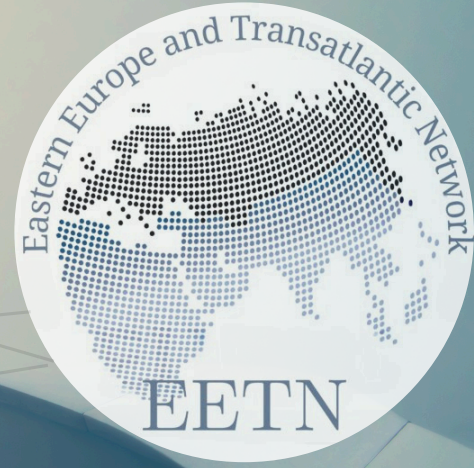


# POLICY BRIEF



## CANADA'S ROLE IN THE BLACK SEA: MINE COUNTERMEASURES AND BEYOND

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- Canada operates a **Mine Countermeasure Task Force** in the Black Sea alongside NATO countries
  - The mission is neutralizing dangerous ordnance in **critical shipping corridors** and **along shorelines**
- Canada is gaining **increased training** and **methods of cooperation** with NATO allies in a war zone
  - **Black Sea manoeuvres** offer critical lessons in multi-domain problems, demanding new ways to see naval operations

### The Black Sea: A Critical Global Transit Route under Threat

Canada provides expertise and equipment to the Mine Countermeasures (MCM) Black Sea operation. Operating from Constanta, Romania, MCM Black Sea unites Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye in efforts to clear their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of drifting mines, unexploded ordnance and armed and uncrewed surface/underwater vessels (USV, UUV).

MCM Black Sea emerged from an [MOU signed between Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye in January 2024](#) to ensure “the safety of maritime traffic against the threat of naval mines that have emerged in the Black Sea following the outbreak of the war that the Russian Federation started against Ukraine.” Between 100-200 mostly Ukrainian mines have become unmoored since 2022, threatening Black Sea shipping and shorelines of littoral states.

Canada joined MCM Black Sea in July 2024 at the invitation of the Romanian Ministry of Defence. Canada's participation highlights the global importance of the Black Sea. Ukrainian grain shipments through the sea [sustain its wartime economy](#) and feed the Global South. The European Union's new (May

2025) [Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region](#) notes its geostrategic importance and envisions a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub to protect shipping, infrastructure and the marine environment. Romania has offered to host this hub.

## Canada's Contributions and MCM Operations

Canada's contribution will last at least through 2025 as part of [Operation REASSURANCE](#). [The Royal Canadian Navy \(RCN\) team numbers 20 personnel](#). It includes a 12-person team of Clearance Divers functioning as Maritime Improvised and Conventional Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians and Sonar Operators who guide uncrewed underwater vehicles (UUVs). Logistics, medical and maritime engineering technicians offer specialist support. They operate at a high readiness state to enact immediate countermeasures against mines. Mines can breach hulls of military or civilian vessels or wash up on the shores of littoral states.

Canada works alongside the MCM Black Sea Fleet, where Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish minesweepers are accompanied by frigates. Canadian REMUS Autonomous Underwater Vehicle systems and teams are on standby to acquire subsurface contacts. They work on tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) with the Romanian Navy for contingency operations and conduct Historical Ordnance Disposal Operations, locating sea mines from previous conflicts. The United States assists MCM Black Sea with anti-submarine aircraft (capable of mine detection) and helicopters.

Over its most recent rotation, the RCN team has been instrumental in assisting Romanian counterparts in neutralizing historical ordnances and armed, uncrewed surface vessels, which had the potential to pose significant damage to large ships.

In addition to gaining active experience, Canada's presence in the MCM Black Sea has deepened relationships with the Romanian military, including improvements in interoperability and training. [Romania plays a critical role as a NATO hub in Southeast Europe and as a strong ally of Ukraine](#). Canada can use this mission as an entry point to a greater NATO role, focused on a country now seen as a [bulwark of stability in Southeast Europe](#).

## MCM Black Sea Challenges

Canada can use this deployment to act as an interlocutor between MCM Black Sea participants, each of which has taken different approaches to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Türkiye has acted as a professional partner in the MCM Black Sea. [It's navy rivals Russia's in strength](#). The country's presence, in what is billed as a humanitarian endeavor, has allowed the mission to avoid Russian objections. Türkiye's continued relationship with Russia in issues such as energy and trade, however, leads to [challenges over information-sharing and trust](#).

Bulgaria lacks naval capacity. It trails Romania in its focus on the Black Sea. Though it is set to make a [major purchase of Naval Strike Missiles from the United States](#), Türkiye's interest remains in maintaining the status quo in the Black Sea, where it acts as a gatekeeper through the [Montreux Convention](#). Romania and other littoral states fear a future where Russia expands its military advance on the Ukrainian coast, resulting in a de facto Black Sea partition between Russia and Turkey.

Canada's ability to use MCM Black Sea to increase its profile depends on its capacity—regionally and overall. MCM Black Sea shows the importance of recognizing multi-domain problems. US air support is critical to Canada's success. Security, trade and other issues intertwine and demand shared attention. Romania's navy and military, despite planned investment, are [underfunded and underequipped](#). Institutional bureaucracy and memory predates NATO membership, hampering efforts to build interoperability.

MCM Black Sea, though uniting NATO allies and being [promoted by NATO Maritime](#), is not an official NATO operation. Türkiye would not have acceded to a NATO action in the Black Sea for fear of damaging relations with Russia. Existing outside of NATO's umbrella could challenge political support for the mission in home countries.

## MCM Black Sea Potential

Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish cooperation, with the assistance of Canada and other NATO countries, can be a model for assisting a postwar settlement. Through MCM Black Sea, Canada is demonstrating capabilities and building trust. Cooperation with Romania in readiness and TTP's revealed through MCM Black Sea could grow to [cooperation in other contingency procedures](#).

Hundreds of mines will threaten the Black Sea trade and security corridor in coming years. Russia could also lay mines in shipping lanes. Demining can provide security for shipping that will certainly increase, given the [growing importance of the Middle Corridor](#) and once Odesa's port returns to full capacity. Romania's defence minister has expressed hope for MCM Black Sea to expand "[to include patrols to protect energy facilities and trade routes from potential Russian attack](#)." Romania is set to become the [largest exporter of natural gas in Europe with the development of new deepwater projects](#).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Extend the MCM Black Sea mission** and/or explore opportunities to leverage links with NATO allies
  - Shifts in US policy demand **new forms of leadership, maritime security and tactical links in a region critical to Canadian interests**, which can be applied more broadly in Europe and elsewhere
  - **Assist Romania** in its desire to improve naval security and defence
- Use MCM Black Sea to **revise conceptions of RCN operations**
  - **Remote and uncrewed systems** have had massive impacts on Black Sea littorals.
  - MCM Black Sea, while focused on mines, demonstrates the **ability to think and move laterally** around constraints—including, when traditional naval vessels cannot enter a combat zone
  - MCM Black Sea can trigger a movement towards **institutional reform to push capability** and elevate a force capable of moving rapidly to deliver effects via whatever means possible, **where multi-domain problems arise**
- Prepare for a robust presence in a **postwar settlement**, where Canada can **assist Ukrainian rebuilding**
- **Clearance Divers and Fleet Diving Units** can offer more than demining. At Odesa and other coastal ports, they could **clear obstructions and ordnance** in and around critical infrastructure