

MARITIME SECURITY FORUM

Operation of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea.

Romania's urgent institutional obligations

STUDY

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It should be emphasized that the objective of this study is not to formulate operational tasks or to substitute the institutional decision-making processes of the state or the European Union. The analysis does not seek to issue administrative instructions or to anticipate political decisions that legitimately belong to the competent authorities. The approach is deliberately limited to identifying and analyzing a specific dimension of a much more complex issue, namely the legal, institutional, and strategic conditions that can enable a European initiative to be transformed into a functional capacity.

Maritime security in the Black Sea involves a range of factors that go beyond the scope of this study, including geopolitical dynamics, military considerations, budgetary constraints, regulatory developments, and rapid technological advances. This study does not claim to exhaust these dimensions, but rather to contribute to the understanding of one of the essential components of the problem: the relationship between the European Union's strategic framework and the capacity for implementation at the national level. The observations made are analytical and indicative in nature, not prescriptive, and should be read as a starting point for reflection and institutional debate, not as exhaustive or definitive solutions.

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Operationalization of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea

-Romania's urgent institutional obligations between strategy, governance, and capacity-

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Abstract

This study analyses the operationalisation of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea from the perspective of the European Union's strategic and legal framework, with a particular focus on Romania's role as a potential host state and implementing actor. Starting from the paradigm shift caused by the deterioration of the regional security environment following the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, the study argues that the Maritime Security Hub is not only a political initiative of the Union, but also a test of institutional capacity for the riparian Member States. The analysis demonstrates that the European Union has opted for an integrated governance instrument, situated between the civil and security dimensions, without creating a European agency or command structure, which means that the success of the Hub is decisively linked to national implementation. In this context, the study examines in detail the institutional responsibilities of the Romanian Government, the Defense Staff, the Ministry of Transport, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighting the need for firm government coordination and an incremental approach. The central conclusion is that Romania's leadership in the Black Sea region is not guaranteed by its geographical position or political support at European level, but must be earned through its ability to transform the Union's strategic framework into a functional operational capacity. The study provides an implementation model and an emergency timetable that serve as a reference for both Romania and the European Union.

Keywords: maritime security, Black Sea, European Union, Security Hub, institutional implementation, strategic leadership.

Argument

The central argument of this study is that **the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea will not be defined by the European Union's strategy, but by the capacity of Member States to implement it**, and in Romania's case, this capacity is inextricably linked to the rapid, coherent, and coordinated action of the Government. In the absence of firm government intervention to give the initiative the status of a national strategic project with European relevance, Romania is likely to miss the window of opportunity created by the current geopolitical context and be marginalized in a regional security architecture built without its decisive contribution.

The study argues that **regional leadership within the European Union is not an automatic consequence of geographical position or coastal status**, but rather the result of a demonstrated institutional capacity to transform European strategic frameworks into functional operational tools. From this perspective, the maritime security hub represents a test of governmental maturity: it requires not only sectoral competence, but also the ability to integrate defense, infrastructure, diplomacy, cybersecurity, and regulatory governance into a coherent architecture.

Without decisive government action, the initiative risks remaining either a symbolic project with no operational relevance or being reconfigured outside the Black Sea region, with a marginal role for Romania. Therefore, the fundamental argument of the study is that **the Romanian Government is the pivotal actor without which the Hub cannot become a real European capacity**, and the urgency of its action is strategic, not administrative.

Key message

This study analyses the conditions under which the European Union's initiative to create a Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea can be transformed into a functional capacity, with a focus on Romania's role as a potential host state and implementing actor. The analysis starts from the observation that the European Union has expressed clear political support for this initiative, without a binding legal decision on the location or operational architecture of the Hub having been adopted to date.

The study shows that this intermediate stage creates a window of strategic opportunity for Romania, but also a risk of marginalization, depending on its capacity for rapid and coordinated action. Regional leadership is not guaranteed by geographical position or favorable political statements, but depends on the ability to deliver credible implementation, compatible with the Union's legal framework and Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The document highlights the central role of the Romanian Government in the institutional coordination of this process and emphasizes the interdependence between defense, infrastructure, diplomacy, and cybersecurity. At the same time, the study avoids formulating operational tasks and does not substitute institutional decision-making processes, limiting itself to analyzing a specific dimension of a much more complex issue.

The main conclusion is that the Maritime Security Hub represents a test of institutional maturity for both Romania and the European Union. The way Romania acts at this stage will influence not only its regional positioning, but also the credibility of the Union as a security actor in the Black Sea region.

Executive summary

The European Union's initiative to create a Maritime Security Hub for the Black Sea region reflects a structural change in how the security of this region is understood at the European level. After decades in which the Black Sea was treated predominantly as a peripheral neighborhood, the accelerated deterioration of the regional security environment has led the Union to recognize its constitutive role for European security. The Maritime Security Hub is part of this new approach, designed as a mechanism for civil-military coordination and integration, focused on situational awareness, critical infrastructure protection, and resilience.

The study shows that the Hub is not a European agency and does not involve the centralization of powers at Union level. On the contrary, it is a governance tool that operates within the limits of the treaties and the common foreign and security policy, relying on voluntary contributions and the implementation capacity Member States. This architecture makes the success of the initiative decisively dependent on the Black Sea riparian states, in particular Romania and Bulgaria.

The analysis shows that Romania has undeniable structural advantages, including its geographical position, port infrastructure, and institutional experience in the field of maritime security. However, these advantages ~~do not~~ automatically translate into a leadership role. Without clear political commitment at the government level, without an effective mechanism for inter-institutional coordination, and without the provision of credible initial operational capacity, Romania risks remaining a marginal player in a strategic initiative of utmost relevance to its national security.

The study identifies the Romanian government as the pivotal actor in implementation, responsible for defense integration, transport, diplomacy, and cybersecurity into a coherent strategic project. At the same time, the specific roles of the Defense Staff, the Ministry of Transport, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are analyzed, emphasizing their interdependence and the need for a coordinated approach. A pilot project for incremental implementation is proposed as a pragmatic solution for quickly demonstrating the functionality of the Hub.

The main conclusion is that the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea represents a unique strategic opportunity for Romania, but also a test of institutional maturity. Regional leadership will not be conferred through political statements or informal support from European institutions, but will be earned through effective implementation. The way Romania acts at this stage will determine not only its role in the European Union's security architecture, but also the Union's ability to respond coherently and credibly to security challenges in the Black Sea region.

Research methodology and limitations

Clarification regarding the objective and limitations of the study

This study adopts a legal-institutional and political-strategic methodology, explicitly oriented towards applied analysis and the formulation of operational solutions in the context of the European Union. The methodological approach is qualitative, based on the analysis of official European Union documents, the relevant primary and secondary regulatory framework, and the examination of emerging institutional practice in the field of maritime security and security governance.

The legal analysis focuses on the European Union's competences in the field of security, the limits imposed by the treaties, and the mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation characteristic of the common foreign and security policy. This dimension is complemented by an institutional analysis, which examines the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of the main national and European actors involved in the operationalization of the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea. The study uses a systemic reading of the relationships between institutions, avoiding an isolated sectoral approach and focusing on the perspective of integrated governance.

From a methodological point of view, the research falls within the category of policy-oriented research, aiming not only to explain the existing framework, but also to identify the conditions for the effective implementation of a European strategic initiative. The study combines normative analysis with an assessment of institutional feasibility and the formulation of legally grounded strategic recommendations.

The limitations of the research are deliberate and necessary for the clarity of the approach. The study is not a tactical or operational military analysis in the strict sense and does not assess combat capabilities, military doctrines, or kinetic scenarios. Nor is it a detailed technical feasibility study, nor does it provide an in-depth analysis of specific solutions. The procurement dimension is addressed only to the extent that it is relevant to the institutional architecture and implementation capacity of the Hub.

At the same time, the study does not aim to develop a new normative framework for international maritime law, but rather analyzes the Hub initiative within the limits of existing international law and European Union law. This delimitation allows us to focus on Romania's role as a member state of the Union and on the concrete mechanisms through which it can contribute to European security through institutional implementation.

Through this methodology, the study aims to present a rigorous, realistic, and academically defensible analysis capable of supporting both scientific debate and decision-making.

Clarification regarding the decision-making status of the Maritime Security Hub and Romania's position

Information has recently appeared in the public domain suggesting that the European Union has approved the location of the Maritime Security Hub for the Black Sea region in Romania. However, a rigorous analysis of the European Union's legal and institutional framework requires a clear distinction between **the political support expressed by the European Commission and a formal decision on implementation with binding legal effect**. Indeed, in May 2025, the President of the European Commission confirmed institutional support for the initiative to create a maritime security hub in the Black Sea and explicitly acknowledged Romania's arguments in favor of hosting such a structure, in the context of implementing the Union's strategic approach for the region. This support represents

However, this is a **political endorsement at the Commission level**, not a legal designation of the host country. To date, no **European Council decision**, **Commission implementing decision**, or **European Council conclusions** have been adopted that formally establish the location of the Hub or confer a binding operational mandate. Consequently, Romania is in a position of **de facto privileged candidate**, by virtue of its geostrategic position, existing infrastructure, and rapid implementation capacity, but **its leadership in this project remains conditional on concrete operational action**, not on a legal decision already adopted at the Union level.

1. Introduction. From strategic adoption to implementation responsibility

For several decades, the Black Sea region has occupied an ambivalent position in the European security architecture. Although constantly identified as an area of geopolitical friction, interference between spheres of influence, ~~and~~ structural vulnerability, it has been treated within the European Union primarily as an extended neighborhood, subject to regional cooperation, economic stabilization, and political dialogue policies. This approach has led to a fragmentation of European instruments applicable to the region and to the absence of a coherent operational vision on maritime security, despite the Black Sea's obvious strategic role for trade, energy, and strategic mobility.

However, the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has caused a profound rupture in this paradigm. The Black Sea is no longer perceived as a strategic periphery and has explicitly become an arena for direct confrontation between competing normative orders, security interests, and models of governance. This change has forced the European Union to rethink not only its political discourse on the region, but also the concrete instruments through which it can contribute to its security and stability¹.

The adoption in 2025 of a strengthened European Union strategic approach for the Black Sea region, which includes the proposal to create a European Maritime Security Hub, must be understood in this context of strategic recentralization. For the first time, the Union explicitly recognizes that maritime security in the Black Sea is not a derivative or secondary issue, but a structural component of European security, with direct implications for freedom of navigation, energy security, critical infrastructure protection, military mobility, and the hybrid resilience of Member States.

However, this initiative is not a solution in itself. Experience with European policies shows that the difference between an ambitious strategic framework and actual capacity lies almost exclusively in the implementation phase. For Member States, especially those bordering the Black Sea, the issue is not whether or not to support the initiative, but to **what extent they are capable of turning it into an operational reality**.

For Romania, this window of opportunity has special significance. Its geographical position, the size of its port infrastructure, its connectivity with the Danube, and its institutional experience in the field of maritime security give it considerable strategic potential. However, this potential does not automatically translate into leadership. In the absence of a coherent, rapid, and credible institutional capacity, Romania would remain only a passive beneficiary of European initiative designed and managed from outside the region.

The purpose of this study is to analyze, in an integrated manner, **what Romania needs to do urgently to operationalize the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea**, focusing on the specific institutional responsibilities of the main national actors. The analysis is built at the intersection between

¹[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)765800](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)765800)

²<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/10/20/co-chairs-conclusions-on-strengthening-cross-regional-security-and-connectivity/>

2. The maritime security hub in the European Union architecture: strategic and legal framework

The integration of the maritime security hub concept into the architecture of the European Union must be analyzed from a perspective that goes beyond the short-term reaction to a deteriorating geopolitical context. Although the war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has accelerated the decision-making process and catalysed the political will of the Union, the foundations of this Hub are part of a broader structural evolution of the European Union as a security actor, characterised by a progressive expansion of governance instruments in areas traditionally under the control of Member States³. The Black Sea Maritime Security Hub is not an ad hoc instrument, but rather the expression of a gradual change in the way the Union exercises its security responsibilities within a legal framework dominated by shared competences, subsidiarity, and intergovernmental cooperation.

From a strategic perspective, the Hub initiative is in line with European maritime security policies, developed since the European Union Maritime Security Strategy and subsequent regional implementation documents. These instruments have established an integrated approach to maritime security that goes beyond the traditional separation between the military and civilian dimensions, including critical infrastructure protection, navigation safety, combating illegal activities, energy security, and marine environment protection⁴. The maritime security hub represents, in this context, an additional step, aimed not at producing new rules, but at **operationalizing existing cooperation** and strengthening coordination and anticipation capacities.

From a legal standpoint, the European Union does not have exclusive competence in the field of maritime security. This is governed by a complex set of shared and complementary competences, in which Member States retain a central role, particularly with regard to national defense, border security, and the management of sensitive information. The common foreign and security policy, including its security and defense dimension, operates on the basis of intergovernmental cooperation, with decision-making mechanisms that reflect the sovereignty of the Member States. This legal reality explains why the Maritime Security Hub is not designed as a European agency with its own legal personality, but as a coordination mechanism that is structurally dependent on Member States' contributions.

This strategic choice reflects a realistic approach to the legal and political limits of European integration in the field of security. The creation of a European agency with direct operational powers in the Black Sea would have raised serious issues of compatibility with the treaties, with the principle of Member State sovereignty, and with the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Instead, the Hub model allows the Union to act within the limits of its competences, stimulating voluntary cooperation, interoperability of systems, and standardization of procedures, without substituting national responsibilities or generating dysfunctional institutional overlaps.

Within the EU architecture, the Hub is positioned at the intersection of several policies and instruments. On the one hand, it is anchored in the common security and defense policy through its objectives of situational awareness, resilience, and critical infrastructure protection. On the other hand, it is closely linked to the Union's civil policies, including those on transport, energy, the environment, space, and cybersecurity. This positioning explains both the Hub's high potential and the complexity of its implementation, as it involves the coordination of distinct legal regimes and institutional actors with different mandates⁶.

³[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRI\(2025\)765800](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRI(2025)765800)

⁴<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-17002-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

⁵<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12016M/TXT>

⁶<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/action-plan-synergies-between-civil-defence-and-space-industries>

A central element of the legal framework applicable to the Hub is the information and data regime. The European Union promotes information sharing and system interoperability as pillars of integrated security, but this objective is limited by regulations on personal data protection, classified information, and national security. The Hub must operate in a dense regulatory environment, where EU data protection law, national regulations on classified information, and cybersecurity rules applicable to critical infrastructures intersect. This intersection makes the Hub a sophisticated legal governance exercise, where clear delineation of access and responsibility regimes is essential for effective operation.

The Hub initiative must also be analyzed in relation to international maritime law. The Black Sea is an area governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and freedom of navigation, the regime of maritime zones, and the rights of coastal states are essential legal parameters. The Hub does not create new obligations for third countries and cannot interfere with the sovereign rights of non-EU coastal states. Its role is limited to facilitating cooperation and strengthening the capacities of Member States, without creating new substantive rules of international law.

From a strategic perspective, this non-normative character is a significant advantage. It allows the European Union to act in a sensitive geopolitical space without escalating legal or political tensions. The hub functions as an indirect stabilisation mechanism, strengthening monitoring, prevention and response capabilities without altering the existing legal balance in the Black Sea. This approach is consistent with the Union's role as a predominantly civilian security actor, focused on resilience and governance rather than force projection⁹.

Within the European security architecture, the Maritime Security Hub also contributes to strengthening the Union's strategic autonomy, without contravening transatlantic commitments. By focusing on the civilian, hybrid, and infrastructural dimensions of maritime security, the Hub complements NATO's role, avoiding duplication of existing military structures. This complementarity is essential for the political acceptability of the initiative and for maintaining the coherence of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture¹⁰.

In conclusion, the Black Sea Maritime Security Hub should be understood as a **strategic governance tool**, designed to operate within the legal framework of the European Union and to capitalize on its comparative advantages. It is not a command structure or an executive agency, but rather a mechanism for integration, coordination, and anticipation. It is precisely this character that explains why its success depends decisively on the member states and, in particular, on their ability to provide operational content and political will. Without a clear understanding of the strategic and legal framework in which the Hub operates, any implementation effort risks being inconsistent or unrealistic. On the other hand, internalizing this framework allows Romania to act strategically, leveraging the European initiative not only as an opportunity, but also as a tool for asserting responsible and sustainable leadership in the Black Sea region.

3. Implications for the European Union: security, governance, and strategic maturity

The operationalization of the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea does not have exclusively regional or national implications, but constitutes a structural test for the European Union as a security actor. Beyond the immediate objectives related to regional stability, the Hub initiative reflects a deeper transformation in how the Union understands and exercises its security responsibilities in a geopolitical context characterized by strategic competition, normative fragmentation, and pressure on the rules-based international order.

⁷<https://www.europeansources.info/record/proposal-for-a-directive-on-the-resilience-of-critical-entities/>

⁸https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

⁹ N. Tocci, 'The EU as a Security Actor: Between Ambition and Constraint', *Survival*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2021, pp. 7–26.

¹⁰<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/10/29/alliance-maritime-strategy>

The first major implication for the European Union is related to **strengthening its role as a non-military but strategically relevant security actor**. This option confirms the Union's distinctive model in the field of security, based on a combination of civil, economic, technological, and institutional instruments. The success of the Hub would demonstrate that the Union is capable of generating added value in areas where security cannot be reduced to the military dimension, such as critical infrastructure protection, energy security, or hybrid risk management.

Secondly, the Hub initiative has significant implications for **European security governance**. By not creating a European agency and not centralizing powers, the Hub relies on the ability of member states to implement and cooperate. This model highlights a structural tension in the architecture of the Union: on the one hand, the need for increased European coordination; on the other hand, the persistence of national powers in the field of security. If the Hub works effectively, it will provide a valuable precedent for how the Union can act strategically without exceeding the limits of the treaties, by stimulating convergence and interoperability rather than through formal centralization.

A third implication concerns **the relationship between the European Union and NATO**, particularly in the Black Sea region. The Maritime Security Hub is explicitly designed as a complementary, not competing, mechanism to allied structures. This complementarity is essential to maintaining the coherence of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and avoiding duplication of resources. At the same time, the Hub gives the Union the opportunity to assert strategic autonomy in an area where NATO does not fully cover the civilian and hybrid dimensions of security. Thus, the initiative contributes to clarifying roles and maturing the EU-NATO relationship in a pragmatic and functional sense.

The implications for the European Union are also evident in terms of **neighborhood policy and relations with third countries**. The Black Sea is an area where the Union interacts with non-member actors with divergent interests and positions. The maritime security hub, by its non-normative and functionally cooperative nature, can become an instrument of indirect stabilization, facilitating technical dialogue and coordination in areas of common interest without imposing new legal or political frameworks. In this sense, the initiative offers the Union a way to project its influence in a flexible manner that is adapted to regional sensitivities.

The Hub also has relevant implications for **the development of European strategic autonomy**, a concept that often remains abstract and controversial. By focusing on a concrete area with measurable operational results, the Hub can contribute to transforming strategic autonomy from a declarative objective into institutional practice. The Union's ability to support and capitalize on a project implemented by a Member State would demonstrate that strategic autonomy does not imply isolation or the replacement of existing alliances, but rather the ability to act coherently and effectively when European interests are directly affected.

Finally, the Maritime Security Hub initiative has implications for **the credibility of the European Union as a global actor**. In an international environment where the rules-based order is being challenged, the Union's ability to respond effectively to security challenges in its immediate vicinity remains an indicator of its global relevance. A functional Hub in the Black Sea would send a strong signal about the Union's commitment to regional security and to protecting global public goods, such as freedom of navigation and critical infrastructure security.

Overall, the implications of the Maritime Security Hub for the European Union go far beyond the regional framework of the Black Sea. The initiative represents a laboratory for strategic governance, in which the Union is testing its ability to integrate security, law, and politics into a coherent instrument. How this laboratory functions will influence not only the security of the Black Sea, but also the evolution of the European Union as a security actor in the 21st century.

3.1. Relations with Turkey in the context of the European Union's Black Sea Strategy

The European Union's strategy for the Black Sea region, officially adopted through the Joint Communication of May 28, 2025, emphasizes the need to strengthen regional cooperation in order to address the challenges to security, stability, and resilience generated by the war in Ukraine and the destabilizing actions of external actors, particularly the Russian Federation.

In this cooperation architecture, **Turkey implicitly emerges as a mandatory strategic partner**, given its dominant geostrategic position in the Black Sea basin and its ability to directly influence regional maritime security. Ankara controls, through the application of the Montreux Convention, the access of warships through the Turkish Straits, an element of prime importance for any situational awareness or crisis response mechanism concerning Black Sea security.

European strategic documents recognize the need for a **coordinated approach with Turkey**, but without establishing a formal mechanism for Ankara's integration into EU structures or the European Maritime Security Hub. The EU strategy mentions closer regional cooperation and the involvement of coastal countries, but does not specify how Turkey would be anchored in an EU institutional framework, thus reflecting a pragmatic approach that remains open to negotiation and political agreement between the parties.

This ambiguity reflects two realities simultaneously. On the one hand, the European Union seeks to involve Ankara in regional security architectures in order to maximize cooperation in areas such as maritime surveillance, data sharing, and response to hybrid threats. Thus, concrete cooperation on practical projects, including exercises or data sharing, is seen as an essential component for the effectiveness of the Hub and for the security of the Black Sea. On the other hand, persistent political differences and divergent approaches between the EU and Ankara—particularly regarding sanctions against Russia or geopolitical priorities—make it difficult to formalize Turkish participation in supranational EU mechanisms.

In practical terms, Turkey has already demonstrated its potential for regional cooperation, for example through trilateral initiatives or naval cooperation forums in which Ankara has played a central role, and through regional maritime security operations such as *Black Sea Harmony*. Furthermore, bilateral and multilateral partnerships—which include Romania and Bulgaria—are concrete areas of collaboration that can compensate for Turkey's lack of formal integration into EU structures.

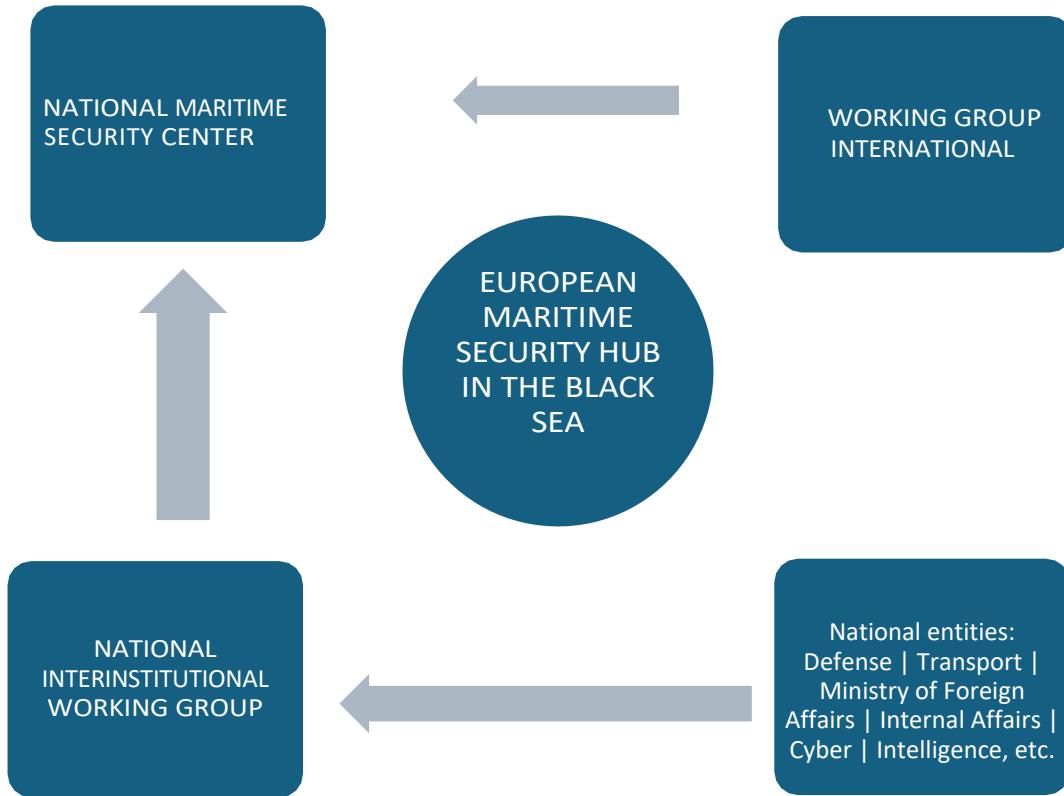
From this perspective, Turkey's role in the Black Sea security architecture is not yet defined in current EU documents, but it is recognized as an **indispensable strategic element of regional stabilization**. The creation of a European maritime security hub is an imperative similar to a platform that, in practice, can serve as a bridge for cooperation between the EU and Turkey, including through joint working groups or operational information-sharing agreements, without making Ankara a formal member of EU mechanisms. This is in line with the general logic of the Strategy, which aims to "encourage regional cooperation" and connect actors in the region without imposing legal mechanisms that contravene existing treaties or national competences.

Pragmatically speaking, Turkey's positioning as a cooperation partner is therefore a key element of any real implementation of the hub. Romania, in cooperation with its EU partners, will have to actively pursue **models for Turkey's institutional and operational inclusion**, so that cooperation is effective without calling into question its political or legal status within the European Union.

3.2. Clarification of the coordination architecture: European and national levels

Coordination architecture: European level and national level

The European hub coordinates cooperation. The national center leads internal implementation.



An essential aspect that must be explicitly defined in the implementation architecture of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea concerns the relationship between the international level of coordination and the national level of operational command. In the absence of such a definition, there is a risk of institutional ambiguity regarding decision-making authority, operational responsibility, and the relationships between participating entities.

The European Maritime Security Hub is designed as an international mechanism for cooperation and information integration, not as a command or regulatory structure over Member States. Within the limits of the European Union treaties, security and defense remain predominantly national competences, and the Hub initiative does not create a supranational authority with the power to issue operational orders or regulate the internal structures of participating states. Consequently, the Hub cannot replace the responsibility of Member States for the management of their own maritime security entities and cannot exercise hierarchical control over them.

This reality requires the existence of a national coordination structure capable of integrating and leading the relevant Romanian entities in the field of maritime security. A National Maritime Security Center, organized as a permanent interinstitutional mechanism, is the functional solution for ensuring internal command unity, operational coherence, and a single point of interface with the European Hub. Such a structure ~~do~~

duplicate the Hub, but rather make it operationally possible by providing the national capacity on which the European mechanism structurally depends.

At the same time, it is necessary to set up an international working group, associated with the European hub, composed of representatives of the participating states and relevant European institutions. The role of this group is to

harmonize procedures, define common standards for information exchange, and ensure interoperability between

national centers. This level does not exercise authority over states, but functions as a consensual coordination mechanism. Symmetrically, at the national level, a permanent interinstitutional Working Group must ensure the

integration of all Romanian actors involved — defense, transport, internal affairs, intelligence, critical infrastructure, and cybersecurity — under the leadership of the national center. This group provides internal unity of action and allows for

Romania's participation in the European Hub should be consistent, rapid, and credible.

This two-tier architecture avoids both the risk of overlapping competences and the illusion of a non-existent European authority in the field of operational security. The European Hub coordinates cooperation between states; the national center leads internal implementation. Together, they create an integrated mechanism that is compatible with European Union law, the sovereignty of Member States, and the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

4. The role of the President of Romania in initiating and strategically guiding Romania's participation in the European Maritime Security Hub

The European Union's initiative to create a Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea is currently in the political and institutional configuration stage at European level, in which the early and coherent positioning of Member States is a determining factor in shaping the final architecture of the mechanism. In this context, the role of the President of Romania falls within the scope of constitutional powers relating to foreign policy and national security and is manifested primarily in terms of strategic orientation and external representation of the state.

In the initial phase of the project, the President of Romania contributes to the political legitimacy of Romania's commitment to the European initiative, ensuring consistency between the national position and the strategic directions of the European Union in the Black Sea region. Romania's representation in high-level political dialogue with European institutions and Euro-Atlantic partners lends external credibility to the initiative and signals the continuity of the state's commitment, beyond internal administrative dynamics.

The presidential role is key at a time when the legal framework for the Hub hasn't been formalized yet through a binding EU decision. Without this, political influence and high-level negotiating skills are still crucial for strengthening Romania's position as a potential host country and implementation player. Therefore, the President's involvement contributes to creating a framework of strategic opportunity that national executive structures can subsequently transform into operational capacity.

Internally, the President acts as guarantor of the national interest in security matters, ensuring convergence between European initiatives and national defense and foreign policy strategies. This position does not involve integration into administrative coordination mechanisms or the exercise of operational authority over the institutions involved. His role is one of strategic guidance, providing the overarching political framework within which domestic institutional action can proceed in a coherent and predictable manner.

Through this combination of external representation, political legitimacy, and strategic orientation, the President of Romania plays a catalytic role in initiating Romania's participation in the European Maritime Security Hub. This contribution should not be confused with operational implementation, but it creates the necessary conditions for it to be possible and credible in relation to European and Euro-Atlantic partners.

5. The Romanian government and the strategic responsibility of implementing the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea as a prerequisite for European credibility.

The operationalization of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea cannot be achieved by accumulating sectoral initiatives, however well-intentioned they may be. The cross-cutting nature of maritime security, which intersects with defense, transport, energy, communications, the environment, and foreign policy, requires an **integrated governmental approach** capable of overcoming the fragmented logic of ministerial competences. In this context, the Romanian Government is not just one actor among others, but **the only entity capable of bringing coherence, authority, and continuity** to the implementation process.

The Government's first urgent responsibility is to **explicitly commit to the Hub as a strategic national project with European relevance**. This commitment must go beyond public statements and materialize in a formal decision that unequivocally establishes the priority of the initiative on the government's agenda. In the absence of such a decision, the Hub is vulnerable to being treated as a secondary project, dependent on the will and individual capacity of certain ministries, without any guarantee of continuity or coherence.

This political commitment must be accompanied by **the institutionalization of a government coordination mechanism with real authority**. The experience of the Romanian public administration shows that informal or consultative interministerial structures are insufficient for managing complex strategic projects. Therefore, the Government must create a coordination structure with a clear mandate, decision-making capacity, and direct access to the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office. The role of this structure is not to replace line ministries, but to ensure the convergence of their actions and prevent institutional bottlenecks.

A second key responsibility of the government is **to define a coherent national vision regarding Romania's role in the European Hub**. Without such a vision, the actions of institutions will remain reactive and fragmented. The government must clarify, in a strategic document, what type of hub Romania wants to host, what functions it will assume, what limits are imposed by sovereignty, and what long-term benefits it seeks. This vision is indispensable both for internal coordination and for Romania's external credibility in its dialogue with European institutions and regional partners.

Closely related to this is the government's responsibility to **ensure regulatory and legal consistency in the implementation process**. The maritime security hub involves the interaction of multiple legal regimes, including European Union law, international maritime law, critical infrastructure regulations, and cybersecurity rules. In the absence of government coordination, these regimes can generate contradictions or gray areas that would affect the functioning of the Hub. The government must therefore mandate an integrated legal analysis and promote the regulatory adjustments necessary to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation and information exchange.

Another critical dimension of urgent government action is **the allocation and coordination of resources**. Although the European Hub does not require massive investments in new infrastructure in its initial phase, it does require financial, human, and technological resources to integrate and operate existing capabilities. The government must ensure coherent budget planning that allows for the complementary use of national and European funds, avoiding fragmentation and competition between ministries. The lack of such coordination would undermine the effectiveness of investments and reduce Romania's attractiveness as the host country of the Hub.

The government also has a responsibility to **ensure the political continuity of the project**, beyond electoral cycles and changes in government. The maritime security hub is a medium- to long-term project, and political instability could compromise its implementation. Therefore, it is necessary to institutionalize the project in a way that reduces its dependence on the political will of the moment and ensures predictability for European partners.

Last but not least, the Romanian government must take an active role in **the strategic communication of the initiative**, both internally and externally. Internally, it is necessary to explain the relevance of the Hub for

national security and Romania's economic and social interests, in order to build public ~~ad~~institutional support. Externally, strategic communication is essential to position Romania as a proactive ~~ad~~responsible actor, capable of contributing substantially to European security.

In the absence of such integrated government action, there is a risk that the Hub initiative will be fragmented, diluted, or even hijacked by other European priorities. On the contrary, by assuming a strategic coordination role, the Romanian Government can transform the Maritime Security Hub into a **flagship project of Romania's contribution to the security of the European Union**, thus strengthening its regional position and European credibility.

6. Ministry of National Defense and Defense Staff: the operational core of the the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea

In the process of operationalizing the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea, the Defense Staff (SMAp) and the Ministry of National Defense (MApN) hold a central structural position. This centrality does not stem exclusively from the military nature of maritime security, but from the SMAp's unique ability to articulate, integrate, and coordinate capabilities that transcend the classic institutional boundaries between civil and military security. ~~In~~ the current context, maritime security can no longer be conceptualized strictly as a domain of territorial defense, but as **a space of convergence between defense, critical infrastructure, technology, energy, and societal resilience**.

The role of SMAp within the Hub should therefore not be understood as exclusively executive or technical, but rather as **architectural and normative**, with the aim of establishing a European capacity that can function within real operational parameters, without compromising the sovereignty of Member States and without creating dysfunctional overlaps with NATO structures.

The first major institutional obligation of the SMAp is to develop an **Operational Concept (CONOPS)**¹¹**dedicated to the Black Sea Maritime Security Hub**. This document must go beyond the descriptive level and explicitly establish the Hub's functions, limits, and operating mechanisms. In the absence of such a concept, the initiative would remain caught in a zone of strategic ambiguity, which would reduce both the confidence of European partners and internal efficiency.

The CONOPS must define the Hub as an **extended Maritime Domain Awareness** tool, capable of integrating data from multiple sources, including surface, underwater, and space surveillance, critical infrastructure information, port data, and hybrid risk information. At the same time, the document must clarify the extent to which the Hub will play an active role in supporting operational decisions and coordinating incident response, or whether its function will be limited to analysis and early warning.

An essential aspect of this operational concept is **the data regime**. The SMAp must establish a clear distinction between strictly national data, data that can be shared at European level, and data that can be shared conditionally with non-EU partners. This distinction is not purely technical, but deeply legal and strategic, with direct implications for mutual trust and the protection of classified information. The lack of clear rules in this area would make the Hub vulnerable to both security risks and institutional deadlocks.

In parallel with the conceptual definition, SMAp and MApN are required to demonstrate the existence of an **initial operational capability** that will enable the Hub to be launched in a functional form. The European Union favors,

¹¹ In the military, a CONOPS (Concept of Operations) is a high-level verbal or graphic description of how a commander intends to conduct an operation, presenting the commander's vision, assumptions, and desired end state, using available resources to solve problems or achieve objectives. It serves as a communication tool for all stakeholders, bridging the gap between initial ideas and detailed technical requirements, and can be used for specific systems, ongoing

operations, or procurement programs.

consistently, projects that can produce rapid and visible results, even if they are initially limited in scope. From this perspective, the incremental approach is not only pragmatic but strategically necessary.

This initial capability must be based on the integration of existing national systems, such as coastal surveillance, automatic ship identification systems, command and control capabilities, and access to satellite data. The role of SMAp is to ensure **the information fusion** of these systems into a coherent framework, avoiding fragmentation and redundancy. The hub should function as a capacity multiplier, not as an additional consumer of resources.

Another fundamental element of SMAp's responsibilities is **the information and cyber security** of the Hub. Given the nature of the data managed, the Hub will inevitably become an attractive target for cyber attacks and espionage activities. In this context, SMAp must define a security regime based on network segregation, rigorous staff accreditation procedures, audit mechanisms, and clear accountability in the event of security incidents. Cooperation with civilian structures responsible for cyber security is indispensable, but strategic coordination must remain firmly anchored in the national security architecture.

Particularly relevant is the SMAp's obligation to integrate **the protection of critical maritime infrastructure** into the Hub. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the vulnerability of submarine cables, energy pipelines, and offshore installations, transforming these elements from economic assets into strategic targets. In the absence of a systematic approach, their protection remains fragmented and reactive.

Therefore, the SMA must develop, in cooperation with other national institutions, a **national plan for the protection of critical maritime infrastructure**, which will be functionally integrated into the Hub. The plan must identify the relevant infrastructure, assess risks, define monitoring mechanisms, and establish incident response procedures. The Hub will thus become a tool for anticipation and coordination, reducing response time and increasing the resilience of the system as a whole.

Last but not least, the SMA has the responsibility to position the Hub in relation to NATO architecture in a way that avoids both unnecessary overlap and institutional isolation. The European Hub should not be seen as a substitute for NATO structures, but as a complementary tool capable of managing dimensions of maritime security that go beyond the strictly military mandate. This complementarity must be clearly defined in order to avoid institutional tensions and maximize the added value of the European initiative.

Overall, the role of the Defense Staff in operationalizing the Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea is decisive. Its ability to articulate a coherent vision, integrate existing capabilities, and ensure a robust information security regime will determine whether the Hub will become a real strategic tool or remain a conceptual construct with no operational impact.

7. The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure as a vector of European maritime security: from economic function to strategic responsibility

In the operational architecture of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure occupies a position that, although often underestimated in security debates, is in fact decisive. Contemporary maritime security can no longer be dissociated from transport infrastructure, as ports, waterways, logistics hubs, and traffic management systems are simultaneously critical economic assets and strategic vulnerabilities. The role of the Ministry of Transport goes far beyond the administration of trade flows, extending to **ensuring the infrastructural resilience of the European Union in a contested maritime space**.

In the context of the Black Sea, this responsibility is amplified by Romania's geographical position and the systemic function of the port of Constanța. The port is not only a commercial hub, but also a point of convergence between the Black Sea, the Danube, and European transport corridors, with major strategic potential for military mobility,

energy security, and regional supply. Therefore, the integration of the Ministry of Transport into the Hub's architecture is not optional but structurally necessary.

The first institutional obligation of the Ministry **of** Transport in this process is to **reconceptualize transport infrastructure as dual-use infrastructure**, with direct relevance to national and European security. This reconceptualization involves abandoning an exclusively economic approach and adopting an integrated perspective, in which criteria such as resilience, redundancy, operational continuity, and cybersecurity are now central elements of transport policies.

Specifically, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure must take an active role in facilitating military and logistical mobility in the Black Sea region, in full compatibility with existing European initiatives. This involves identifying and remedying structural bottlenecks affecting connectivity between the port of Constanța, the Danube, and land transport networks. Rail, road, and river infrastructure must be assessed not only in terms of commercial capacity but also in terms of its ability to support strategic flows in crisis situations.

This assessment should lead to the development of a coherent investment plan focused on resilience and dual-use mobility, capable of being integrated into European funding mechanisms. Without such a plan, Romania risks remaining an undersized transit point in a context where the European Union is refocusing its priorities towards security and defense. Therefore, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure is a key player not only in the implementation of the Hub, but also in strengthening Romania's position within European strategic mobility policies.

Another fundamental pillar of the Ministry of Transport's responsibilities is **the operational and cyber security of port infrastructure**, particularly the port of Constanța. The accelerated digitization of ports, through the introduction of Port Community System, VTS, AIS, and operational automation solutions, has generated significant efficiency gains but has also created new vulnerabilities. In the context of hybrid warfare and strategic competition, these vulnerabilities can no longer be treated as mere technical risks, ~~but~~ as potential threats to national security.

In this context, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure has the obligation to initiate and coordinate rigorous cybersecurity and operational audits, targeting both IT infrastructure and industrial operational systems. These audits must be followed by concrete remediation plans and the implementation of operational continuity mechanisms capable of ensuring the port's operation under extreme stress conditions. Without these measures, the integration of the port of Constanța into a European maritime security hub would remain purely formal.

Equally, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure must contribute to **the integration of transport infrastructure into the early warning and incident response mechanisms** developed within the Hub. The data

generated by traffic management, vessel monitoring, and port access control systems is a valuable resource for maritime situational awareness. Integrating them into a broader information fusion framework can significantly enhance the ability to anticipate and respond to threats.

This integration naturally raises sensitive issues related to data protection, information classification, and the delineation of responsibilities. The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure must work closely with defense and security institutions to define a data-sharing regime that allows for cooperation ~~without~~ compromising legitimate commercial interests or infrastructure security. This regulatory dimension is essential for the effective functioning of the Hub and requires a carefully calibrated approach.

Another strategic responsibility of the Ministry of Transport in the context of the Hub is **the capacity to respond to major maritime incidents**, including pollution, accidents, or blockages of shipping routes. The Black Sea is an ecologically fragile area, and a major incident would have significant economic, environmental, and security consequences. Integrating pollution and maritime emergency response capabilities ~~into~~ the Hub's architecture would allow for more effective coordination and faster response, increasing regional resilience.

In this context, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure must assume a coordinating role between port authorities, naval authorities, and other relevant institutions to ensure the consistency of procedures ~~and~~

their compatibility with European standards. The hub can become a catalyst for standardisation and interoperability, but only if the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure exercises its role as a strategic actor, not just as a sectoral administrator.

Finally, it is essential that the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure understands that its participation in the operationalization of the Maritime Security Hub is not a temporary exercise, but a **process of institutional transformation**. The integration of the security dimension into transport policies will influence the long-term way in which Romania plans and manages its infrastructure, positioning it as a state capable of responding to the complex challenges of European maritime security.

In the absence of such a transformation, there is a risk that transport infrastructure will become the weak link in maritime security, exposed to hybrid risks and an inability to respond. On the contrary, by taking on an active and strategic role, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure can contribute decisively to the success of the Hub and to strengthening Romania's position as a central player in Black Sea security.

8. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic architecture of the Black Sea maritime security hub: legitimacy, European anchoring, and regional governance

The operationalization of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea cannot be conceived exclusively as an internal technical or institutional exercise. The very nature of the initiative, situated at the intersection of European Union security, regional cooperation, and the management of a deeply contested maritime space, gives the Ministry of Foreign Affairs an essential structural role. This role goes beyond the traditional function of diplomatic representation and extends to **shaping the political and legal legitimacy of the Hub**, both at European and regional level.

In the absence of a coherent diplomatic architecture, the Hub risks being perceived either as a unilateral initiative of a member state or as a technocratic project lacking regional political connection. Both perceptions would undermine the initiative's effectiveness and sustainability. Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an obligation to build a framework for cooperation that would give the Hub **acceptability, predictability, and stability**, which are indispensable elements in a geopolitical environment characterized by volatility and strategic mistrust.

The first dimension of this role is **the institutional anchoring of the Hub in the decision-making mechanisms of the European Union**. Although the Hub proposal is included in the EU's strategic approach to the Black Sea region, in the absence of further steps, it remains a general policy instrument without a clear operational mandate. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must therefore seek to transform the initiative into an integrated element of European security and resilience policies, with an accepted governance formula and access to the relevant financial instruments.

This connection requires sustained diplomatic activity within the Council of the European Union, in dialogue with the European External Action Service and the European Commission, in order to clarify the status of the Hub. It is essential that Romania promote a formula that recognizes the role of riparian states and avoids excessive centralization of decisions outside the region. At the same time, this formula must be compatible with European Union law and the principle of loyal cooperation, avoiding any perception of institutional competition.

A second essential dimension of the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is **to build the regional legitimacy of the Hub**, especially in relation to the Black Sea riparian states. In an area characterized by power asymmetries and historical sensitivities, legitimacy cannot be assumed, but must be actively built. In this context, cooperation with Bulgaria, as the only other European Union member state bordering the Black Sea, takes on particular importance.

A strategic partnership with Bulgaria is not only a matter of European solidarity, but also a practical condition for the success of the initiative. The absence of a common Romanian-Bulgarian position would weaken Romania's

approach and create space for institutional or geographical alternatives that could dilute the role of the region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

must therefore act to institutionalize cooperation with Bulgaria in a stable format, geared towards implementation and compatible with the Hub's architecture.

Beyond intra-EU cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for managing the Hub's relationship with **non-EU member states in the region**, particularly Turkey, Ukraine, and Georgia. This dimension is particularly delicate, as it involves interaction with actors who have divergent interests and, in some cases, tense relations with the European Union. However, completely excluding these states would significantly reduce the Hub's effectiveness, given the cross-border nature of maritime threats.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must promote a **gradual, functional, and differentiated** model of cooperation that allows these states to become involved in areas of common interest, such as navigation safety, marine environment protection, or maritime incident management, without compromising the Hub's security regime. This approach requires a clear distinction between technical cooperation and access to sensitive information, as well as careful articulation of dialogue formats.

Another strategic responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to **manage the relationship between the European Hub and NATO**, particularly in the context of the complementarity between European and allied initiatives. Although the Hub is not a military instrument in the strict sense, its security dimension inevitably places it at an intersection with NATO interests and structures. The MFA must contribute to clarifying this relationship, avoiding both dysfunctional overlap and the perception of institutional competition.

This clarification is essential to ensure the Hub's acceptance by NATO allies and prevent the fragmentation of security efforts in the region. At the same time, it allows the European Union to assert its specific role in areas that go beyond the strictly military mandate, such as critical infrastructure protection, civil resilience, and economic security.

From a legal and regulatory perspective, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a central role in **harmonizing the legal regimes applicable to the Hub**. The initiative involves the interaction between European Union law, international maritime law, critical infrastructure regulations, and cybersecurity rules. Without careful coordination, these regimes can generate contradictions or gray areas that would affect the functioning of the Hub.

The MFA must contribute to clarifying these issues, including by promoting agreements or administrative arrangements that facilitate cross-border cooperation and information exchange. This regulatory dimension is often invisible in public debate, but it is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must understand that its involvement in the Black Sea Maritime Security Hub is not limited to the launch phase. On the contrary, the Hub will require **maintenance diplomacy**, capable of managing tensions, adapting cooperation formats, and ensuring the political continuity of the project. In a fluid geopolitical context, this ability to adapt will be essential to maintaining the Hub's relevance.

In conclusion, the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in operationalizing the European Maritime Security Hub is fundamental. Through its ability to build legitimacy, anchor the initiative in European mechanisms, and manage regional relations, the MFA can transform the Hub from a strategic proposal into a functional instrument of European security. Without this solid diplomatic dimension, operational and infrastructural efforts risk remaining insufficiently coordinated and vulnerable to political challenge.

9. The role of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, internal security structures, and national cybersecurity capabilities in the maritime security architecture

The maritime security dimension in the Black Sea region is not limited to naval defense or port infrastructure protection, but encompasses a wide range of cross-border risks of a criminal, hybrid, and digital nature. Romania's National Defense Strategy explicitly identifies threats such as illegal immigration, human trafficking, trafficking in prohibited substances, cross-border organized crime, and cyber attacks on

critical infrastructure, all of which have a significant maritime component. In this context, the participation of structures with responsibilities in the field of internal security, border management, and cyber protection is an indispensable element of the implementation of the European Maritime Security Hub initiative.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and management of the cross-border dimension of maritime security

The Ministry of Internal Affairs contributes to the national maritime security architecture through its role in coordinating policy on managing the cross-border dimension of security. Specifically, the Border Police, which is under the institutional coordination relevant for the management of the European Union's external borders, is the operational instrument through which Romania ensures the control of maritime flows, the prevention of illegal immigration, and the fight against trafficking in human beings and prohibited substances on the Black Sea route.

The integration of the Border Police into the information exchange and situational awareness mechanisms provided by the European Hub allows for the strengthening of early detection capabilities for illegal activities, increased interoperability with specialized European agencies, and the facilitation of a coordinated response to cross-border risks. At the same time, the diplomatic dimension managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributes to the harmonization of bilateral and regional cooperation agreements necessary for joint actions in international waters or maritime border areas.

The role of the Romanian Intelligence Service in identifying and anticipating hybrid and cross-border threats

The Romanian Intelligence Service plays an intrinsic role in the national security architecture through its duties of gathering, analyzing, and exploiting information on threats to national security. In the context of maritime security, these tasks include monitoring potentially destabilising activities, identifying cross-border organised crime networks, anticipating hybrid actions and assessing risks to critical maritime infrastructure.

The interconnection of national intelligence capabilities with the European Hub's analysis and information exchange mechanisms contributes to strengthening the common operational picture of emerging risks in the Black Sea region. In this context, the SRI does not perform direct operational roles in the maritime space, but provides essential information support for decision-making and for guiding the actions of structures with operational responsibilities.

National Directorate for Cyber Security and the protection of the digital dimension of maritime security

The accelerated digitization of port systems, maritime logistics, and surveillance infrastructures generates specific vulnerabilities in the field of cybersecurity. The National Defense Strategy explicitly identifies cyberattacks on critical infrastructures as one of the main contemporary threats to national security. In this context, the National Cyber Security Directorate is the competent national authority for the prevention, detection, and management of cyber incidents that may affect maritime, port, and strategic transport infrastructures.

The integration of the Directorate's capabilities into the national architecture associated with the European Hub allows cyber incidents to be correlated with the maritime operational picture, vulnerabilities to be quickly identified, and a coordinated response to digital attacks or intrusions to be provided. At the same time, participation in European cybersecurity and technical information exchange networks strengthens the resilience of Romanian maritime infrastructures and their compatibility with emerging European standards.

Integrating internal security, information security, and cybersecurity dimensions into the national coordination mechanism

The role of these institutions is not exercised in isolation, but is integrated into a national coordination mechanism that brings together the components of defense, internal security, intelligence, and cybersecurity. Through this integration, Romania can provide the European Hub not only with naval surveillance capabilities, but also with a comprehensive contribution to combating cross-border crime, hybrid threats, and digital attacks that affect regional maritime security.

This multidimensional approach reflects both the provisions of the National Defense Strategy and the emerging European Union guidelines on integrated external border security and critical infrastructure protection. It strengthens Romania's capacity to act as a provider of regional security and as a pivotal state in the implementation of European mechanisms for stabilizing the Black Sea region.

10. What Romania needs to do urgently: operational measures by institutions to transform the Maritime Security Hub into a functional European capacity

For Romania, making the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea operational is more than just an obligation to comply with a strategic initiative of the European Union. It is a test of institutional capacity, governmental coherence, and strategic maturity. The urgency of Romania's action does not stem exclusively from the European calendar, but from the highly competitive nature of the implementation process: states that manage to quickly transform the strategic framework into a functional capacity will define the future architecture of the Hub, while those that delay will be integrated marginally, as mere sources of data or passive beneficiaries.

In this context, the measures that Romania must adopt cannot be fragmented or left at the level of sectoral initiatives. They must be understood as part of an **integrated governance process**, in which each institution has distinct but interdependent responsibilities, and success depends on the capacity for coordination and synchronization.

At the level of the Romanian Government, the urgency is manifested primarily by the need **for explicit political commitment to the Hub as a strategic national project with European relevance**. Without such formal commitment, the initiative is in danger of being treated as a sectoral issue, dependent on the short-term priorities of each ministry. The government must give the Hub a status equivalent to that of major national strategic projects, establishing clear political responsibility and an inter-institutional coordination mechanism with real authority. This coordination must go beyond the consultative logic and allow for quick decisions, including on resource allocation, prioritization, and external representation.

For the Defense Staff and the Ministry of National Defense, the urgency lies not in developing entirely new capabilities, but in **quickly clarifying** the Hub's **operational architecture**. Romania must demonstrate that it can provide an immediately functional core based on the integration of existing capabilities. The development of an Operational Concept dedicated to the Black Sea Hub is essential to define its specific role, its limits, and its relationship with NATO structures. Without this document, any discussion about hosting or leadership remains meaningless.

At the same time, the Ministry of National Defense is responsible for integrating the **protection of critical maritime infrastructure** into the Hub's operations. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that underwater and port infrastructure is a strategic target, and the lack of an integrated approach exposes not only Romania but the entire European Union to systemic risks. The urgency in this case is dictated by the preventive nature of security: the Hub must be able to anticipate and signal risks, not just react to incidents.

The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, in turn, has an urgent responsibility to **redefine transport infrastructure as strategic dual-use infrastructure**. The Port of Constanța, the maritime Danube, and the associated land connections cannot be treated exclusively as economic assets. They must be integrated into a security logic that includes operational resilience, continuity of operation in crisis situations, and cybersecurity. The urgency stems from the fact that infrastructure is, by its nature, difficult to adapt quickly; decisions made now will determine the capacity to respond in the coming years.

In this regard, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure must accelerate the assessment of infrastructure vulnerabilities and integrate data generated by port and traffic management systems into the Hub's information architecture. Without this integration, the Hub is in danger of operating in an operational vacuum, lacking one of the most relevant sources of information for maritime security.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has another urgent issue that is equally critical. In the absence ~~of a clear place for the Hub in the European Union's decision-making mechanisms~~, the initiative is in danger of remaining in a zone of political ambiguity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must act quickly to position Romania's efforts as an integral part of the implementation of the EU's Black Sea strategy, not as a unilateral initiative. This requires constant dialogue with European institutions and the building of a coalition of support, starting with Bulgaria, as a coastal EU member state.

At the regional level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must carefully manage relations with non-EU states in the region, ensuring a functional but controlled framework for cooperation. The urgency is dictated by the need to avoid both the isolation of the Hub and its vulnerability through uncontrolled openness. The balance between cooperation and information security is one of the most sensitive aspects of implementation.

An important role is played by the institutions responsible for communications and cyber security, in particular the Special Telecommunications Service. The urgency in this area is linked to the technological nature of the Hub: without a secure, interoperable, and resilient infrastructure, the entire initiative is vulnerable. The integration of existing systems, data protection, and ensuring continuity of communications are prerequisites for any real functionality.

Overall, the urgent measures that Romania must adopt cannot be understood as a set of isolated administrative actions. They represent **a process of institutional transformation**, in which each actor must overcome sectoral logic and contribute to a common goal. The urgency is strategic and irreversible: the window of opportunity opened by the European initiative is limited, and delay will have structural consequences for Romania's position in the security architecture of the European Union.

Through rapid, coordinated, and implementation-oriented action, Romania can transform the Maritime Security Hub into a flagship project of its contribution to European security. Through inaction or fragmentation, it confirms its status as a peripheral actor in a strategic space that directly affects its national security.

11. Risks and possible failures: structural limitations, institutional vulnerabilities, and scenarios of dysfunctionality

Any rigorous analysis of a security initiative with strategic ambitions must include an explicit assessment of the risks and potential failures. The absence of such an assessment does not indicate strategic optimism, but analytical vulnerability. In the case of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea, the risks are not marginal or circumstantial, but derive from the very legal and institutional architecture of the European Union, the complexity of the regional environment, and the cross-cutting nature of maritime security.

A first major risk is **the excessive politicization of the initiative at the national level**. In the context of internal political competition, there is a danger that the Hub will be exploited for rhetorical purposes, without benefiting from real institutional continuity. Such a scenario would lead to a discrepancy between public commitments and implementation capacity, undermining Romania's credibility with its European partners. In the absence of firm governmental stability and institutionalisation that transcends electoral cycles, the Hub would remain affected by its symbolic nature, dependent on the political will of the moment.

A second significant risk is **interinstitutional fragmentation**. Maritime security involves a multitude of actors with different mandates, and the lack of effective coordination can lead to overlaps, conflicts of competence, or areas of non-responsibility. If each institution involved acts exclusively within the limits of its own sectoral mandate, the Hub will fail to function as an integrating mechanism and will instead reproduce the fragmentation it is supposed to correct. This risk is amplified by the absence of a consolidated culture of interinstitutional cooperation in the field of integrated security.

Another structural risk is **legal and regulatory ambiguity**. The Hub is designed as a coordination mechanism, not as an entity with its own legal personality. This option has obvious advantages, but it also creates vulnerabilities. In the absence of clear boundaries regarding data regime, decision-making responsibility, and reporting

Institutionally, legal obstacles may arise that limit the exchange of information or create institutional reluctance. The risk is all the greater as maritime security involves sensitive information subject to strict national classification regimes.

A distinct category of risks relates to **the relationship between the European Union and NATO**. Although the Hub is designed as a complementary mechanism, there is a risk of perceived overlap or institutional competition, particularly in the Black Sea region, where NATO already has a significant presence. Without ongoing clarification of roles and transparent coordination, the Hub could be perceived as either redundant or intrusive, which would diminish political and operational support for the initiative.

A particularly sensitive risk is **informational and cyber vulnerability**. The hub relies on data integration and exchange, which makes it a potential target for cyber attacks, influence operations, or informational compromise. Without a robust cyber security architecture and clear procedures for data access and segregation, the initiative could generate additional risks rather than reducing them. This risk is amplified by the hybrid nature of threats in the Black Sea region.

There is also the risk **of a "Hub without Hub" failure**, where the initiative formally exists but does not produce real operational value. This scenario materialises when the focus is on labelling and political recognition, to the detriment of effective capacity building. A Hub that lacks functional initial operational capacity, clear procedures and measurable results is vulnerable to being perceived as an institutional branding exercise with no real impact on maritime security.

At the European level, an additional risk is **the lack of convergence between Member States**. The Hub requires a minimum degree of trust and willingness to cooperate. Political differences, national sensitivities, differing priorities among Member States may limit participation and reduce the effectiveness of the mechanism. If the Union fails to create sufficient incentives for involvement, the Hub is likely to remain a project with limited participation, below its strategic potential.

Finally, the risk **of institutional inertia** must be mentioned. Innovative initiatives in the field of security often face internal resistance, generated by fear of change, loss of control, or increased responsibilities. Without clear institutional leadership and accountability mechanisms, this inertia can slow down or even block the implementation process.

The assessment of these risks does not lead to the conclusion that the Maritime Security Hub is an unrealistic or excessively vulnerable initiative. On the contrary, it highlights the conditions necessary for success. Explicit recognition **the risks** allows for the formulation of mitigation measures and reinforces the realistic and mature nature of the approach. Without such critical reflection, the Hub would remain an aspirational project. By incorporating this assessment, the study confirms that transforming the Hub from a strategic opportunity into an instrument of European leadership is possible but not inevitable, as it depends on political will, institutional capacity, and responsible governance.

12. The emergency implementation schedule: the temporality of strategic leadership

The operationalization of the European Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea cannot be conceived as an open-ended process without any time frame. In a geopolitical context characterized by volatility, strategic competition, and institutional pressure at the European Union level, time is a strategic variable in itself. The urgency calendar should not be understood as a rigid administrative exercise, but as an expression of the fact that **leadership is built through the synchronization of decisions**, not through their progressive accumulation.

The first critical stage is that of political and institutional commitment, which must take place within a short period of several months. At this stage, it is essential for the Romanian Government to give the initiative the formal status of a national strategic project with European relevance and to institutionalize the interinstitutional coordination mechanism. This stage is crucial for Romania's external credibility, as it signals its ability to act quickly and coherently in a competitive European framework.

This is followed by an initial operational configuration phase, which should take place over a period of approximately six to nine months. During this period, the focus is on clearly defining the functional architecture of the Hub, integrating existing capabilities, and establishing the data and information regime. This is the phase in which Romania must demonstrate that it can provide a credible initial capacity, even if limited in scope, but real in functionality. The lack of such an initial capacity would turn the Hub into a purely declarative construction.

The next stage is operational testing and validation, which will take approximately six months. During this phase, the Hub's operation will be subject to interinstitutional exercises and risk scenarios focusing on critical infrastructure protection, navigation safety, and hybrid incident management. This stage has a dual function: internally, it allows for the identification of malfunctions and the adjustment of cooperation mechanisms; externally, it provides the European Union with concrete evidence of its implementation capacity.

The final stage of the emergency calendar is that of consolidation and European projection, which takes place within two years of the initiative's launch. In this phase, Romania must use the experience gained to negotiate the integration of the Hub into a broader European framework, either as a mechanism officially recognized by the Union or as a model that can be replicated in other sea basins. This stage marks the transition from national implementation to European leadership.

Overall, the urgency calendar highlights the fact that **time is not a neutral factor**, but one that favors actors capable of acting quickly and coherently. For Romania, complying with this calendar is not just a matter of administrative efficiency, but an essential condition for transforming a strategic opportunity ~~to~~sustainable leadership role in the European Union's security architecture.

13. Conclusion. From opportunity to strategic leadership

The European Union's initiative to create a Maritime Security Hub in the Black Sea marks a turning point in how the security of this region is conceptualized and managed at the European level. For the first time, the Black Sea is treated not as a strategic periphery, but as a constituent space of the Union's security, where interests regarding freedom of navigation, energy security, critical infrastructure protection, and resilience against hybrid threats converge. This paradigm shift creates an unprecedented strategic opportunity for Romania. However, as this study has shown, opportunity is not synonymous with leadership, and the distance between the two is determined exclusively by the capacity for implementation.

The analysis showed that the Maritime Security Hub is not, by its nature, an instrument that can be imposed or built exclusively at the level of European institutions. It is an operational governance mechanism that requires the active and responsible participation of Member States, especially coastal states. In this context, Romania cannot adopt a wait-and-see or passive compliance position. Without political commitment, government coordination, and the provision of credible initial operational capacity, the initiative is in danger of materializing into an architecture defined by others, in which Romania's role would inevitably be marginal.

The fundamental conclusion of the study is that **strategic leadership is not conferred by geographical position or formal status**, but is built through coherent, rapid, and results-oriented action. Romania has undeniable structural advantages in the Black Sea region, but these advantages can only be exploited through institutional transformation that allows for the integration of defense, infrastructure, diplomacy, and cybersecurity into a common strategic project. The maritime security hub provides the mechanism for such a transformation, but does not guarantee it.

The study showed that Romania's urgent action is strategic and irreversible. The window of opportunity opened by the current geopolitical context is limited in time, and decisions or indecision at this stage will have long-term structural effects. Delay does not mean neutrality, but rather the loss of the ability to influence the future architecture of European maritime security. Instead, taking on a proactive role allows Romania to

participate in defining the standards, procedures, and cooperation mechanisms that will govern Black Sea security in the coming decades.

Another key finding of the analysis is the central role of the Romanian government as a pivotal actor in implementation. Without government coordination, explicit political commitment, and institutionalization of the project, the sectoral efforts of ministries and agencies remain insufficient. Strategic leadership requires the ability to overcome administrative fragmentation and act in an integrated manner, including by assuming the political costs of rapid decisions. Thus, the Maritime Security Hub is qualitatively transforming from a security project into a **test of the Romanian state's ability to function strategically**.

The study's conclusions also emphasize that the Hub's success should not be measured solely by immediate results, but by its ability to generate a ripple effect in European security architecture. Through a functional pilot project, Romania can demonstrate that European security can be built through incremental implementation, civil-military cooperation, and the intelligent use of existing capabilities. Such a model strengthens not only Romania's position, but also the credibility of the European Union as a security actor capable of responding to the complex challenges of the contemporary strategic environment.

Ultimately, the transition from opportunity to strategic leadership is a political and institutional choice. It involves taking the risk of acting, rather than the comfort of waiting. The European maritime security hub in the Black Sea gives Romania the chance to assert itself as **a key state in European security**, both through discourse and capacity. How this opportunity is exploited will determine not only Romania's role in the region, but also its contribution to the European security project as a whole.

Therefore, the final conclusion of this study is a firm one, according to **which strategic leadership in the Black Sea will not be granted to Romania, but will be earned through implementation**. The maritime security hub is the tool that makes this transformation possible. The decision to make full use of it remains to be taken.

In this context, in our opinion, it is necessary for policy makers to recognize that Romania, as a maritime state with major national maritime interests, needs a maritime strategy.

DEVELOPING ROMANIA'S MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY IS BECOMING A NECESSITY!

ANNEXES

Note: the proposed backup option in the event that the EU does not clearly designate Romania as the country to implement the Black Sea Security Hub

ANNEX 1-Black Sea Maritime Security Center – Pilot implementation led by Romania

CONCEPTUAL NOTE

From strategic framework to operational capacity

1. Strategic context

The Black Sea has become one of the most contested maritime spaces in Europe, where military confrontations, hybrid threats, energy security risks, and critical maritime infrastructure vulnerabilities intersect. While the European Union has gradually recognized the strategic relevance of the region, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally altered the security landscape, transforming the Black Sea into a strategic maritime space. against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the security landscape, turning the Black Sea into a direct test of European resilience, situational awareness, and capacity to act.

In response to this structural change, the European Union adopted a strategic approach to the Black Sea in 2025, identifying maritime security as a flagship priority and proposing the establishment of a Black Sea Maritime Security Center. The center is not designed as a military command structure, but as a civil-military coordination and information integration mechanism aimed at strengthening maritime situational awareness, protecting critical infrastructure, and improving coordinated responses to complex risks.

The effectiveness of the proposed center will depend on the ability of member states to translate political intentions into operational capacity. This concept note proposes a pilot implementation led by Romania as a way forward.

pragmatic and predictable transition to a functional European center.

2. Justification for a pilot project approach

Launching the Black Sea Maritime Security Center directly as a fully-fledged institutional structure would entail significant political, legal, and operational risks. Divergent national sensitivities, data-sharing constraints, and institutional overlaps could delay or dilute the initiative.

A pilot project approach allows the European Union to test the concept of the center under real operational conditions, while maintaining flexibility. This allows for gradual development, early demonstration early demonstration of added value, and expansion based on evidence. Romania is uniquely positioned to host and lead such a pilot project, given its geographical location, infrastructure, EU and NATO membership, and experience in maritime security.

The pilot project is designed as a proof of operational capability rather than a definitive governance model. Its success would provide the empirical basis for subsequent EU-level decisions on the permanent architecture of the Hub.

permanent architecture of the Hub.

3. Objectives of the pilot project

The overall objective of the pilot project is to establish an initial operational maritime security capacity at the Black Sea level, aligned with the EU's strategic priorities. More specifically, the pilot project aims to improve maritime situational awareness through integrated data fusion, improve protection

critical maritime infrastructure and strengthening civil-military coordination in risk prevention and incident response incidents.

The pilot project focuses on Romania's maritime area of responsibility, with functional links to the port of Constanța and the maritime sector of the Danube, ensuring legal feasibility and rapid implementation.

4. Governance and integration model

The pilot project would be implemented under the leadership of the Romanian government, in close coordination with EU institutions.

Governance is based on a national interinstitutional consortium, which acts as an integrator while remaining open to EU monitoring and the gradual participation of interested Member States.

Operational coordination would be based on existing national structures, avoiding duplication and ensuring compatibility with NATO, while preserving the civilian nature of the initiative. The European Union would be invited to recognize the pilot project as a demonstration project within the Strategic Approach to the Black Sea.

5. Timetable and results

The pilot project is designed to last a total of 24 months. The first phase focuses on institutional setup and operational design. The second phase enables technical integration and the establishment of a fusion cell. The third phase validates operational performance through exercises and real-case simulations. The final phase evaluates the results and prepares options for transition to a permanent EU-level mechanism.

6. European added value

The pilot project offers immediate European added value, functional for cooperation in the field of maritime security in a high-risk environment. It supports the EU's strategic autonomy without duplicating NATO functions, strengthens the resilience of critical maritime infrastructure, and contributes to regional stability.

By facilitating implementation led by Member States under the strategic guidance of the EU, the pilot project reflects a pragmatic model of European security governance based on capability, subsidiarity, and cooperation.

7. Conclusion

The pilot project led by Romania offers a credible and timely path for transforming the Black Sea Maritime Security Center

Black Sea Maritime Security Center from a strategic concept into an operational reality. It demonstrates that European maritime security can be built through implementation, not just coordination. The pilot project is proposed as an inclusive, scalable, and results-oriented contribution to the Union's security objectives in the Black Sea region.

TECHNICAL ANNEX—Framework for the implementation of the pilot project for the Black Sea Maritime Security Center

A. Legal and institutional basis

The pilot project is established by a decision of the Romanian Government, which recognizes the project as a strategic national initiative with European relevance. The decision requires interinstitutional cooperation and authorizes data integration in accordance with applicable national and European legislation, including regulations on data protection, data, classified information, and critical infrastructure.

EU institutions are officially notified, and the pilot project is positioned as a voluntary contribution to the implementation of the EU's strategic approach to the Black Sea.

B. Integrator and management structure

The pilot project integrator is a **national pilot project implementation consortium** coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office. Operational management is provided by a dedicated project management unit with a fixed mandate.

The Defense Staff provides operational requirements and security standards. The Special Telecommunications Service ensures secure communications and system interoperability. The Ministry of Transport integrates port and maritime traffic systems. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages EU and regional relations.

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C. Operational components

The pilot project establishes a maritime security fusion cell based in Constanta, which initially operates during extended working hours and gradually transitions to continuous availability. The cell integrates maritime traffic data, surveillance information, satellite information, and infrastructure monitoring flows infrastructure.

Access to data is hierarchical, with a clear separation between national data sets, those that can be shared at EU level and restricted data sets. Civilian and military personnel operate in accordance with common procedures, but in separate areas of information.

D. Implementation stages

The first stage focuses on establishing governance, legal alignment, and finalizing the concept operational. The second stage ensures technical integration and initial operational capability. The third stage validates performance through exercises and stress tests. The fourth stage produces evaluation reports, lessons learned, and recommendations for EU-wide expansion.

E. Risk management

Identified risks include institutional resistance, data sharing constraints, cybersecurity threats, and policy discontinuity. Mitigation measures include high-level political oversight, robust legal frameworks, secure IT architecture, and early EU involvement.

F. Evaluation and transition

An independent evaluation is carried out at the end of the pilot. The results inform decisions on expansion, replication, or integration into a permanent European structure. Romania is committed to sharing lessons learned with EU partners.

G. Strategic outcome

The pilot project positions Romania as a capacity-based contributor to European security and provides the EU with a tested and adaptable model for maritime security centers in disputed regions.