



EU Unpacked

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EU Unpacked # 3

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EU strategy for secure, prosperous and resilient Black Sea region

An In-Depth Analysis for Non-Experts

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EU strategy for secure, prosperous and resilient Black Sea region

The European Union's new strategy for the Black Sea region responds to the ongoing geopolitical upheaval caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This unprovoked, brutal war has triggered the process inside the EU that was almost unthinkable before 2022. With this new strategy, the EU seeks to enhance its role as a reliable regional actor through structured cooperation with six partner countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Türkiye, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The strategy is built around three main pillars:

- **Enhancing security, stability, and resilience** – including the creation of a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub.
- **Fostering sustainable growth and prosperity** – through improved transport, energy, and digital connectivity.
- **Promoting environmental protection and climate resilience** – by addressing war-related ecological damage and reinforcing civil protection.

The overall aim of the strategy is to consolidate EU influence, support regional partners on their European path, and strengthen mutual resilience and economic integration. At the same time, the initiative aligns with broader EU policy frameworks, including the Global Gateway Strategy, the Eastern Partnership, and the enlargement process.

Let's have a closer look at the document.

The EU's new strategy for the Black Sea region is a wide-ranging response to the rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. It marks a substantial shift in the EU's engagement in regional security and geopolitical affairs, especially due to Russia's destabilising influence and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Geopolitical Repositioning of the EU

At its core, the strategy aims to strengthen the EU's geopolitical presence in the Black Sea, a region which historically has been characterised by the competition for spheres of influence among different regional powers. The focus on stability and the creation of the Maritime Security Hub represents a more assertive and strategic EU stance, moving beyond its traditional soft power approach towards more engagement with hard and hybrid aspects of security governance. It is notable that the integration of non-EU countries, with varying degrees of alignment—from EU aspirants such as Ukraine and Georgia to strategic partners like Turkey—exemplifies a pragmatic and flexible approach grounded in practical cooperation rather than strict institutional frameworks.

Economic and Connectivity Agenda

The strategy places significant emphasis on connectivity, portraying the Black Sea as a transit gateway between Europe, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and even the Eastern Mediterranean. This framing reflects the logic of geoeconomics, where infrastructure, energy corridors, and digital networks act as tools for influence and integration.

Importantly, by linking the Black Sea strategy to the Global Gateway – the EU's counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative – the EU distinctly positions itself as an alternative partner, offering value-based, sustainable investments. This approach aligns with current EU external action priorities that emphasise democratic governance, transparency, and environmental standards.

Environmental Security and Resilience

Notably, the strategy makes environmental protection and climate adaptation a central pillar. This aligns with the increasing recognition of environmental security as a vital part of regional stability. The war in Ukraine has led to significant environmental damage, while rising maritime risks and climate vulnerability in coastal communities underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive security approach. By focusing

on the environment, the strategy also helps build normative legitimacy, reinforcing the EU's position as a global leader in climate governance while tackling practical risks that threaten regional well-being and sustainability.

Enlargement and Normative Integration

The document strategically links the Black Sea vision with the broader EU enlargement agenda, particularly concerning Ukraine, Moldova, and possibly Georgia. While it refrains from prescribing accession outcomes, it implicitly portrays the EU path as the most viable trajectory for regional development, grounded in the rule of law, democratic institutions, and market integration.

In this context, the EU uses its normative influence to drive reforms, boost institutional resilience, and promote policy convergence, thereby reinforcing the Europeanisation framework. However, the success of this approach relies on internal reforms within partner countries and the EU's credibility in offering integration incentives.

Institutional Synergy and Strategic Coherence

The strategy is presented as part of a coordinated and comprehensive EU response, aligned with other initiatives such as the European Defence White Paper, ProtectEU, the European Democracy Shield, and forthcoming strategies on ports and oceans. This integration signals a stronger push for strategic coherence across EU foreign, security, and neighbourhood policies – a notable shift from fragmented past approaches. It also reflects a growing awareness within EU institutions of the interconnectedness between internal and external security, particularly in light of Russia's hybrid tactics, disinformation campaigns, and energy blackmail.

Conclusion

The EU's new strategy towards the Black Sea is a comprehensive and timely initiative that addresses immediate security concerns while laying the groundwork for long-term integration, sustainability, and regional cooperation. Its success will depend on effective implementation, the willingness of partner states to engage, and the EU's ability to maintain unity and strategic clarity amidst growing global competition. This initiative marks a step towards a more geopolitical Union, as envisioned by EU leaders – one that balances moral values with strategic pragmatism in a critical neighbourhood increasingly marked by confrontation, competition, and complexity.

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George is a diplomat and expert in international politics, security and European integration. During his career in the Georgian public service (2004–2023), he held senior positions focused on political affairs, European and Euro-Atlantic integration and regional security. Beyond diplomacy, he has contributed extensively as an author and researcher, specialising in the rise of radical and populist movements in Eastern Europe. He currently serves as the executive director of the EU Awareness Centre, a Brussels-based NGO promoting democratic reforms, good governance, and EU values. He continues his work as an independent researcher on political and international issues.