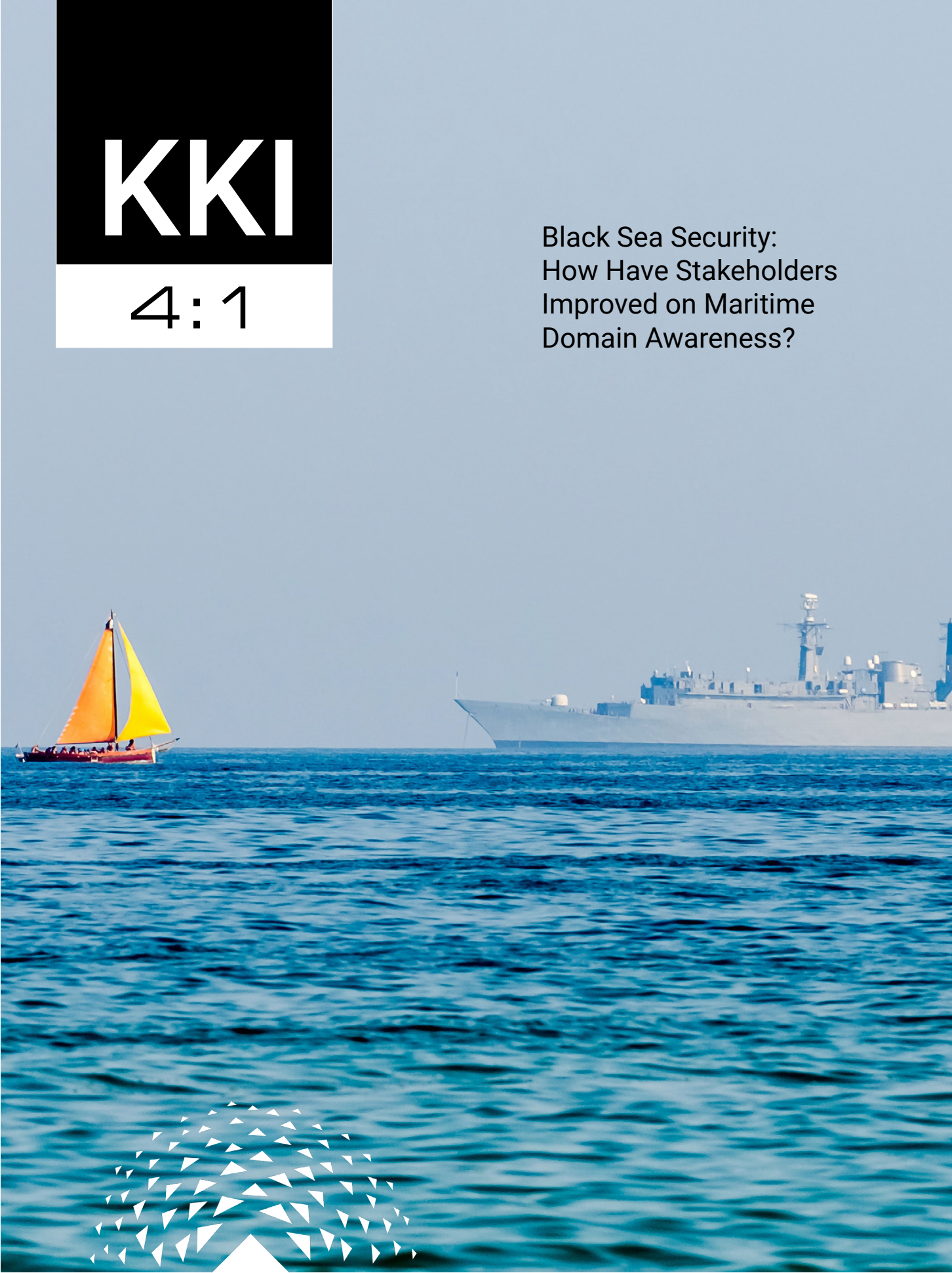


KKI

4:1

Black Sea Security:  
How Have Stakeholders  
Improved on Maritime  
Domain Awareness?



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# KKI 4:1

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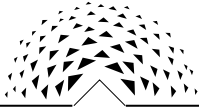
In the 4:1 series of the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade, four experts give a short answer to the same question concerning international politics and economics. Our aim is to launch scientific debates in and beyond Hungary and promote dialogue among experts. In this issue our topic is *“Black Sea Security: How Have Stakeholders Improved on Maritime Domain Awareness?”*

## **MARTIN SOKOLOV**

### ***PERSPECTIVES FROM BULGARIA***

Until 2014, the security architecture in the Black Sea was shaped predominantly by regional formats, such as BLACKSEAFOR, which were aimed at enhancing confidence and cooperation between littoral states. With the 2008 Russia-Georgia war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and backing the selfproclaimed republics, the 2014 illegal annexation of the Crimea and supporting the separatists in Donbas and Donetsk, Russia has unilaterally changed the security architecture in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, through the militarization of the Crimean Peninsula, the Kremlin is enhancing its antiaccess area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which provide Moscow with regional dominance in conventional military. The Black Sea region as a whole is Moscow’s main strategic maritime domain, as the Kremlin highly likely believes it can operate with near impunity in the area, building and by extension projecting its capabilities into the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and beyond. Moscow is also striving to ensure that there is no new east-west energy corridor that can bypass Russia or weaken its dominant grip on oil and gas exports. It is to be emphasized that its ports in the Black Sea are the only ones that can be used throughout the year due to the harsh winter conditions in its northern and eastern naval bases.

For Bulgaria the main security challenges in the Black Sea are related to the escalation of the confrontation in eastern Ukraine, the frozen conflicts in the region, and Russia’s military buildup particularly in Crimea. The Black Sea is of vital importance for the Bulgarian economy, transport, energy routes, raw materials, and tourism. However, the Bulgarian population also has overt pro-Russian sentiments and a largely favourable view of Moscow, regardless of the international developments. The two countries share deep historical, cultural, religious, political, and linguistic roots, while Sofia is also highly dependent on Russian energy imports. Thus, Bulgarian politicians and decisionmakers are extremely careful about their rhetoric and messaging. Sofia does not have a separate strategy for the Black Sea, but its position in relation to the security architecture in the Black Sea is based on four main pillars. First, as a member of NATO and the EU, the country insists on the need for more active participation of the organizations for security in the region as well as its economic development.



Second, Bulgaria wants to avoid unnecessary confrontation with the Kremlin while also developing relations with Moscow. Third, Bulgaria wishes to develop regional, inclusive formats for cooperation that address the current challenges and incorporate discussions on mutually beneficial economic prospects. And fourth, it asks for a complete respect for the rules of international law.

Bulgaria's military equipment is largely from the Soviet era, which makes it both physically and morally dated. To address this and improve its conventional capabilities, the country has begun to modernize its military. As part of this process, Bulgaria signed a contract with the Lürssen Group in November 2020 to build two multipurpose modular patrol vessels that can participate in a broad range of NATO and EU operations. This will equip the Navy with modern capabilities for surface warfare, submarine warfare, and air warfare. Furthermore, the recently established NATO centre in Varna is an encouraging development, as Bulgaria will provide a maritime coordination function to support NATO's tailored forward presence while also supporting MDA. This is further enhanced through the 2019 deal for the acquisition of eight US-made F-16 fighter jets. Additionally, bilateral cooperation with Washington has allowed Sofia to increase military professionalization, cyber security, divestiture of Soviet and Russian legacy equipment, MDA, and NATO interoperability. Bulgaria will also almost certainly procure 3D radars in the short to near term, which will further enhance MDA. Nevertheless, further cooperation is essential within NATO and the EU to enhance the security and stability of the Eastern Flank and limit Russian military dominance in the Black Sea.

## **MICHAEL VAN GINKEL**

### ***PERSPECTIVES FROM HUNGARY***

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is a critical component of maritime security. A lack of adequate MDA can lead to a proliferation of maritime security issues, for example, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregistered (IUU) fishing, human smuggling, arms trafficking, and military escalations. These security issues have significant ramifications not only for riparian states but also for Central European countries like Hungary. Hungary's location between high-paying markets in Western Europe and the Black Sea region means the country lies along several major transport corridors, human smuggling routes, and illicit trade networks. By contributing to MDA in the Black Sea, Hungary can pre-emptively address security threats that have a track record of expanding into Europe.

Hungary already works within the framework of several multilateral initiatives to enhance MDA. This cooperative approach allows countries to make the most of limited resources and technical deficiencies. Likewise, information-sharing

mechanisms between nations create a more comprehensive image of the maritime domain. As part of the European Union (EU), Hungary has worked to enhance collective MDA in the Black Sea mainly within the auspices of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, also known as Frontex. The Frontex Eurosur Fusion Services, for instance, house a centralized repository for spatial datasets. By facilitating information-sharing around data collected by surveillance tools like automated vessel trackers and satellite data, Frontex reduces the duplication of efforts and allows authorities to analyse regional trends in blue crime. Frontex also works alongside several programs and agencies to deliver these services, including Copernicus, Galileo, the European Maritime Safety Agency, and the European Union Satellite Centre.

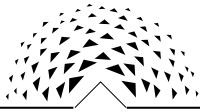
The porous nature of the maritime domain, combined with the presence of several protracted conflicts, makes the Black Sea security environment both complex and dynamic. To adequately respond to the malign activities of state and non-state actors, nations must continue to improve their capabilities and capacities in MDA. Authorities can enhance interoperability between maritime agencies, more systematically integrate artificial intelligence technologies, and further refine maritime training programs. As malign actors frequently conduct operations across multiple domains, adopting a holistic approach to MDA that allows for aggregate analysis is also becoming increasingly important. In this multi-domain approach to situational awareness, Central European countries without a forward naval presence can more proactively contribute to MDA in the Black Sea.

Black Sea security threats significantly undermine regional stability. By enhancing MDA in the Black Sea, authorities can more efficiently and effectively use limited government resources to address maritime challenges. Since the second and third-order effects of illicit maritime activities and increased militarization extend into Central Europe, countries like Hungary also have a vested interest in improving MDA. By building on existing initiatives, countries across Europe can assist local stakeholders in generating sustainable solutions to maritime security challenges.

## **BARIŞ HASAN**

### ***PERSPECTIVES FROM TURKEY***

The point that the Black Sea should be a sea of peace had perhaps not been sufficiently understood until the conflict in Ukraine emerged. When the profound crisis between Russia and Ukraine turned into an armed conflict, it revealed that the strategic and geopolitical significance of the Black Sea, only thought to be of importance for the coastal countries, actually had a global impact when considering military security, the security of economic activity, and the



security of environmental elements. Comprehending the regimes that ensure the security and stability of this sea and its basin in general has become crucial, as the conflict is not limited to land and has moved to the Black Sea coast as a result of a Russian strategy aimed at preventing Ukraine's exit to the sea.

Although a considerable number of attempts, projects, and regulations aim to provide political security and economic stability in the Black Sea region, few initiatives and regimes can be mentioned as significant, historically distinctive, and important in today's conflict. The Montreaux (1936) regime is undoubtedly the most important regulation that prevents increasing armament in the Black Sea from turning into a much larger conflict that would threaten European security, and it kept the Black Sea away from any gunfight for nearly a century, ensuring the security of the [Black Sea littoral states by providing extensive guarantees](#). This is the result of the successful implementation of the security perspective provided by the Convention, according to which vessels of war of non-riparian states with a maximum tonnage of 30,000 can only enter the [Black Sea on the condition of staying for 21 days](#), thus preventing the increase of militarization in the Black Sea.

The Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is the most influential institutional initiative in the Black Sea in terms of the development of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). The organization was established in June 1992 with the participation of 11 countries in the Black Sea basin after the end of the Cold War (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine). Later the number of members increased to 13 with the participation of Serbia and North Macedonia. The initiative has had a significant impact on activities in the Black Sea in such fundamental areas as agriculture and fishery, finance, controlling organized crime, customs, energy, environmental protection, science and technology, trade, and transportation. The organization acts in accordance with international law, by taking into account the interests of each state in terms of economic development and by promoting cooperation between member states, companies, [and international organizations](#). The active working groups formed under the BSEC play an important role in the introduction of joint policy structures for the protection of the rights of states, companies, and individuals against organized illegal movements in the Black Sea. For instance, the Working Group on Combating Crime under BSEC acts as a platform for the construction of common Black Sea policies towards strengthening cooperation among the member states in combating organized crime activities, for example, the trafficking of human beings, drugs, weapons, and radioactive materials, corruption, smuggling motor vehicles, and cyber-crime, as well as money laundering and [illicit economic activities](#).

One of the most important missions of BSEC is to ensure environmental security in the Black Sea. The Working Group formed in this field helps member states develop their environmental legislation towards the protection of the

environment in the Black Sea basin in accordance with international law and agreements. In addition, the efforts of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution and joint projects aimed at preventing pollution in the Black Sea and protecting the environment are encouraged and supported through funds provided by the [Black Sea Project Promotion Facility](#).

In addition to all this, the Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Agencies Cooperation Forum (BSCF), which was established at Turkey's initiative in 2000 with the participation of the coastal states of the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine) and gained an institutional structure in 2006, has been carrying out successful activities in the Black Sea. It is an example of a well-functioning international coast guard cooperation, aiming to prevent the smuggling of drugs, psychotropic substances, their analogs and precursors, ammunition, explosive, poisonous, drastic, and radioactive substances, as well as petrol. The BSCF aims to prevent irregular migration and other kinds of illegal activities and strengthens the safety and security of navigation in the Black Sea, and it conducts activities of counterterrorism and supports [the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction](#).

As a result, there are two significant actors in terms of environmental, economic, and military security in the Black Sea: BSEC, as a unique regional cooperation platform, including Russia and Turkey, and the EU with its Black Sea coastal member states. Although BSEC does not operate as a security provider in its current institutional structure, and the EU is still facing internal challenges in adopting extensive policies for engaging and interacting with the Black Sea basin,<sup>1</sup> considering that the environmental, economic, and military threats in the Black Sea primarily affect the security of the European continent, the active role of European actors in the challenges arising from the Black Sea is the key that will open the way for the Black Sea to become a safer basin in the future.

## **TINATIN KHIDASHELI**

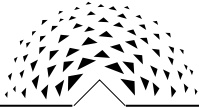
### ***PERSPECTIVES FROM GEORGIA***

The current Black Sea security architecture enhancing MDA was established by a [decree](#) of the government of Georgia (first adopted in December [2013](#)) aiming to ensure control of the legal order of the Georgian Maritime area. At the same time, the decree established the Joint Management Center of Maritime Operations ([JMOC](#), fully operational from 2016), as well as rules and procedures for the management of information over ensuring the totality of the state border protection system.

The issues reinforced by MDA included maritime domain awareness, the coordination of all state institutions involved, effective and real-time exchange

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<sup>1</sup> Selçuk Çolakoglu, "Security Structure of the Black Sea Region in the Context of New Challenges", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2007), p. 153.



of information amongst them, the availability and modernization of rapid reaction instruments over potential threats at sea, and other issues related to the management of the maritime area and state borders.

It is recognized by all parties in Georgia that participation and active involvement in NATO MARCOM instrumentalized Georgian maritime response capacities on the Black Sea towards potential threats and challenges even more. The Georgian [maritime response](#) component found its place in [SNGP](#) (Substantial NATO – Georgia Package), which was granted to Georgia at the Wales NATO Summit in 2014. It included:

- Fulfilment of the Operational Capacity Concept (OCC) programme for the Coast Guard Department;
- Development of the human and technical resource capabilities of the Coast Guard Department for participating in NATO-led maritime security operations;
- Enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness capacity in the Black Sea region;
- Advanced Harbour Protection.

We have benefited from multiple programs (both international and bilateral ones) offered by our partners for the training and continuous education of our personnel, both staff and field officers, as well as divers and tactical units of law enforcement. Georgia is among the nations benefiting from international assistance in the improvement of various capacities at sea, including technical assistance, equipment, trainings, and expertise. In 2019 the [Joint Statement](#) of the US-Georgia Security working group underlined the importance of MDA, saying that “the United States and Georgia expressed a commitment to strengthening Black Sea security cooperation, including through the multilateral Maritime Domain Awareness program and in line with NATO-Georgia cooperation in the Black Sea region. In this context, the parties noted the importance of Georgia’s Joint Maritime Operations Center (JMOC), as well as other initiatives.”

Another crucial area is information exchange. Due to various bilateral memorandums with the countries of the Black Sea as well as other partners, the Georgian Coast Guard Service of the National Border Police is successfully working on information exchange, including real-time information on ships and floating devices violating laws and international rules related to illicit and unreported fishing, illegal trade, increased militarization or illegal transportation of arms, drags, trafficking, and irregular migration, as required. The cooperation in the field of information exchange includes reporting and data about devices, crew, passengers, cargo, and all other necessary information.

In spite of the remarkable assistance Georgia and its Coast Guard Services receive, there is more room for improvement and work to be done, particularly when it comes to the improvement of the infrastructure, the renewal of floating object capacities, modernization and in some cases even replacement, as well as the continuous training of personnel.