



UNIVERSITATEA
LUCIAN BLAGA
— DIN SIBIU —

CENTRUL DE STUDII GLOBALE



On April 7, 2021, the Global Studies Center (LBUS) and the Black Sea University Foundation "Mircea Malița" organized the event entitled: ***“The Strategic Dilemma of the Black Sea: Problematization of International Accords and Common Security Engagements”***.

This paper summarizes the ideas expressed by experts on the particularities offered by the **Montreux Convention** and the perspectives according to which the Black Sea can become an open sea, a maritime space with unrestricted access.*

Dan DUNGACIU – *The Montreux Convention and the Two Perspectives on the Black Sea*

Sergiu MEDAR – *Istanbul Canal in the Competition of the Great Powers*

Șerban CIOCULESCU – *Istanbul Canal: A “Game-Changer” in the Security Architecture of the Black Sea Region or a (Controversial) Internal Policy Decision of the Erdoğan Regime?*

Adriea PÂRLOG – *The Security of Turkey, the Blue Homeland and the Black Sea*

Adrian POPA – *The Geopolitical Impact of the Istanbul Canal Operationalization on the Black Sea Coastal States*

Silviu NATE – *Diverged Visions on Multilateralism and Unilateralism in the Black Sea*

MODERATOR: Cristian BARNA

DILEMA STRATEGICĂ A MĂRII NEGRE
INTRE PROBLEMATIZAREA ACORDURILOR INTERNAȚIONALE ȘI
ANGAJAMENTELE DE SECURITATE COMUNĂ

07 APRILIE 2021, 16:00 - 17:30 (VIA ZOOM)

DAN DUNGACIU – CONVENȚIA DE LA MONTREUX ȘI CELE DOUĂ
PERSPECTIVE ASUPRA MĂRII NEGRE

SERGIU MEDAR – CANALUL ISTANBUL ÎN COMPETIȚIA MARILOR PUTERI

ȘERBAN CIOCULESCU – CANALUL ISTANBUL: UN „GAME CHANGER” ÎN
ARHITECTURA DE SECURITATE A REGIUNII MĂRII NEGRE SAU O DECIZIE
(CONTROVERSATĂ) DE POLITICĂ INTERNĂ A REGIMULUI ERDOĞAN?

ADRIEAN PÂRLOG – SECURITATEA TURCIEI, PATRIA ALBASTRĂ ȘI MAREA
NEAGRĂ

ADRIAN POPA – IMPACTUL GEOPOLITIC AL OPERAȚIONALIZĂRII
CANALULUI ISTANBUL ASUPRA STATELOR RIVERANE MĂRII NEGRE

SILVIU NATE – VIZIUNI CONCURRENTE PRIVIND MULTILATERALISMUL ȘI
UNILATERALISMUL LA MAREA NEAGRĂ

MODERATOR: CRISTIAN BARNA

EVENTIMENT ORGANIZAT DE:
CENTRUL DE STUDII GLOBALE (ULBS) ȘI
FUNDAȚIA UNIVERSITARĂ A MĂRII NEGRE „MIRCEA MALIȚA”

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FUMN

Translation and adaptation of text: Andreea ADAM and Scott EASTMAN

*The ideas expressed do not represent an official point of view and do not reflect the position of any public institution.
Synthesis coordinated by the Global Studies Center, LBUS – April, 2021.



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General (r) Sergiu MEDAR worked as a presidential adviser for National Security, a position from which he coordinated the National Intelligence Community in Romania, headed the General Directorate of Defense Intelligence, the Military Intelligence Directorate and acted as Romania's Military Attaché in the USA. As a university professor, he delivered courses at the National Defense University, the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy and the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu.



Lecturer Dr. Șerban Filip CIOCULESCU is an academic at the Faculty of Political Sciences within the University of Bucharest and scientific researcher at the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History.



Major-General (r) Adrieon PÂRLOG was Deputy of the Romanian Military Intelligence Directorate and Attaché of Defense, Military, Aero and Naval in the Kingdom of Norway. As a university professor, he delivered courses and lectures at the National Defense University, the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, and the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu.



Dr. Adrian POPA is a young researcher in the field of Security Studies, doctor in Intelligence and National Security of the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, graduated Political Science and International Relations and a master program in Strategic Studies and International Law within the University of Aberdeen, UK.



Dr. Silviu NATE is Assoc. Professor and coordinates the Security Studies degree program at the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu (LBUS). He is the director of the Global Studies Center, LBUS, has an academic background in political science and security studies, coordinated several policy papers on topics related to the EU energy security, the migration phenomenon in Europe and the Wider Black Sea Area security.



Prof. Dr. Cristian BARNĂ is dean of the Faculty of Psychosociology within the "Andrei Șaguna" University of Constanța and associate Professor of the Faculty of Intelligence, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance, University of Bucharest, and the Faculty of History "Babeș-Bolyai", University of Cluj-Napoca.



Short historical landmark

The Black Sea is the exclusive sea of its coastal states – this expression derives from the Montreux Convention, from which it was inherited the idea that these states should hold the key to Pontus Euxinus¹. At Montreux, this was also formalized by the great Romanian diplomat Nicolae Titulescu, who argued in favor of giving the key to the Black Sea to Turkey. But when Titulescu returned to Bucharest, the Liberals criticized his decision within the Romanian Parliament – they advocated on behalf of the other version available for the Black Sea: namely, to be an open sea. However, the vision of the Black Sea as being exclusive to its coastal states remains the main view even after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The vision arguing for an open sea starts to manifest more in 2004 when the West arrives at the Black Sea. Once the transatlantic frontier physically touched it and built a framework, the first books and articles about the Black Sea appeared, while its infrastructure began to be theoretically set up. This infrastructure had its premises on the Black Sea as an open sea, where the Western allies could come unhindered.

Between 2004 and 2005, the European Union launches its Neighborhood Policy, and in 2007, Romania contributes to the operationalization of the Black Sea Synergy concept. The Black Sea Synergy tries to gather the coastal states to prove to them that the sea must be opened. But this effort culminated with the reticence of Turkey, Russia, and Bulgaria, and its relevance started to fade in 2008 after the NATO Summit in Bucharest when Ukraine and Georgia were not given consistent paths of accession. A few months later, Russia started a war against Georgia that shook the world; then, in 2014, the Russian Federation significantly increased its relevance in the Black Sea, inclusively by taking control of the Kerch Strait. Nowadays, because it lost control over Crimea and its adjacent territorial waters, Ukraine is not able to capitalize its maximum harbor capacities as a riparian state.

Georgia can only access 4 of its 8 harbors, because the other 4 are de facto under Abkhazian control, as a semi-official representative of Moscow.

As a result, we are in a prolonged state of tension in the Black Sea which remains, after all, a closed sea.

¹ *Pontus Euxinus* – historical name of the Black Sea, intercontinental sea located in SE Europe and Asia Minor.



The Black Sea, From a *Russian Lake* to a *NATO Sea*

The Montreux Convention is the key to the Black Sea's security, but although it apparently is in the hands of Turkey, it rather belongs to Russia. Even though Turkey ensures approvals for military ships transiting the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, Russia can still do what it does best: it manipulates. This way, Russia manipulated the coastal countries in order to pass the blame of „closing the Black Sea”, to Turkey, and to distract the attention from itself, the true causative factor. If the Convention would be organized nowadays, it would probably not be approved by the signatory states – arguments such as the situation in the Spratly Islands, South China Sea, would be invoked because they match the discussions on freedom of navigation.

The Black Sea represents the only international maritime area where the U.S. Navy accepts the fact that navigating through it requires permission from someone else. The Montreux Convention limits the freedom of navigation and delineates the principle referring to the coastal states and those having a passing way. In 2018, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed a decree granting him – in his quality as President of the Turkish Republic – the right to approve or abolish a series of international treaties that Turkey is part of. Erdoğan regards himself as an artisan of the Istanbul Canal, craving to compare it to those in Suez or Panama, and simultaneously aiming at important economic benefits.



All security strategies of the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and Russia refer to the strategy of the great powers, which must be taken into consideration. This same idea applies in the case of the Istanbul Canal, where we can talk about the great powers' perspectives, as well as reactions from Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union (considered a great economic power, but military only through its relations with NATO).



Each powerful state has access to a sea or an ocean, while Russia is the only country with aspirations of great power that does not neighbor any warm sea, consequently waiting for temperature increases to open the northern corridor. Now, the Black Sea is offering Russia this access to the Mediterranean. Although Russia is the main beneficiary of the Montreux Convention, it is confronted with a new reality: the Black Sea is transforming from a Russian lake to a NATO sea.



Also, Russia prefers not to publicly amplify its message regarding the 1936 Convention, at the same time being extremely cautious towards a potential deterioration of its relations with Turkey and the strengthening of Turkey's position within the Western bloc.

China and Russia have agreed to support each other from a political point of view. China will support the continuation of the Montreux Convention's regulations because it has concessions in South-Eastern Greece, in the Mediterranean's peripheral zone, and because it has broader interests in Syria.

From the Blue Homeland to the Istanbul Canal

The estimated physical dimensions of the future Istanbul Canal are considerable, as it is projected to be 150 meters in length and 25 meters in depth.

The idea of this project appeared for the first time in the 16th century during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent, after which it was resuscitated on a public level in the '90s - however, at that time it was confronted with internal opposition, economic shortages, and a negative reaction from the Soviet Union, and subsequently Russia. Feasibility studies have been paid in 2009 and 2012, and during the electoral campaign of 2011, Erdoğan declared that he wished to build the Istanbul Canal to obtain funds and to decongest the traffic within the two straits.

The construction of this canal fits into the maritime doctrine of Mavi Vatan (the Blue Homeland).

The Blue Homeland doctrine is permissive regarding the channel and is tightly connected to Admiral (Ret.) Cem Gürdeniz, who has left a mark on Turkey's security policy in the last 12 years, just like President Erdoğan has. After trying to monopolize the foreground of maritime security, Cem Gürdeniz was placed in reserve in 2012; he was accused of subversive actions against the political stability of Turkey and received a sentence of 18 years of imprisonment, from which he only executed three (released in 2014 after a full acquittal).

Recently, because of an open letter signed by 104 retired Turkish admirals regarding the intention of resuming debates on the Montreux Convention, Cem Gürdeniz has been once again arrested, along with nine others. From this perspective, Cem Gürdeniz could even be considered an adversary of Erdoğan.

Turkey currently has three main security problems:

- The protection of the Blue Homeland perimeter - meaning all of Turkey's economic exclusive zones from the Marmara, Black, and Mediterranean seas summed up, for the potential of hydrocarbons exploitation;
- The implications of the Kurdish factor upon Turkey's political and social stability, including the East and South-Eastern parts of the country, as well as Syria;
- The Republic of Northern Cyprus.



All the above-mentioned reasons make Cem Gürdeniz an important figure due to his political impact.

There are security issues in the Bosphorus and they impose taking a cautious stance regarding the correct relation between the economic dimension of the naval transport corridor and the military aspects. At the same time, 38% of the potential of hydrocarbons exported by water by Russia are transiting the Bosphorus. Moscow wishes to perpetuate the applicability of the Montreux Convention from the perspective of military implications, but a combination of Russia-China strategic interests would prefer the Istanbul Canal to decongest the economic traffic on the Black Sea - World Ocean route.

The statute of submarines in the Bosphorus allows their transit only in exceptional situations - sells or repairs outside the Black Sea. According to the Agreement, other situations are excluded, although submarines belonging to the former Soviet Union and Russia have benefitted from exceptions in the past.

A project similar to the Istanbul Canal is currently in an operationalization stage in the Eastern Flank's northern region: Vistula Spit Canal. This artificial navigable way will permit ships from the Polish harbor of Elblag (headquarters of the NATO Multinational Division North-East) to get directly to the Baltic Sea without accessing the current mandatory point of passing in the Vistula Lagoon, namely the Russian harbor of Baltiysk (the main naval base of Russia's Baltic Fleet, situated on the Pilava Strait's shore).

This route between the Vistula Spit Canal (situated in the northern part of the Eastern Flank) and the Istanbul Canal (situated in its southern part), there are civil and military transport ways foreseen to interconnect them with the purpose to consolidate the defense of allied states in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, two such projects are already implemented under the aegis of the Three Seas Initiative: the Via Carpathia road connection, and the Rail 2 Sea railway connection. In perspective, a maritime connection could also be taken into consideration - for example, the Gdansk-Galați Canal, a Romanian project dating from the interwar period with an estimated route of 1900 kilometers running the Vistula - San - Dniester - Prut - Danube: this would only need the arrangement of 72 additional kilometers to shorten the distance that ships travel between the Baltic and the Black Sea with circa 4000 kilometers.

Therefore, probably nothing fits the current context better than the remark of the Polish historian, Marek Chodakiewicz: "History is alive in the East. Clarifying the past is the key to the future!"



Projects and Influences with Strategic Character in the Black Sea

Russia's efforts are directed at the Turkish opposition, having the purpose to reject the construction of the Istanbul Canal and sabotage this process. President Erdoğan anticipates that once the project is finalized, the Turkish state will benefit from new leverages in its relations with the US, NATO, Russia, and China. The US has applied sanctions on Turkey because it purchased S400 missiles from Russia, but this infrastructure project could ease to some extent, or even cancel these sanctions in return for unhindered access to the canal.

Another project of Turkey is called The Middle Corridor – similar to a section of the Silk Road that ensures the link between Northern Africa and the Middle East – which transits Turkey to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In 2015, a protocol has been signed between Turkey and China, through which the Turkish minister of foreign affairs declared himself in favor of these projects, as being another two playing cards for Erdoğan.

The financial dimension of finalizing the project is huge and it will probably become burdensome for Turkey. The Istanbul Airport does not have the necessary financing for operation, and China offered to substitute Turkey's lack of liquidities. China's availability to financially support the Turkish government will lead to an increase in the complexity of their bilateral relations, but also of security issues, including between Russia and China. To this, it is added the appetite of the Russian Federation to invest in the Turkish energy industry in the domain of nuclear powerplants, projects that cannot be found anymore in the area of public discussions in the last 3 or 4 years.

Final Remarks

- The limits of the Montreux Convention regarding the deployment of military ships belonging to non-coastal states have permitted the Russian Federation to impose itself as the main power in the Black Sea after the end of the Cold War.
- Russia's bifurcated attitude is clear: when it comes to the Istanbul Canal, from a defensive point of view, Russia suddenly recognizes the value of a multilateral order and international agreements, intending to extend their area of application. However, when it positions itself in offensive formulas in the Sea of Azov, Ukraine, and South Caucasus, Russia resorts to hard-power mechanisms with which flagrantly violates the sovereign right of states and the international law.
- Although Turkey sometimes pushes Russia into the corner when it comes to the Black Sea, the common regional stakes risk eroding Turkey's predictability in the transatlantic context.
- Bulgaria could be worried about the perturbation of commercial maritime routes, as over 80% of its imports and exports are realized through the Black Sea.



- The average waiting time for transiting the Bosphorus varies from 14 to 30 hours, while its actual transit takes about one and a half hours for ships of large dimensions – this way, we can appreciate the economic losses suffered by all transporters.
- Although most great powers prefer to maintain the current status of the Black Sea, the democratic coastal states fight for it to become an open sea.
- The efforts and strategies of the two main institutions of Brussels, NATO and the EU, should find a convergence point regarding the Black Sea. While the Alliance presents a clear and profound vision for the Black Sea, this cannot be said about the European Union, whose vision is relatively diluted and disengaged.
- The Montreux Convention limits the projection of NATO capabilities in the Black Sea. The Istanbul Canal could have a major impact consisting of discouragement through offering an alternative for the tonnage restrictions in the Bosphorus.
- The Istanbul Canal can play the role of a strategic bypass, both for the Convention through facilitating the unhindered deployment of allied ships in the Black Sea and as an essential piece of a connecting corridor between the southern and northern parts of NATO's Eastern Flank.
- Even though Montreux is perceived as an important pillar for Turkey's maritime security, an extended perspective is also necessary in order to support the relevance of the Alliance. If Turkey cannot control the Black Sea, then it becomes less relevant for NATO. Currently, Turkey is an important actor in the region and could initiate an innovative strategy to integrate the NATO states in approaching the issues of the Black Sea.
- It is advisable for Romania to strategically anticipate a possible renegotiation of the Montreux Convention as a result of the Istanbul Canal operationalization, considering that at the moment, Turkish authorities avoid publishing the judicial regulations that will govern the transit of this new naval transport corridor.

