and Mykolaiv. The total results of the Ukrainian ports in 2021 were 153 million tons of goods, which fell by 3.8% compared to 2020. Almost 30% were cereals, and 25% for ore. Pivdenny had the biggest traffic (53.5 million tons), followed by Mykolaiv (29.8 million tons), Chornomorsk (25.6 million), and Odesa (22.5 million). The three ports that are still operational in 2022, in total, had just 5.3 million tons by the results of 2021¹³.

Shared risks

Ukraine and Romania have had quite a shared vision regarding the risks in the maritime domain and the Black Sea at large since 2010. The understanding of the growing risks from the Russian Federation appeared after the prolongation of the Russian Black Sea fleet stationing in Crimea and was confirmed by the annexation of Crimea and later activities in the Black Sea. However, the risks have not been only regarding military activities or those faced by the navy of the two states. So, the responses needed also should cover both navy and civilian domains, short-term responses and long-term planning for sustainable regional development.

As for now, the following threats exist that both countries share with different probability levels.

1. Blockade of the ports and recommended navigation routes (while Ukraine already has experienced it, Romanian ports or routes to them also can be disturbed by the Russian military actions);
2. Mining and uncontrolled flowing of the mines in the Black Sea (due to the uncontrolled release of mines, both countries regularly experience their approaching to the coast, so a serious demining of the Northern-Western Black Sea should take place);
3. Blockade of the gas fields around Snake Island and other gas fields in the Black Sea (what has already been experienced since 2014 regarding Ukrainian platforms);
4. Puffing the GPS signals and other types of electronic warfare that can affect the safety of navigation;
5. Violation of the territorial waters (this can happen by both Russian ships illegal enter of the territorial waters and attempts to control the entrance of the third countries ships, as already had been tried at the beginning of the war);
6. Fishery endanger (both due to the Russian navy activities, mines and possibilities to capture ships);
7. Initiating the checking of ships (as happened in the Sea of Azov) by the Russian fleet;
8. Provocations against the ships (this already took place in previous years, especially against the coastal guard and navy ships that performed exercises in the Black Sea);
9. Water pollution (due to the military activities, uncontrolled sewage at the occupied territories, or intended actions as part of the hybrid warfare);

¹³ У 2021 році морські порти України перевалили 153 млн тон вантажів, Uprom, 2 February 2022, <https://uprom.info/news/other/logistika/u-2021-roszi-morski-porty-ukrayiny-perevalyly-153-mln-tonn>

10. Misguiding of the missiles attacks from the sea (considering the increased attacks against Ukrainian Bessarabia, particularly targeting the city of Izmail, the proximity of Romanian territories, and critical infrastructure objects should be considered).

A new vision of cooperation

The existed situation demonstrated both limits and opened new horizons for cooperation. Granting Ukraine with the NATO Membership Action Plan could open more opportunities for cooperation, however, the existed Enhanced Opportunity Partner status and EU candidate status also opened doors for increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation where the maritime domain should not be ignored.

The following issues to increase the possibilities of cooperation in a maritime domain should be explored:

1. The Danube should be considered a second entrance to the Black Sea and access to exports routes, so the analysis of the Danube security strategy should be made, which can include response to the emergency, natural disasters, the safety of navigation, as well as security component. Considering that the EU Danube Strategy is not covering security issues, this dialogue can be established at the bilateral level or with NATO participation.

2. Creation of the logistical hubs and mechanisms for forces support that can be shared by two states. This process can go at the bilateral level or within the currently discussed EU "Military Schengen". This will also promote forces interoperability.

3. Enhanced cooperation within NATO Tailored Presence and other joint projects in the maritime domain. This can also include joint promotion of the idea to draft the NATO Black Sea Strategy that can be done after publishing NATO Strategic Concept 2022.

4. Both countries need greater involvement in MARSECOE activities. The Excellence Center has been functioning for several years, but without the two countries' active participation, that allowed a dominant Turkish view of the centre's activities.

5. Joint monitoring and reconnaissance in the Western Black Sea; The exchange of intelligence information, interceptions, etc. The Enhanced Opportunity Partner status of Ukraine gave additional access to confidential information and real-time exchange of information that can be important in times of war.

6. Elaboration of the joint plan on demining the Black Sea when the security situation allows.

7. Development of the system of crisis reaction and management for the Black Sea. The military activities of the Russian Federation have a significant effect on the safety of navigation, so additional measures should be elaborated to be able to react in case of an emergency.

8. Review existing legislation between two states to reflect the current threats and reality of bilateral relations in the security sphere and Ukraine's status as the candidate state and EOP.

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