

Türkiye's Role in Europe and the Middle East: Impact on Ukraine's Interests

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Introduction

For centuries, Ukraine has been and remains Türkiye's northern front in its long-term rivalry with Russia for maritime dominance. From Ottoman campaigns against the state of Muscovy to the Crimean War of the 1850s, control over Ukraine's southern coast was key to limiting Russia's ability to project naval power toward the Turkish Straits and further – into the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. At the beginning of the 21st century, the situation has not changed, but Ankara's foreign policy has become more complex and "multi-vector", while maintaining traditional principles and defining main risks.

Türkiye traditionally claims the role of regional leader in the Black Sea region, and in recent years has expanded its presence in the Middle East. At the same time, its relations with countries of the Black Sea and Middle Eastern regions, the Caucasus and the European Union (EU) are not unambiguous and create a complex system of relationships where policy in one region affects actions and strategy regarding relations in another. This interdependence is most visible in the link between Middle Eastern and European vectors.

2024 became the year when Türkiye managed to significantly strengthen its [influence](#) on the turbulent situation in the Middle East, seeking to expand the scope of its foreign policy by focusing on several regions and actively participating in global platforms, from BRICS and G-20 to the International Conference of Asian Political Parties, while facing a complex economic and political situation within the country. Türkiye is gradually trying to move beyond the role of purely a Black Sea leader, positioning itself as a more global-level actor. Overall, Turkish analytical centers [emphasize](#) that against the backdrop of global confrontation between such actors as the United States (US), China and the Russian Federation, "Türkiye conducts a pragmatic and interest-based foreign policy, prioritizing security, economic resilience and strategic autonomy". At the same time, it should be noted that this "pragmatism" and "autonomy" often becomes merely an explanation for unwillingness to join European sanctions or take a clearer position on certain international crises.

Türkiye's relations with Russia remain a complex balancing act. On one hand, Ankara depends on Russian energy and seeks to avoid direct confrontation. On the other hand, Türkiye increasingly takes advantage of Moscow's weakening positions in the Middle East, the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus.

Turkish experts identified the following priorities of Turkish foreign policy for 2025: Syria, Gaza, Iraq, Ukraine, Somalia, relations with the EU and Gulf countries. Additionally, according to their forecasts, Ankara's attention to Africa will grow, whether humanitarian, economic or political. Special attention will be [focused](#) on South Africa (which chairs the G-20), the Horn of Africa, Libya, as well as Niger, where Türkiye will begin its first gold mining.

Black Sea Region: Ukrainian-Turkish Strategic Partnership as Basis for New Regional Security Architecture

The main principle of Turkish foreign policy regarding the Black Sea region, regardless of the general geopolitical context, has always been the principle of regional responsibility of coastal countries for regional security. It was through this principle that until 2014 Türkiye actually created conditions to prevent the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to some extent the EU from ensuring regional security, balanced in its relations with the Russian Federation and initiated a number of security and naval initiatives (for example, Operation "Black Sea Harmony"). At the same time, Ankara tried to remain the main channel of information and assessments for NATO structures regarding the situation in the Black Sea region. Even after 2014, when the security situation in the region changed significantly, the Turkish approach remained. The recent decision to create a Turkish-Bulgarian-Romanian mine countermeasures group can be considered an example of such regional responsibility. In January 2024, Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania created the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Group. The beginning of joint [demining](#) in July 2024 represents progress. Nevertheless, for Ukraine, as well as the Black Sea NATO member countries themselves, it would be important to expand the mission's mandate to patrol the northern and western parts of the Black Sea to protect commercial shipping and critical infrastructure from Russian sabotage and false flag provocations.

At the same time, it can be noted that in the period from 2014 to 2022, the balance of power in the Black Sea region was actually disrupted, where [Russian](#) and Turkish military forces dominated, and a certain parity of forces was considered. However, if the Russian Federation dominated due to the quantity of forces and means – ships deployed primarily in Crimea – then Turkish forces were always difficult to assess, as they were deployed around the entire perimeter of the country. It was control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles that allowed Türkiye to have certain strategic advantages. In particular, Türkiye has no naval bases on the Black Sea coast, considering itself protected by NATO's umbrella from Russia's aggression, concentrating forces on the southern (Mediterranean and Middle Eastern) theater.

Today, every successful strike by Ukrainian drones on Russian military ships changes the balance of power in the region in Türkiye's favor. Common interests make Ankara and Kyiv natural partners in containing Moscow, ensuring safe navigation in the Black Sea, protecting critical infrastructure and strengthening Europe's defense against Russia – especially against the backdrop of possible reduction in US military presence on the continent.

Türkiye's diplomatic efforts in Russia's war against Ukraine have brought certain results on the humanitarian track. The negotiations held in Istanbul initially contributed to unblocking the grain corridor in 2022 (which was simultaneously actually sabotaged by the Russian Federation), as well as conducting eight major prisoner exchanges in 2025 – the largest since February 2022, when Russia began its full-scale invasion. While the Russian Federation drags out time, Ankara can contribute to peace by taking concrete steps in three critically important directions.

Additionally, these efforts by Türkiye and Ukraine's maritime successes have allowed keeping export corridors open, which are vital for global food supply, and have also strengthened Türkiye's own security. These strategic advantages must not be lost.

By keeping Turkish straits closed, strengthening cooperation with the EU to counter hybrid maritime threats, and deepening defense ties with Kyiv, Türkiye can contribute to establishing lasting peace in Ukraine and ensuring stability in the Black Sea.

Turkish Straits

In February 2022, guided by the [Montreux Convention](#), Türkiye closed the Turkish straits to Russian military vessels. This decision prevented Russia from conducting a landing operation against Ukraine's southern coast. Since then, successful Ukraine's counterattacks, which destroyed almost a third of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, with the remaining ships forced to retreat to Novorossiysk, have significantly changed the [balance](#) of naval forces in the straits in Türkiye's favor.

Despite discussions about the possibility of sectoral or maritime ceasefire in 2025, it is important that Türkiye does not succumb to pressure to restore Russian fleet access to the straits. The ban must remain in effect until Russia's complete withdrawal of troops from all occupied Ukrainian and Georgian territories and territorial waters. Moscow's construction of a new naval [base](#) in Ochamchire, in the occupied Georgian region of Abkhazia, indicates the Kremlin's intention to continue threatening regional stability. While Ukraine rapidly develops its drone fleet and Türkiye completes construction of corvettes for the Ukrainian Navy, Russia's naval capabilities must be neutralized to ensure lasting peace in the region.

Russia's Hybrid Threats and Protection of Black Sea Infrastructure

While NATO has strengthened efforts to protect underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, particularly through [Operation](#) "Baltic Sentry", launched in January 2025, the level of maritime situational awareness in the Black Sea remains critically low. As Serhat Güvenç notes in a recent Atlantic Council [report](#), Turkish naval forces and aviation provide about 65% of the information picture in the Black Sea. Experts have long advocated for creating a Black Sea Information Sharing Center, which would facilitate sharing of sensor data, intelligence and other important information among participating countries. This would also allow coordinating measures in response to threats below the level of conventional warfare, counter smuggling and other illegal

activities, strengthening cooperation between Black Sea region countries, NATO and the EU.

The new EU Black Sea [strategy](#), published in May 2025, envisages creating a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub to counter hybrid maritime threats. This creates an opportunity for closer interaction between Türkiye and the EU in maritime security. This direction is also promising for Ukraine, particularly opening opportunities for trilateral cooperation. Such cooperation would not only strengthen deterrence of Russia but also help reduce political tension between Brussels and Ankara. As Turkish experts Asli Aydintaşbaş and Mustafa Aydın [noted](#): "As Europe faces changes in US policy and needs to deter Russia after the war, renewing cooperation with Türkiye is key. The Black Sea could be the first step".

The need to strengthen Black Sea security is obvious. The EU Black Sea Strategy notes that against the backdrop of Russian airspace violations, attacks on ports and shipping routes, as well as mining, the Black Sea remains a "priority target" and Europe's "front line" in countering Moscow's hybrid attacks.

Additionally, as Bulgaria and Romania build infrastructure for gas extraction on the Black Sea shelf, Moscow is expected to try to disrupt these projects, as Sofia and Bucharest do not have sufficient naval capabilities to control the perimeter and deter Russian attacks. The Neptune Deep gas fields in Romania, Sakarya in Türkiye, and Khan Asparuh in Bulgaria will significantly reduce these countries' dependence on Russian energy. However, these facilities are located in exclusive economic zones beyond NATO territorial waters and the application of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, making them attractive targets for Russia's hybrid tactics.

The issue of Türkiye's weak response to violations by the Russian shadow fleet – tankers illegally transporting oil, revenues from which finance the Kremlin's war – remains open. A more active position by Ankara would help limit revenues to the Russian budget, which in the long term would contribute to faster end of the war.

Caucasus

The South Caucasus traditionally remains a region of rivalry between various actors. In recent years, a trio of states that have the greatest interest and compete for influence has become more clearly defined – Russia, Türkiye and Iran. "The post-Cold War regional order, dominated by Russia and defined by its confrontation with the West, was [structured](#) around two main axes: the Russia-Armenia-Iran bloc, which maintained the status quo of Russian dominance, and the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Türkiye axis, which leaned toward the West, where Georgia advocated Euro-Atlantic integration and Türkiye supported its NATO ambitions".

This situation has changed significantly over the past five years. The escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020 led first to Türkiye's first military involvement in the conflict, Moscow's subsequent diplomatic sidestepping of Ankara, and the final peace

declaration signed in Washington in 2025 through the mediation of US President D. Trump.

The resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict not only reduced the Russian Federation's influence on Armenia but also opened the possibility for renewed Armenian-Turkish dialogue. And although this process is not final, as Armenia's leadership simultaneously tries to establish dialogue with Brussels (in the process of renewing dialogue on possible association with the EU, interrupted in 2013), Moscow and Washington, it is important for Ukraine to take advantage of this moment to engage Armenia in security and European integration dialogue. For Türkiye, further competition with Iran and Israel for the South Caucasus should be expected, as well as with a new active actor – China. Overall, the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, significant progress in normalizing Armenia's relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan means Armenia's actual exit from regional isolation, which undermines Russia's influence in the region while strengthening Türkiye's positions in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Middle East: Common Interests in Weakening Russia's Influence

Support for the Arab Spring in the early 2010s allowed Türkiye to return to the Middle East. Ankara began to play a more prominent role in the region through involvement in the Syrian conflict, as well as intensifying contacts with Gulf countries. At the same time, Türkiye is not perceived by many in the region as a Middle Eastern country, which complicates its positioning and participation in some formats. Regional uncertainty in the Middle East continues to create complex challenges for Türkiye. Moreover, as some experts note, Türkiye's expanding involvement is associated with risks. Türkiye's growing presence exposes it to potential overextension, for which it lacks resources, primarily [economic](#), and may also provoke new conflicts with other regional actors.

In the early 2020s, Islamist movements supported by Türkiye, particularly those associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, lost political positions, leading to Türkiye's certain isolation in the Middle East. This isolation was particularly evident in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Ankara's aggressive tactics (regarding support for the Muslim Brotherhood) [alienated](#) potential allies and led to its exclusion from regional platforms such as the East Mediterranean Gas Forum. Recognizing that its regional isolation was unacceptable, Türkiye began a fundamental change to its regional strategy in early 2021. This transition coincided with broader trends of regional reconciliation, including the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, the Al-Ula Declaration in 2021, which ended Qatar's blockade, and various diplomatic initiatives by Iran and Saudi Arabia. Türkiye's reconciliation efforts with regional countries represented a pragmatic recognition that its previous confrontational approach did not serve its national interests, and that it [lacked](#) the financial and geopolitical means to maintain a regional position indefinitely.

US airstrikes on Iran, Israel's campaign against Hamas and Hezbollah, and the collapse of Assad's regime in Syria made Russia's reduced influence obvious. In response, Türkiye is [expanding](#) its military and diplomatic presence, increasing drone exports, normalizing relations with Gulf countries and deepening cooperation with NATO.

Syria

One of the main issues for Turkish leadership in the last decade has been Syria. The most important event for Turkish foreign policy in the past year was undoubtedly the fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Ankara has supported the Syrian opposition and met with it since 2011, calling for inclusive governance and a new constitution. Türkiye was involved not only politically but also militarily, where its interests fundamentally diverged from Russian ones, and also became a haven for millions of Syrian refugees. The latter issue had a significant impact on Türkiye's relations with the EU as well.

Syria had two critical factors for Türkiye in 2024-2025 that also affect its domestic policy. The first is the problem of almost four million Syrian refugees living in the country since the beginning of the Syrian civil war. The second pressing issue related to the situation in Syria was the persistent problem of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) (PKK), which Ankara recognizes as a terrorist organization. However, in May 2025 it officially [dissolved itself](#) after lengthy negotiations with the Turkish government. The future of the PKK's Syrian branch (People's Defense Units (YPG)) in Syria may remain a critical [point](#) of disagreement between Türkiye and the US.

Today Türkiye controls many processes in Syria, but Arab experts expect that competition with France and Saudi Arabia for influence in the country may soon begin, in addition to existing disagreements with Iran and the US. Also, Türkiye's position is not stable, as it does not have a very positive image in the country, and Ankara is viewed cautiously. Nevertheless, this involvement is expected to be long-term for Türkiye itself.

Despite this, Türkiye's interests in Syria currently coincide with those of Saudi Arabia. Both states share a vision of a stable post-Assad Syria that marginalizes Iran's influence and consolidates Sunni power in Damascus. While Türkiye can offer military and technical expertise, it lacks financial resources. Saudi Arabia, conversely, [offers](#) financial resources but lacks state-building capabilities and grassroots engagement. In this case, in certain technologies Ukraine may be more of a competitor to Türkiye, apart from joint developments, as it also has positive relations with Saudi Arabia. But this could also open opportunities for more multilateral cooperation, particularly within the framework of joint Ukrainian-Turkish projects in the defense industry sphere.

Türkiye and Israel are [discussing](#) their military presence in Syria in Azerbaijan, with the latest round of such discussions taking place in June 2025. Israel opposes Turkish bases in certain key areas. The US has volunteered to mediate the dispute. If these negotiations expand, Israel and Türkiye could [consider](#) broader Middle Eastern issues and begin to lower the temperature in bilateral relations.

At the same time, Russia's actual exit from Syria reduced the tension felt in Türkiye due to possible provocations and escalation on its southern border, as Moscow and Ankara were on different sides of the conflict. For a long time, Türkiye's position regarding the Russian Federation was restrained by the Syrian factor. Türkiye's representative participation in the coalition of the willing meeting in London in March 2025, immediately after Assad's regime fall, was indicative. Ukraine should use this moment both for further deterring the Russian Federation through Ankara's clearer position and for possible trilateral cooperation and implementation of joint projects in Syria.

Gaza

The second important issue of Turkish policy in the region is Gaza, as the last 10 years have been characterized by a significant diplomatic crisis in Türkiye-Israel relations and open support for Hamas. The Palestinian issue has long negatively affected bilateral Israeli-Turkish relations, and President Erdogan's [approval](#) of Hamas as a liberation

movement, to emphasize his opposition to Israel, further [exacerbated](#) this chronic source of tension.

According to Turkish experts, Türkiye should be expected to be an influential actor in achieving a sustainable ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, as well as in Gaza's reconstruction. Türkiye's policy in this context will include diplomatic mediation and balancing Israel's growing influence in regional affairs. Based on this, [calibrating](#) regional diplomacy in the Middle East is vital for Türkiye. At the same time, in this issue Türkiye faces significant competition from Egypt and Qatar, and is not the most desirable mediator for Israel, so Ankara's mediation chances are small. The issue of Gaza's reconstruction and involvement of Turkish companies there is more promising.

Iran

Türkiye's relations with Iran have long oscillated between limited cooperation and managed rivalry. Between 2016 and 2021, the two countries experienced a close period of pragmatic agreement driven by mutual disappointment with the United States and their allies. However, Türkiye's turn after 2021 toward Western-oriented regimes revealed logical spheres of competition between the two regional states. This shift was most vividly [manifested](#) in Syria and in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict.

In the long term, the weakening of the Russia's economy and reduced support for traditional partners – from Iran to the Assad regime and Armenia – creates opportunities for Türkiye to strengthen its influence at Moscow's expense. While the US pressures Tehran through economic sanctions and strategic deterrence, Türkiye, as in the situation with the Russia-Ukraine war, [tries](#) to find balance to avoid direct participation in broader conflict. Considering Ukraine's position on Iran and the constant variability of Iranian-Turkish dialogue, most likely, in the coming year these relations will not affect Ukraine's interests or Ukrainian-Turkish relations, as Ankara consistently adheres to the principle of "compartmentalization of relations" – that is, clear separation of different tracks of its foreign policy.

Gulf Countries

Growing cooperation with Gulf countries is another characteristic of 2025, as Türkiye seeks to conclude a free trade [agreement](#) with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and seeks to align the foreign policy of key regional countries to overcome growing geopolitical challenges in the Middle East.

Türkiye no longer seeks to play unilaterally in the Middle East, but rather [positions](#) itself as a constructive partner for Gulf countries. After years of regional isolation caused by a failed attempt to establish hegemony during the Arab Spring, Türkiye has strategically reoriented toward GCC countries' reconciliation efforts, becoming a key actor in supporting the new regional architecture.

The reconciliation process began several years ago with Türkiye's attempts to establish relations with former adversaries, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi

Arabia, Israel and even the Assad regime in Syria. Türkiye's motivation for this strategic turn was multifaceted, but primarily [driven](#) by economic necessity. In this context, President Erdogan's tour of Gulf countries in 2023, which included visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, became an important [milestone](#) in this diplomatic reset. These visits led to the signing of significant economic agreements, with Türkiye announcing framework bilateral investment agreements with the UAE worth over \$50 billion.

It is important to note that Türkiye's relations with Gulf countries are primarily based on economic interest and the idea of reducing regional tension through conflict resolution. At the same time, from a political standpoint, significant breakthroughs or joint initiatives are unlikely to be expected. Regarding Ukraine, the state is interested in Türkiye's pragmatic and stable relations with Gulf countries. Nevertheless, one should be prepared for certain diplomatic rivalry, as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Türkiye all offer their mediation efforts in specific issues of the Russia-Ukraine war, and each country understands the positive effect that successful mediation initiatives have on their international image.

Iraq

In 2024, Türkiye turned a page in relations with Iraq, [marked](#) by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Baghdad. By signing twelve agreements, Ankara welcomed the Iraqi central government's recognition of the Kurdistan Workers' Party as a "banned organization".

In Iraq, Türkiye has used trade and infrastructure projects to gain influence. The planned \$17 billion "Turkish-Iraqi Development Road" project aims to transform Türkiye into Asia and the Middle East's logistical heart, raising its global status while making the Kurdistan Regional Government economically [dependent](#) on cooperation with Türkiye.

Additionally, in Iraq, Turkish troops conduct regular operations from over 30 outposts, cementing a forward military [doctrine](#) that competes with traditional great powers.

Regarding Ukraine, while this direction has significant priority and attention from Ankara, it will not affect either bilateral Ukrainian-Turkish relations or Ukraine's national interests. In case of stabilization of the situation in Kurdish regions of Iraq, this could only indirectly affect opening new opportunities for Ukrainian trade or cooperation that existed in the past.

Somalia

Türkiye's growing presence on the Horn of Africa, in North Africa and the Sahel reflects its broader strategy of influence in regions historically dominated by European and Chinese actors. However, Türkiye faces significant [competition](#) from actors like China, France and Russia, which are actively expanding their influence in Africa. Back in 2008, Türkiye received strategic partner status with the African Union, defining this direction as one of the priorities in its foreign policy. According to experts, several [reasons](#) can be identified that motivate Türkiye to conduct active foreign policy on the African track –

the desire to diversify external relations to increase the country's weight in the international arena, Türkiye's intention to develop military cooperation with African countries within the framework of the declared goal of transforming Türkiye into a global state, and Turkish companies' desire to penetrate the African market. In February 2024, the Somali government officially approved a defense and economic cooperation agreement with Türkiye, which allows Ankara to build, train and equip the Somali navy, and also reportedly protect its territorial waters amid tensions with Ethiopia (Ankara served as [mediator](#) between Ethiopia and Somalia in the conflict over sea access in 2024). The agreement strengthens Türkiye's political and military positions in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region amid growing [concerns](#) about security on this strategic waterway. In fact, in Mogadishu, Türkiye has its largest foreign base and is involved in the naval education process.

The maritime security agreement concluded by Türkiye in February 2024 gave it exclusive rights to patrol Somalia's coastline of over 3,000 kilometers, located next to the Bab el-Mandeb strait, one of the world's most strategically important for shipping. Since over 12% of world trade passes through the strait, this agreement effectively [expands](#) Turkish control over a critically important maritime route, strengthening its influence in the Red Sea and Persian (Arabian) Gulf.

Türkiye's military influence has quietly expanded into a strategic network. It has at least 12 foreign military bases, including in Somalia, Qatar and Northern Cyprus, and has concluded defense cooperation [agreements](#) with Jordan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Libya and Chad.

Considering the security challenges facing this region, and Somalia in particular, Ukrainian-Turkish military-technical cooperation could be useful. It could include various elements: from involving joint technologies and temporary use of Ukrainian ships located in Türkiye for patrolling near Somalia (thus, the Ukrainian Navy could test new ships and gain relevant experience), to using experience and training future specialists in Somalia.

Ukraine's main interest in Africa is weakening Russia's influence, so any expansion of Turkish presence, if it occurs at the expense of Russian interests, benefits Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine is expanding its own diplomatic presence on the African continent, so the issue of intersection of Ukrainian and Turkish interests in economic, energy and military-industrial spheres deserves separate analysis, with the aim of clearly defining in which countries and spheres we are competitors, and where efforts should be combined.

EU and NATO: Strengthening European Security against Backdrop of Russia's Aggression

Türkiye remains a key actor in NATO, contributing to deterrence measures in response to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. However, Ankara emphasizes strategic autonomy, balancing NATO commitments with its own foreign policy priorities. Türkiye's role in NATO in 2025 is [defined](#) by increased investment in defense technologies and selective cooperation with NATO allies, while keeping open communication channels with Russia.

At the same time, the former US Ambassador to Türkiye called Türkiye an "à la carte member", explaining that Türkiye is such a NATO member that chooses "as from a menu" its involvement, while simultaneously receiving significant [benefit](#) from Russia during the Russia-Ukraine war and not applying NATO-agreed sanctions.

Against the backdrop of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and reduced US presence in Europe, Ukraine and Türkiye become key partners for the EU and NATO in security and defense. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte [called](#) on European leaders to set aside disagreements with Ankara to strengthen defense cooperation.

At the same time, regarding Türkiye-EU relations, they remain complex, particularly due to the lack of prospects for Turkish EU membership, which has been delayed for 50 years, as well as harsh statements by European countries regarding the political situation in Türkiye, the fight against opposition, the human rights situation, and the refugee issue, where refugees travel through Türkiye to the EU.

Nevertheless, the new EU Black Sea strategy, aimed at creating a Black Sea Maritime Security Center to counter hybrid maritime threats, [offers](#) an opportunity for closer interaction with Türkiye. Such cooperation between the EU and Türkiye would not only strengthen deterrence of Russia but also help overcome political disagreements.

Accordingly, it is the security sphere that can have a positive effect on European-Turkish relations, where Ukraine and the Black Sea region can have the greatest positive effect. In particular, the EU should reconsider approaches to defense cooperation with Türkiye. The following points are important for both Türkiye and Ukraine, and can be, in particular, subjects of trilateral consultations:

- integration of defense industry into joint European projects, particularly through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) programs and the European Defence Fund;

- ▶ joint maritime initiatives in the Black Sea, including protection of trade routes and critical infrastructure;
- ▶ strengthening military mobility and intelligence sharing for faster response to threats;
- ▶ development of innovative technologies such as maritime drones and autonomous systems.

The EU and Türkiye can join efforts to support Ukraine, protect the Black Sea and strengthen security on Europe's southern flank. Such a partnership would create a new pillar of stability, compensating for the reduced American role and becoming a strategic advantage in countering the Russia's threat. In this same context, it should be said that Ukraine and Türkiye will play an important role in ensuring security and stability on the European continent.

In May 2025, Türkiye together with Belgium [joined](#) Ukraine's international drone coalition, which aims to strengthen Kyiv's defense capabilities through cutting-edge unmanned technologies. Such initiatives demonstrate the potential for deeper defense-industrial ties that go beyond Ukraine's current needs and can lay the foundation for a new Black Sea security architecture.

Türkiye and Ukraine's defense partnership has already had a tangible impact on Kyiv's war efforts. Construction of the Baykar plant near Kyiv continues – it will produce Bayraktar TB2 and TB3 drones. Further cooperation could extend to maritime drones. Both Türkiye and Ukraine are actively engaged in maritime drone development and are ahead of European countries. Expanding their production would better protect Black Sea trade routes and critical infrastructure, and potentially open markets to other NATO and EU maritime states.

Conclusions

Thus, Türkiye's role in the regional context is multi-dimensional: from defense cooperation with Ukraine and deterring Russia in the Black Sea to expanding influence in the Middle East and strengthening European security.

Türkiye as a Middle Eastern actor is an ambiguous partner for Ukraine. On one hand, in the economic sphere and defense industry it can be a direct competitor, and politically it does not have the weight to help Ukraine compared to what existing Ukrainian contacts already provide, for example, in Gulf countries. On the other hand, cooperation with Türkiye in the Middle East region and Africa could open additional opportunities for Ukraine. For example, joint export of Ukrainian-Turkish products to third markets in the Middle East, primarily agricultural products and defense industry, etc., could be the goal of cooperation. The second opportunity, which could be facilitated by the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and Türkiye, is joint production of drones, military equipment, etc., which could be exported to these regions. Another common interest is pushing Russia out of Africa and the Middle East. It is also important to consider Türkiye's participation in regional organizations where Ukraine is not a member or observer; accordingly, Ukraine should promote the idea of Türkiye acting as Ukraine's "advocate" in those regional forums where Ukraine lacks representation. In addition, the level of Ankara's involvement in Syria will have a direct impact on Türkiye's freedom of action regarding Russia.

The Black Sea region and cooperation within NATO remain the most promising. Both countries are interested in deterring Russia, unimpeded trade and stability in the Black Sea. In this context, it is in Ukraine's interest to maintain trilateral dialogue and consultations, primarily on security matters, thus engaging Ankara in the European area and minimizing Moscow's influence.

Deepening Ukrainian-Turkish strategic partnership is an opportunity for Ukraine to secure military and political support from Türkiye – a country with the second largest combat-ready army in NATO and a rapidly developing dynamic defense industry; an opportunity for Ankara to strengthen its positions, and for Europe – to create a more resilient security system in partnership with an important regional actor.