

Black Sea Basin Geostrategic Region from History to Modern Times

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Abstract: For Black Sea its geostrategic importance has become increasingly evident in recent years, as major powers have become more aware of its potential benefits and risks. The region's location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East makes it an important trade route and strategic point, connecting different regions and cultures. Its natural resources, such as oil, gas, and minerals, have also attracted the attention of major energy producers and consumers. In addition, the Black Sea has become an important arena for diplomacy, cultural exchange, scientific research, and military affairs. Major powers such as Russia, Turkey, and the United States have increased their presence and influence in the region, seeking to promote their interests and secure their strategic goals. These efforts have included political and economic partnerships, military alliances, and cultural initiatives, among others. These issues require collective action and cooperation among all stakeholders in the region.

Keywords: Black Sea, geostrategy, political importance

1. Introduction

The disintegration of the USSR caused changes in the geopolitical perspective in the region. The new independent states of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova seeking connections with the West. . Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the recent war in Ukraine has increased regional tensions, with the West and Russian Federation engaged in an economical and military buildup.

2. Materials and methods

For writing this historical and geopolitical paper, the materials and methods used are crucial to ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the research. One of the critical materials used is primary sources. These sources include first-hand accounts, diaries, letters, photographs, maps, and official documents. Primary sources provide direct evidence of historical events and offer unique insights into

the mindset of the people who lived during that period. Secondary sources used are also essential materials used in historical and geopolitical research. These sources include textbooks, academic journals, biographies, and historical analyses. Secondary sources provided an interpretation and analysis of primary sources and help contextualize historical events within a larger historical and geopolitical framework. Several methods were used to assure the accuracy and credibility of the study: archival research, comparative analysis that helps us to identify patterns and trends in history, and it can provide insights into how historical events are interconnected, geospatial analysis helps to visualize and map historical and geopolitical data, and it can provide insights into the spatial distribution of events and phenomena, textual analysis, this involves analyzing written documents, including primary and secondary sources.

3. Results and discussions

The Black Sea lies between the Western and Eastern worlds, and the geographical, social, economic and military value of the coastal states, coupled with the geopolitical interests of the major powers in the area, has entered the sphere of interest of many researchers around the world. As a result, multidisciplinary research projects have been planned, which are expected to take several years to complete. Interestingly, even countries and scientific institutions that previously showed little interest in the Black Sea are now getting involved in this research effort.

Therefore, it is imperative for Romania to increase its involvement in these activities and enhance its position as a riparian nation by highlighting its geostrategic significance in areas such as politics, economics, culture, science, sports, and more. Figure 1 shows the current reconstruction of Herodotus' map [1].

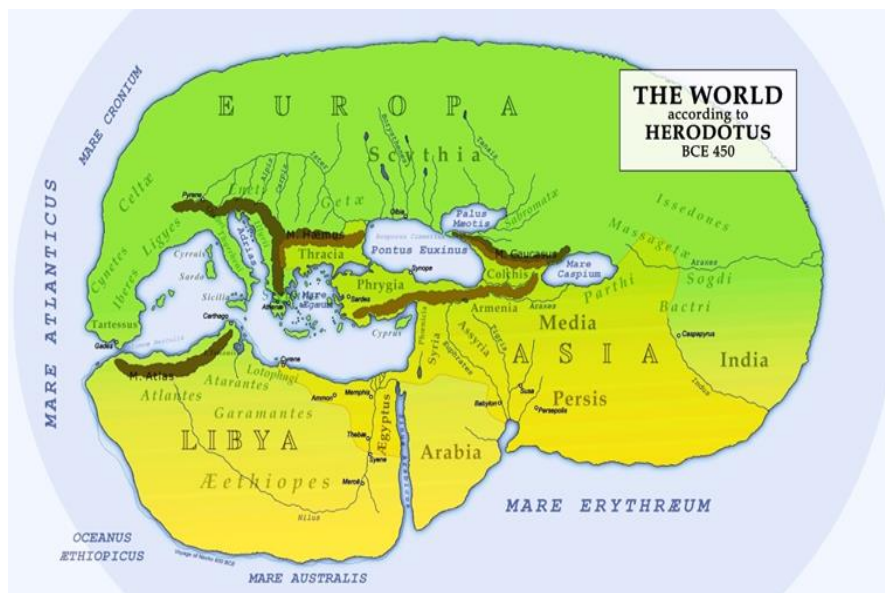


Figure 1. Pontus Euxinus in the centre of the map [1].

Ancient navigators found in Pontus Euxinus a challenge, a test of their strength and a chance to discover a new world. But for the local people of these attractive places for sailors, The Black Sea was an intangible, dark, capricious territory that was not to be trespassed upon, unlike those who

ventured out onto the great sea without fear and for whom it was a desirable and hospitable place. Sailing on this sea in the old days was difficult, even nowadays there are no great differences, for various reasons such as: adverse winter weather (strong winds and storms with very rapid onset, heavy precipitation, large snows, penetrating cold, unbearable for southern sailors), lack of reliable information about this area shrouded in mystery and frightening legends, lack of information about the people of the place. For the ancient Greeks, a people of skilled navigators, it took a long time before they dared to venture into the Pontos Euxinus. Passing the straits from south to this scary sea was itself an unknown and a great challenge. Harsh weather conditions, adverse currents, short and rapid waves, and a sea that changed rapidly from calm to stormy, prevented the southern colonists from venturing into new and unknown land for a long time until they had more reliable information about the Black Sea and its shores. So, the great Greek settlement spread northwards in the second part of the eighth century BC. The colonies that emerged were independent political entities and over time, some of them even engaged in armed conflicts with their motherland. Nevertheless, in general, the relations between the colonies and the motherland were quite friendly. [2]. The ancient Greek colonizers of the Black Sea initially named it as an inhospitable sea - Axeinos. Then when they developed trade relations with the Basin peoples, gained their trust and built fortresses-ports here and a flourishing civilization for many centuries thereafter, they developed new beneficial ties with the motherland. Thus, they changed the name to Pontos Euxinos, meaning inhospitable shore. From then on this beautiful name is known throughout the ancient world and it was inscribed on the famous maps of Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Figure 2, 3, 4, 5). Then, with the known historical changes, this sea was named after the names given by those who have temporarily imposed their rule over it, until today, we all call it the Black Sea.



Figure 2 Europe chart of Abraham Ortelius [3] Figure 3 Black Sea - Diego Homen ancient map [4]



Figure 4 Argonautica chart of Abraham Ortelius [5]



Figure 5 Black Sea map of Grek colonies (VIII-IV c. BC) [6]

During 1st century BC the romans conquered territories up to the Danube river. Historical changes in geopolitical region were always important. For example, the Roman empire expanded, during the Emperor Trajan’s reign, with a surface of over 5,000,000 km², which represented the entire Europe, except its north, as well as North Africa (Figure 6). In that time Rome was considered the center of the world, power and luxury[7].

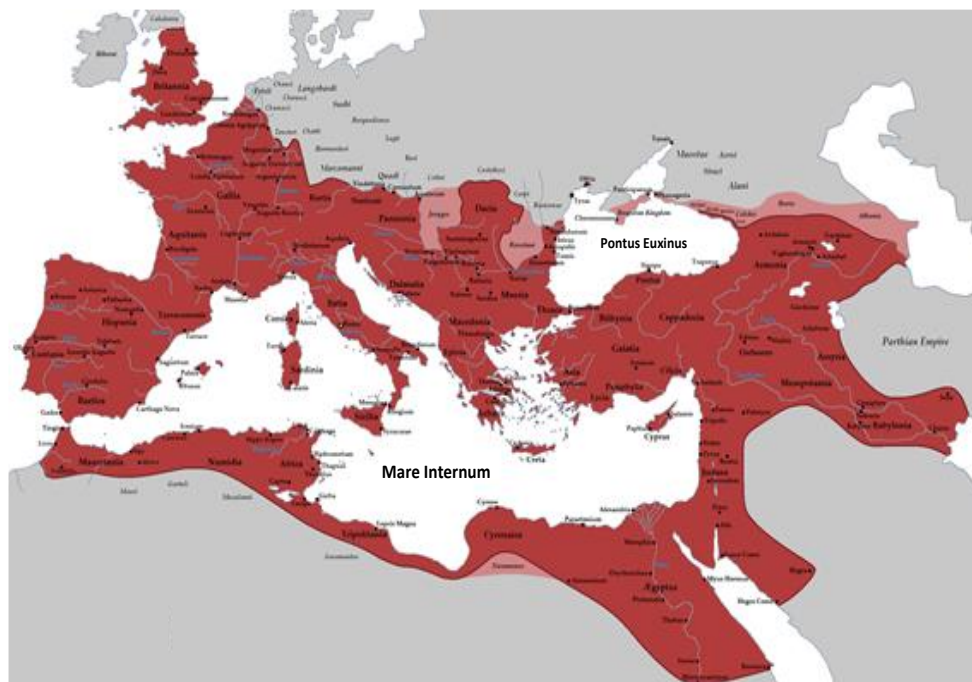


Figure 6 Maximum expansion of the Roman Empire in 117 AD. Modified from [7]

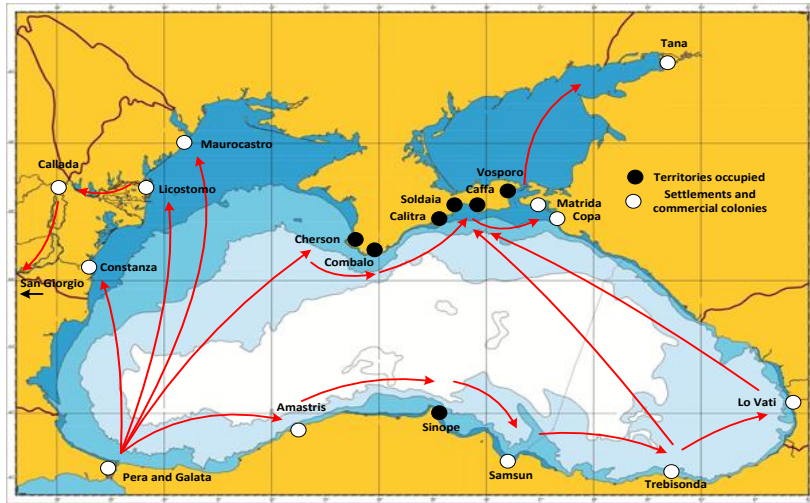


Figure 7 Territories occupied, settlements and commercial colonies of Repubblica di Genova in Genoese Gazaria, modified after Khalkov, 2015 [11]

The Treaty of Ninfeo of 1261 established a new monopoly over the entire Black Sea [9]. After this period, these possessions were captured by the Ottomans until 1475, excluding Chios (1566) (Figure 7) [11]. Black Sea became to be that we know from history a *Turkish Lake* more than 200 years (Figure 8). Information regarding ports is presented in a research study and chart named the *Catalog of Potential Ancient Ports* [12].

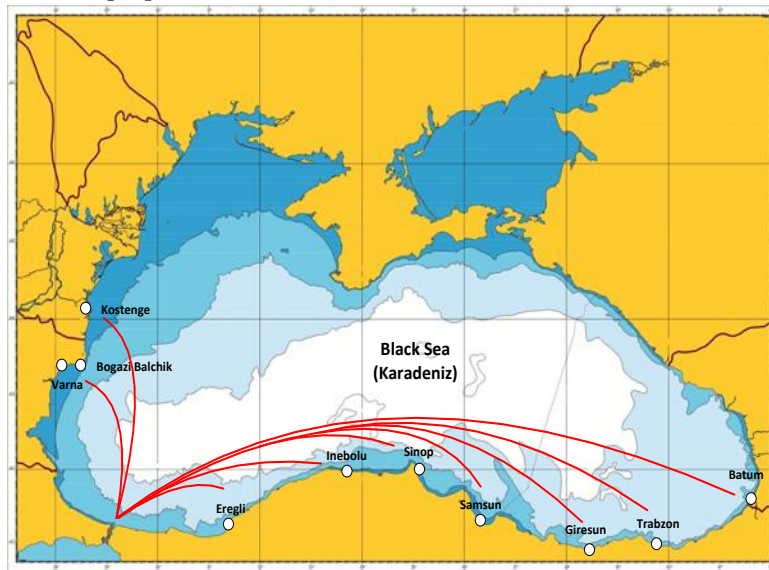


Figure 8 Ottoman Karadeniz's ports

Black Sea had a significant politics and military history, evidenced by numerous actions taken by various nations throughout history. While the major powers of the time acted to increase their political, military, economic and cultural influence in the region, the Black Sea's coastal countries had a consistent policy of having free access to their sea, without living under the sovereignty or suzerainty of others (Figure 9). In recent years, the countries bordering the Black Sea have undergone a period of significant political, social and economic changes, as they have had to adapt to new standards required by Euro-Atlantic integration. Romania and Bulgaria, both NATO and EU

members, along with Turkey, have been striving to modernize and develop in order to meet the conditions for EU and NATO membership. Ukraine and Georgia have also been undergoing a lengthy process of development and modernization, while the Russian Federation has moved from a state socialist economy to an original type of capitalist economy, in which the state is very well represented.

The Black Sea lies at the eastern end of the European land and inland water routes to the huge Asian hinterland, which makes the interest of the major international political players active in the region, the EU, the USA and the Russian Federation, to increase their presence on these particularly important economic routes (inland waterways) on which not only goods, but also political, geopolitical and military influence are transported (Figure 10) [13].

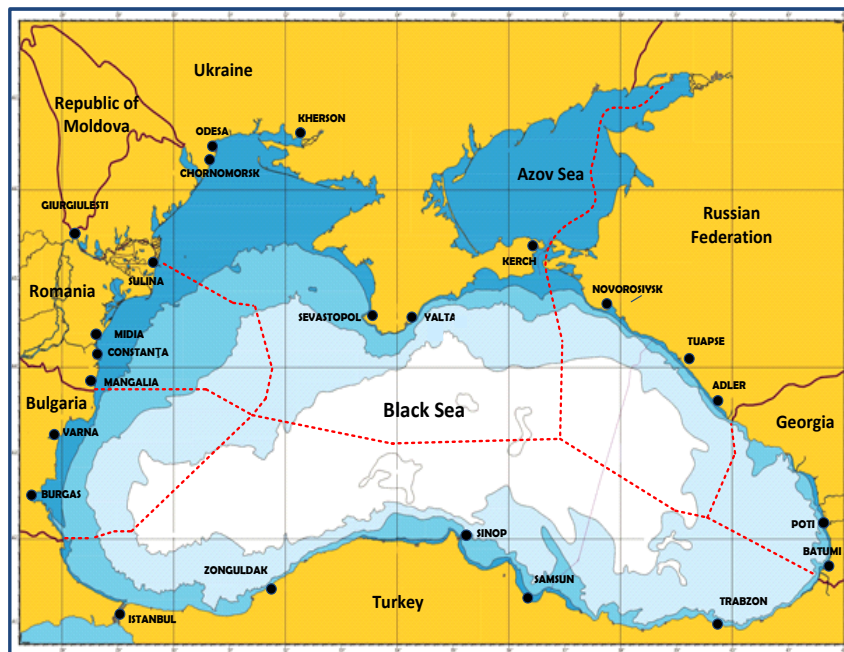


Figure 9 Black Sea - the still unfinished delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones



Figure 10 Black Sea - inland waterways [13]

The maritime routes link its main ports: Constanta, Odessa, Sukhumi, Poti, Batumi, Istanbul, Varna, Burgas with each other, but also with large parts of Europe and Asia, via roads and railways interconnected with these ports (Figure 11).

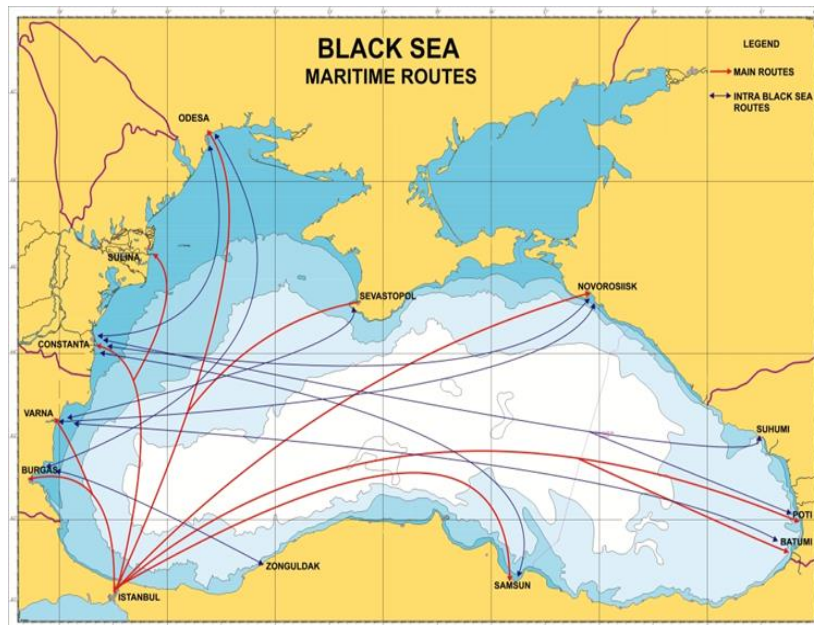


Figure 11 Black Sea - international maritime routes

This area is a part of drug traffic routes Central Asia / Middle East to Western Europe. The Europe Black Sea's western maritime facade stretches strictly geographically on the territory of four states,

from north to south: Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, with an approximate length of 630 km, with the main ports: Odesa, Sulina, Constanța, Midia, Varna, Burgas and Istanbul (Figure 12) [2, 14].

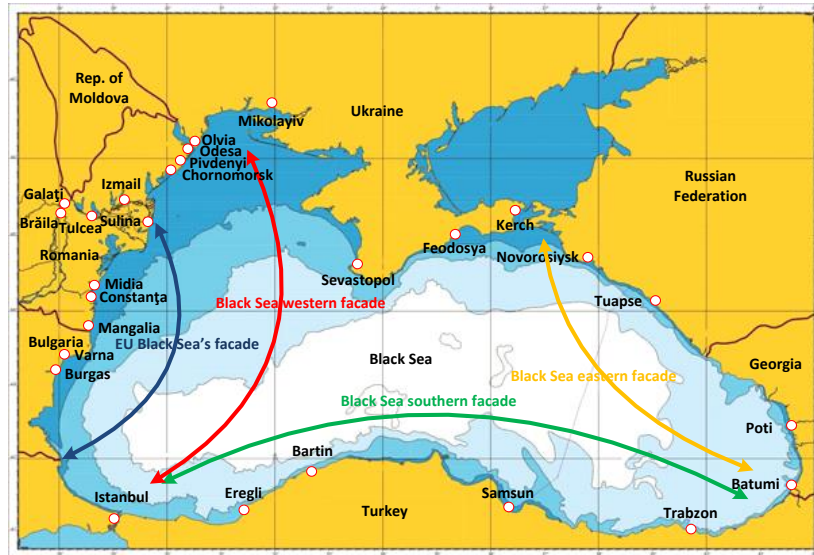


Figure 12 Black Sea - maritime facades [15]

Today, several variants of the notion of the wider Black Sea region have crystallised: one variant includes the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia, as well as landlocked countries bordering the Danube; the second variant is much broader, geographically oriented towards the north and east, including countries in the southern Caucasus, as well as other European countries (Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova), in line with the idea of a *Complete Europe*. The third option is a combination of the first two [16].

In 2021 the GDP of the coastal states and GDP per capita was as follows: the Russian Federation USD 4,078 billion, USD 28,000 per capita, Ukraine USD 535.5 billion, USD 12,900 per capita, Romania USD 588.4 billion, USD 30,800 per capita, Bulgaria USD 167.8 billion, USD 24,400 per capita, Turkey USD 2,668 billion, USD 31,500 per capita, Georgia USD 57.4 billion, USD 15,500 per capita (figures 13 and 14) [17].

The population of the coastal states (2023) and the HDI index (2022) are as follows: Russian Federation 141.7 million, 0.822, Ukraine 43.3 million, 0.773, Romania 18.3, 0.821, Bulgaria 6.8 million, 0.795, Turkey 83.5 million, 0.838, Georgia 4.9 million, 0.802 (figures 15 and 16) [18].

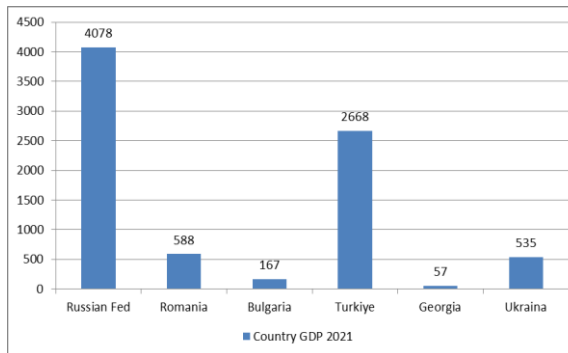


Figure 13 Black Seas countries GDP

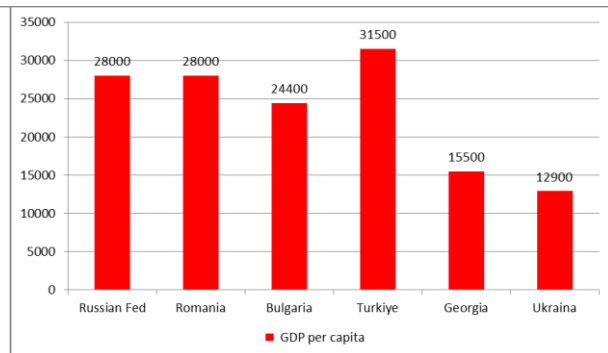


Figure 14 Black Seas countries GDP per capita

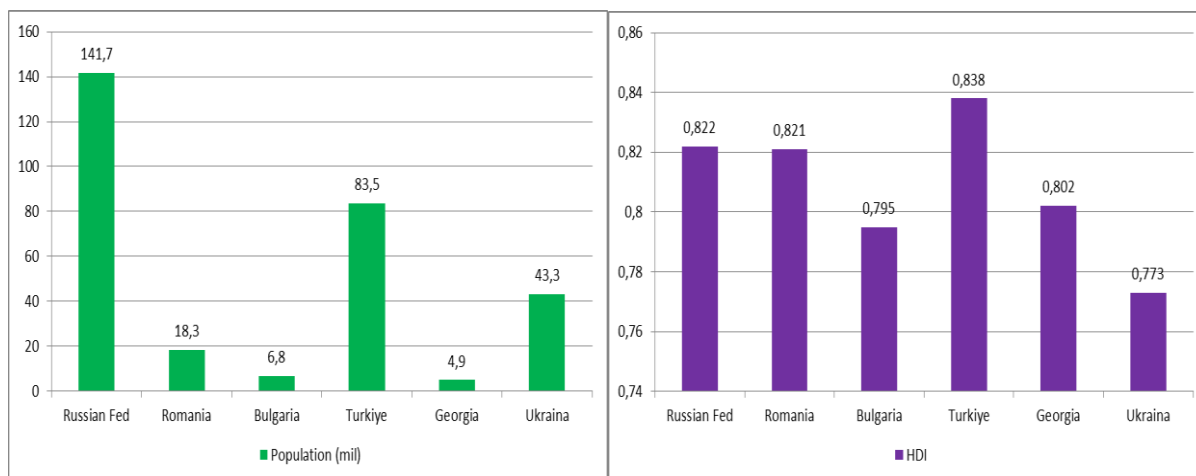


Figure 15 Black Seas countries GDP population

Figure 16 Black Seas countries GDP HDI index

4. Conclusions

Since Antiquity the Black Sea basin has been a region of great interest to ancient Mediterranean, medieval and modern times: Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Genoese, Venetians, Turks, but also to Vikings and other migrants, as well as to Slavic and Asian peoples. So it can be said that the geopolitical value of this region was very high even then. The Black Sea went from being known as a legendary land, little known, mysterious and inaccessible, but very tempting for its riches, to a welcoming one, good for building new civilizations, at the crossroads of the European, Asian and African worlds.

For many centuries, the empires bordering the Black Sea and other powerful states with interests in this region have disputed politically and militarily this area of recognized geostrategic importance. Battles and periods of peace alternated, with development and decline in continuous succession. In trying to impose their will in the Black Sea basin, the political actors of those times divided their periods of domination, the Black Sea is considered as "their sea", Russian or Turkish sea, etc. which demonstrates once again the geopolitical interest in the Black Sea.

But in recent years, as a result of political developments in coastal states, the change of Romania and Bulgaria's membership in a certain defunct political-military alliance, and their accession to NATO and the EU have led to a change in the balance of power in the area. Their economical evolution influenced the needs for import and export by sea and, as a result, the shipping and trade flows of these countries have increased or decreased accordingly.

The Soviet Union, the former socialist states Romania and Bulgaria had internationally important commercial and ocean-going fishing fleets, adapted to the needs of the state economy, but these declined drastically after 1989.

The ongoing military conflict following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, to which are added many other conflicts, older or more recent, in the various areas near the Black Sea, proving that there is a desire to impose a new geostrategic balance in the region. But the new political, military and geostrategic factors analysis shows that this whole large and important Euro-Asian region has come back into focus. The important economic resources that the current political actors are tending towards, as well as the geographical position, show once again the geostrategic value of the Black Sea basin, as seen since Antiquity. All these conflicts and fragmentations have caused significant changes in the physical-geographical framework of the Black Sea basin, some of them irreversible, but also in the terrestrial and aquatic environment, with a negative impact on life in the region.

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