

FRANCE AND THE SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE **BLACK SEA** REGION



"France has begun re-engaging with the countries of Northern and Eastern Europe. This initiative must be sustained and enhanced, just as with France's commitment to European security, whether in the north, the south or the east, from the Baltic to the Black Sea."



A Dassault *Mirage 2000D* carrying out a mission in the Black Sea region



The French command and replenishment ship *Var*, which sailed from the naval base in Toulon on July 2020, is about to pass under the last Bosphorus Bridge before entering the Black Sea



Exercise between the French furtive light frigate *La Fayette* and a Bulgarian frigate, the *Drazki*, in the Black Sea off Bulgaria on March 2017 (French furtive light frigate *La Fayette* on the left)

A STRATEGIC REGION FOR FRANCE AND EUROPE

INCREASED TENSIONS SINCE 2014

An enclosed space of 420,000 square kilometres at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and southern Russia, **the Black Sea is shared by six bordering states:** Bulgaria, Romania (NATO and EU members), Turkey (a NATO member since 1952), Ukraine, Georgia (both aspiring to join the Alliance) and Russia. In recent years, **the region has seen a resurgence of tensions and new rivalries that led to a deterioration of the regional stability.**

The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the open conflict in Donbas have enabled Russia to strengthen its military hold over this space where it felt its influence was declining since the end of the USSR. This perception was reinforced by NATO's enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria in 2004, then by the recognition, in 2008, of Georgia's and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations at the Bucharest Summit.

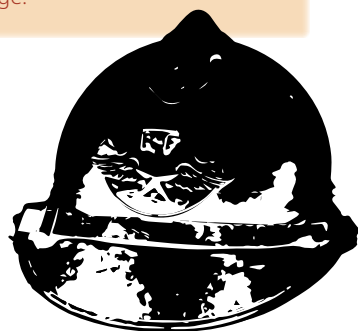
Tensions in the aftermath of the incident that occurred in November 2018 between the Russian and Ukrainian Navies in the Sea of Azov, linked to the Black Sea by the Kerch Strait, underline the importance of the Pontic space for Russia. Gateway to the Mediterranean Sea through the Turkish Straits, the Black Sea is **a privileged area where Russia is able to exercise and project its power**, especially since its intervention in Syria in September 2015. The Russian military buildup on the Sevastopol base (Crimea) translated into a stronger operational capacity and a better air-sea space control.

FRANCE IN THE BLACK SEA : BALANCING POWERS THROUGH HISTORY

In line with its intervention during the Crimea War (1853-1856), Paris has always sought to maintain the balance of power for the sake of stability and **to promote the right of the people to self-determination in the Black Sea region.** Against this backdrop, and in the face of the Triple Alliance's advances during World War I, France sent a Military Assistance Mission under General Berthelot in the non-occupied part of Romania. The latter took part in **the rebuilding and training of the Romanian Armed Forces**, in which 430 French officers and 1,500 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were appointed as advisers and trainers. In support to Bucharest, Paris then provided advanced military equipment and medical teams to Romania.

A large majority of the French dead from the Crimean War (around 95,000) and the Armée d'Orient (around 70,000), which had put the Central Empires in difficulty in 1918, now lie in the region's cemeteries and are the subject of historic cooperation between France and the countries bordering the Black Sea to honour their memory.

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, France welcomed several thousand refugees from the former Russian empire and, after the Red Army invasion of Georgia in February 1921, **the exiled Georgian Government** officially took refuge in Leuville-sur-Orge.





MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS AND AREAS OF TENSION IN THE BLACK SEA



ENERGY HUB FOR EUROPE



3 MILLION BARRELS OF OIL
PER DAY TRANSIT
THROUGH THE REGION

8 GAS PIPELINES
RUN THROUGH THE REGION

At the heart of **energy security challenges**, the Black Sea region is a **transit zone of strategic importance** for both importing countries of Central and Eastern Europe and producing countries like Russia or Azerbaijan, or, more broadly, Caspian region countries.

Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits are among the most important maritime passages of the world, with 3 million barrels of oil from Russia, Ukraine and the Caspian Basin transiting through them on a daily basis. Free movement through the straits and in the Black Sea is guaranteed by the Montreux Convention signed in 1936 by the riparian countries of the Black Sea (Turkey, USSR, Romania, Bulgaria) and European countries (France, the United Kingdom, Greece, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).

Since the early 2000s, **Russia-Ukraine crises have redrawn the map of hydrocarbon transport networks**. The volume of gas transiting through Ukraine has been gradually decreasing (its share went from 80% to about 35 % of the Russian gas deliveries to Europe) and the epicenter of the gas transit has moved from Ukraine to Turkey, southeastern Europe and the Baltic region. This is due, in part, to Russia's willingness to bypass the Ukrainian territory, northerly with the **Nord Stream 1 and 2** gas pipelines, and southerly with the TurkStream. The European Union also seeks to reduce its gas dependency on Russia: for this purpose, it supports projects aiming at diversifying its supply sources and routes, notably the **TANAP** and **TAP** gas pipelines that convey the Azerbaijan gas to southeastern Europe through the Turkish territory. **Turkey's geographical position**, at the crossroads of hydrocarbon-rich regions (Russia, Central Asia, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean) and consuming European countries makes it a hub for importing and producing countries. **Eastern and south-eastern European countries are at the heart of the struggles for influence and the competition between the European and Russian projects**. Lastly, 70 % of potential natural gas deposits of the Black Sea would be concentrated on two sites: **"Neptune Deep"** and **"Trident"**, located in the Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) around Crimea.

NATO'S INITIATIVES FOR ALLIES AND PARTNERS OF THE REGION

An area of prime interest since **NATO Wales Summit in 2014**, the Black Sea region benefits from the Alliance's **assurance and adaptation measures**, but also, since the 2016 Warsaw Summit, from the **tailored Forward Presence ([tFP])**. In this framework, Allies deploy land, maritime and air capabilities on a rotational basis. The land component is built around a multinational brigade under Multinational Division Southeast in Romania and a Multinational Army Corps Headquarter created in Romania in 2020. The Combined Joint Enhanced Training Initiative aims for its part at coordinating the multinational training and guaranteeing the regular presence of the Allies. Thanks to air assets deployed to Romania and Bulgaria and a naval presence in the Black Sea, **the Allies participate in the protection of the Alliance's air and maritime spaces**.

As part of NATO Initiative for **Interoperability with its partners**, which aims at maintaining and deepening cooperation between Allies and partners having made significant contributions to NATO-led operations and missions, Georgia was granted in 2014 **the enhanced Opportunity Partner ([eOP]) status**. Ukraine has benefiting from the same status since 12 June 2020.

PARTNERS COMMITTED TO EUROPEANS' SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL STABILITY

France shares with its partners of the Black Sea numerous strategic interests which translate into common engagements on many theatres, especially on the Alliance's southern flank. Today, all the countries bordering the Black Sea are engaged in Africa or the Levant.

Ukraine is the first eastern European country contributing to UN missions in terms of personnel deployed, with more than 300 military and civilians in 9 peacekeeping missions.

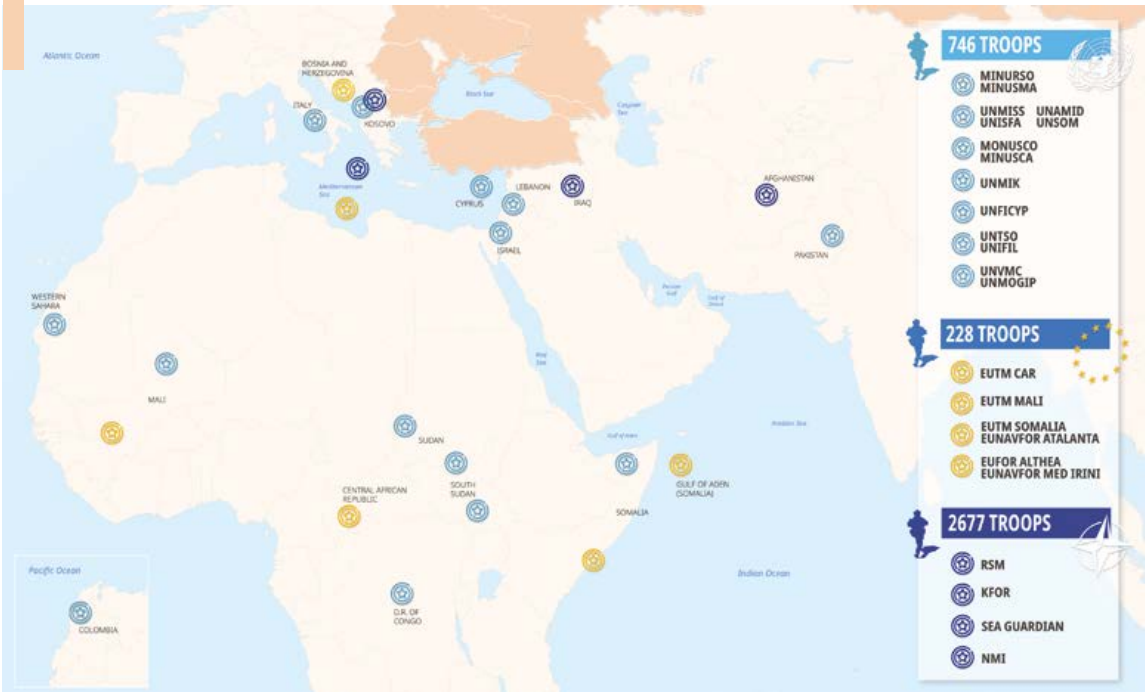
Romania provides essential support to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) with the deployment of its helicopters since autumn 2019. It has also deployed 12 staff to EUTM CAR (half of whom being French-speaking staff) and 10 staff to the International Coalition in Iraq.

Georgia, for its part, has been engaged in Central African Republic alongside the Europeans within the framework of the CSDP (EUTM CAR), and it deploys a French-speaking officer within the EUTM in Mali.

Turkey is today the second contributor to the EU EUFOR Althea mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina with 140 staff deployed. Ankara also participates in the UNIFIL (79 military deployed).

Lastly, Bulgaria is engaged in an arms transfer process to African countries and has recently deployed military staff in the EU operations (8 in EUFOR Althea and 4 in EUTM Mali).

BLACK SEA COUNTRIES ENGAGED IN EXTERNAL OPERATIONS



FRANCE'S COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL STABILITY

FRANCE, A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC ACTOR IN THE REGION

Committed to strategic stability in the Black Sea, France plays a major role in the diplomatic efforts to resolve regional conflicts, especially in Georgia and Ukraine. In 2008, the French mediation as part of the European Council Presidency had made it possible to put an end to hostilities between Tbilisi and Moscow and had paved the way for international discussions in Geneva. Co-chaired by the EU, the UN and the OSCE, they are up to now the only forum gathering all the parties to the conflict. France participates in the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) patrolling in the areas adjacent to the South Ossetian and Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Lines. Regarding the conflict in the Donbas region, France is involved alongside Germany within the Normandy Format to which Russia and Ukraine are also parties that aims at implementing the Minsk agreements. The first Normandy Format Summit since the Berlin Summit in October 2016 was held on 9 December 2019 in Paris. The parties committed to concrete measures in order to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone and reinvigorate the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

A STRATEGIC AND PROSPECTIVE REVIEW ON THE BLACK SEA

The Foundation for Strategic Research (FSR) was tasked to carry out a Strategic and Prospective Review on the Black Sea, funded by the DGRIS. This review ensures a broad monitoring of themes related to the region by publishing analysis reports, and by organising conferences on the actors' strategies, as well as the geopolitical, security and energy challenges.

REVIVING THE DIALOGUE WITH RUSSIA – COOPERATION COUNCIL ON SECURITY ISSUES

The 12th session of the Cooperation Council on Security Issues (created in 2002) took place on 9 September 2019 in Moscow in the presence of the French and Russian Ministers for the Armed Forces and Foreign Affairs. This session, on the initiative of the French President, made it possible to resume a dialogue interrupted since 2014 (the last meeting had been held in 2012). France intends to place the resumption of a lucid and challenging dialogue conducted with a view to protecting our interests and those of our Allies and partners within a logic of openness and firmness towards Moscow. This dialogue should make it possible to lay the groundwork for a future trust and security architecture in Europe, in line with the principles of the OSCE.

 **6 RIPARIAN STATES**
BULGARIA, GEORGIA,
ROMANIA, RUSSIA, TURKEY, UKRAINE

 **1 STRATEGIC AND PROSPECTIVE REVIEW**
CARRIED OUT BY THE FSR

 **NEARLY 30000 FRENCH NATIONALS**

 **5 DEFENCE MISSIONS AND 1 NON-RESIDENCE**

SUPPORT TO COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW OF THE SEA AND THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION IN THE REGION

France is in the front line defending the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. While tensions have risen in the Sea of Azov, whose status has been disputed since the Annexation of Crimea, France underlined its commitment to international law at all levels (UN, EU, national, and in common statements with Germany) so that all vessels benefit from the free passage through the Kerch Strait and freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov. Paris called for the release of the Ukrainian sailors taken prisoner when their three warships were seized by Russia in November 2018, and for the restitution of the vessels (which was effective late 2019).

MONTREUX CONVENTION

The Montreux Convention, officially called the Convention concerning the Regime of Straits, is an international agreement that came into force on 9 November 1936. It still determines today the exercise of freedom of movement in the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits, as well as in the Black Sea. This convention therefore regulates the passage of warships and submarines through the Straits in peace times. The Article 18 of the convention notably limits the total tonnage of the warships of non-riparian States in the Black Sea and their length of stay (21 days).



AN ENHANCED FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE TO MAINTAIN SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA

REINFORCED BILATERAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In parallel with its role in the resolution of crises affecting the region, France has developed its defence cooperation with partner countries. This cooperation is varied (mine clearance, equipment transfer, mountain training, stopovers of French vessels or arms control, etc.) and reflects France's commitment to stability in the Black Sea. With five defence missions (Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey and Romania) and one non-residence (Bulgaria) in countries bordering the Black Sea, France is developing a **mutually beneficial structured military cooperation** like in Georgia with the creation from scratch of the Sachkhere Mountain Training School.

SACHKHERE MOUNTAIN TRAINING SCHOOL

Created in 2006, this pole of expertise is an **unprecedented initiative**. As an evidence of the quality of the teaching provided, it was awarded **the official status of NATO 'Partnership for Peace training centre and centre of excellence'** in 2010. Numerous projects are ongoing in the field of mountain combat and shooting training. The acquisition of tactical processes strengthens the ability of Georgian defence forces to protect the land borders of the country. In the long run, the joint training of mountain specialists will contribute to the **deployment of mixed teams on theatres of operations**.

France maintains close relationships with Bulgaria and Romania within the framework of the EU and NATO. In the last years, **our strategic dialogue with Bucharest was significantly strengthened**, notably at the '2+2' format meetings involving the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministries. The military cooperation with Romania was consolidated, especially on common theatres of operations such as in the Sahel where Romania carried out key missions, notably within the MINUSMA. Turkey facilitated our deployments in the area by hosting stopovers of the French Navy. **Our defence relationship has also deepened with Sofia**, especially during the Bulgarian EU Presidency where both our countries cooperated to develop new European Defence initiatives.

Strategic dialogues have been organised with Ukraine and Georgia, respectively since 2006 and 2019. They provide a formalised discussion framework enabling to consolidate our military and strategic partnerships. **In April 2019, France hosted the first French-Georgian strategic dialogue**. In December 2019, it organised **the first French-Georgian Dimitri Amilakhvari structured dialogue** (after the name of an officer of the Foreign Legion of Georgian origin, killed in action in the 1942 battle of El-Alamein), an annual French-Georgian meeting aimed at reviewing our cooperation.

By helping to reform the Armed Forces and modernise the Georgian and Ukrainian defence tools, France underlines even more its support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of these countries, which face territorial conflicts (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Donbas) and hybrid threats.



COMMITMENT OF THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES TO THE SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA

Willing to help Ukraine in general, and its Navy in particular, the French Navy, despite severe operational constraints on other theatres, has contributed to enhance stability in the Black Sea by conducting **5 stopovers in Odessa since 2015**, therefore placing France among the first partner countries. In addition, two Passex exercises in 2019 and the taking of young cadets of the Naval Academy on board French units in 2017 and 2019 allowed to strengthen the Ukrainian preparation state and naval capacities. Furthermore, the French Navy sends every two years an observing officer **to the NATO exercise Sea Breeze** which is jointly organised by the American and Ukrainian Navies.

In Romania, the Ministry for the Armed Forces wishes to **keep the goal of at least 3 stopovers each year**, which provide major opportunities to conduct exercises jointly with the Romanian Navy and enhance our interoperability. In **Bulgaria**, France took part in 2018 and 2019 in exercise Breeze with the deployment of a vessel and has made **9 stopovers** since 2014. In **Georgia**, the French Navy carried out a dozen stopovers in Batumi since 2014.

France leads the air defence component under the umbrella of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package granted to Tbilisi by NATO in 2014 and therefore accompanies Georgia in the modernisation of her defence tool. It also strengthens the interoperability of the Georgian Armed Forces with those of NATO by participating in the multinational exercise Noble Partner in Georgia.

FRANCE IN THE TFP SINCE THE WARSAW SUMMIT: LAND, SEA AND AIR COMPONENTS

As part of the Alliance's reassurance measures, **4,000 French troops are deployed each year on the Alliance's eastern flank**. France actively contributes to the maritime and air components of the tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea. In addition to the tFP, France is present within the different structures and headquarters. If France does not yet participate directly in the land component of the tFP of the Multinational Brigade, it contributes to the animation of the different structures and headquarters in the region at multilateral or bilateral level, notably in the NATO command in Romania (Bucharest and Sibiu) and Turkey (Izmir).

Beyond these engagements, French interests are increasingly aligned with those of the European and Eastern European states. **Convergence of threats to Europe, notably terrorism, and the common strategic priorities bring forth progressively shared interests.**





**MORE THAN 30
STOPOVERS SINCE 2014**

**125 DAYS AT SEA FROM
2017 TO 2019**

**100 DAYS AT SEA
PLANNED IN 2020**

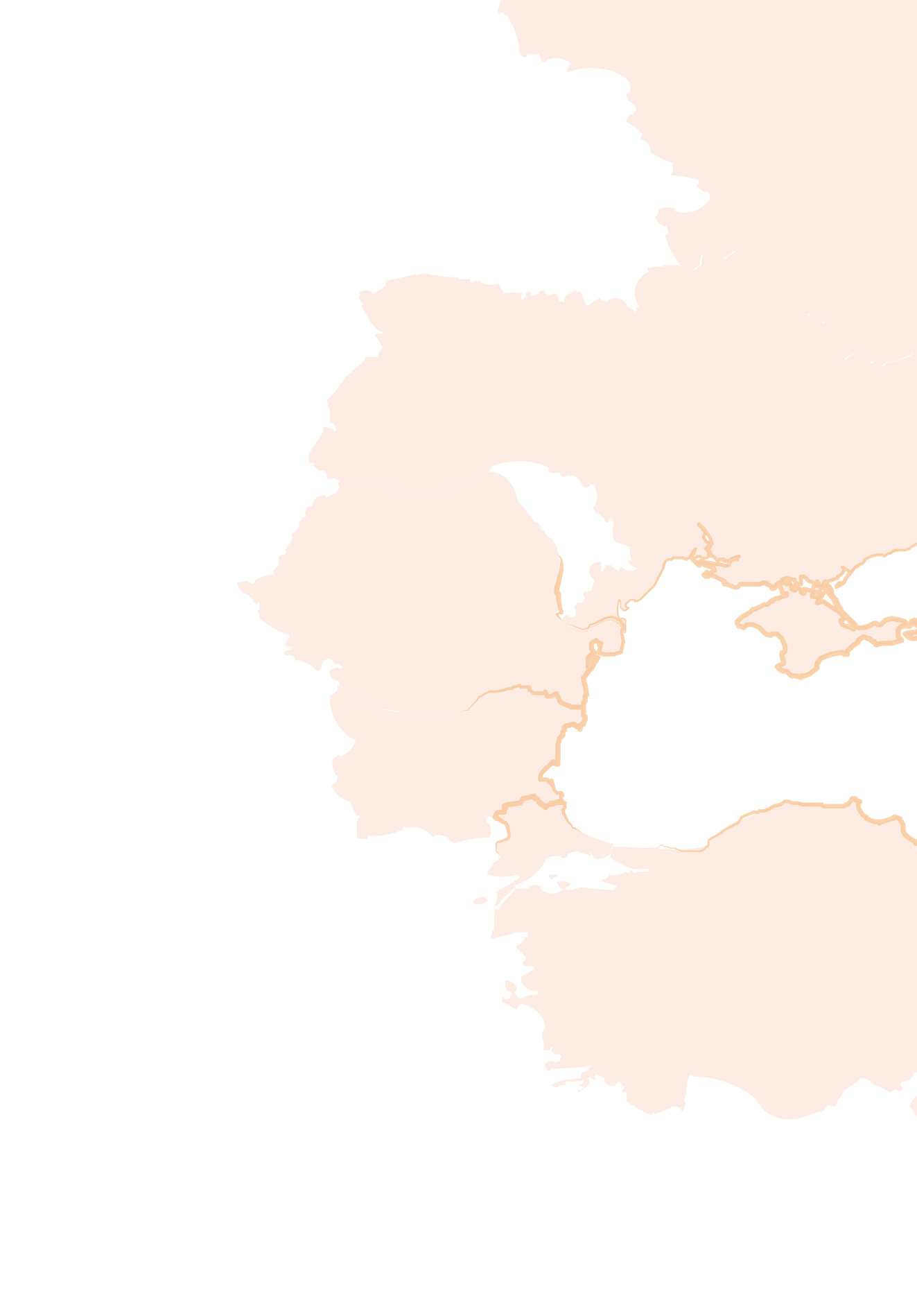


**8 FLIGHTS OF ATLANTIC 2 A
YEAR ON AVERAGE SINCE 2019**

**6 TO 7 AWACS FLIGHTS
A YEAR SINCE 2018**

**1 ATLANTIC 2 MISSION
IN AUGUST 2020**







Exercise between the French furtive light frigate *La Fayette* and the Romanian frigate *Hora Macellariu* in the Black Sea on march 2017 (French furtive light frigate *La Fayette* in the foreground)



The French furtive light frigate *La Fayette* crosses the Bosphorus Strait on april 2017, at the entrance to the strait, a large number of merchant ships are waiting their turn for the crossing



A French radar aircraft E-3F (Awacs) used in a mission over the Black Sea



Editorial Board

Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy

Alice Guitton (Director General)

Olivier Landour (Director for Europe, North America and Multilateral Affairs Office)

Adeline Braux (Desk officer for Russia and South Caucasus)

Camille Coatalem-Serikoff (Desk officer for Russia and Eastern Europe)

Jules Subervie (Desk officer for Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus)

Sylvie Lesage (Translation)

Editing and Graphics : **Ninaï Fofana and Julie Azoula**

Photographic credits : (2nd cover) © Sandra Auguste/French Air Force ; Enzo Lemesle/French Navy/Armed Forces ; François Bogaert/Marine Nationale/Defence. (3rd cover) © François Bogaert/French Navy/Armed Forces ; Christophe Kelsen/French Air Forces.

With the participation of the French Defence Staff

© DGRIS - September 2020

www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris