

## Russia's Naval Expansion in the Black Sea

The recent announcement of a Russian naval base in Ochamchire, Abkhazia has intensified concerns about regional security, economic stability, and Georgia's sovereignty. While Russia claims this expansion is a strategic necessity following Ukrainian attacks on its Black Sea fleet, Georgia and its Western allies see it as a direct violation of international law and a further entrenchment of Russian influence in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea.

### Capabilities of Ochamchire Port

Ochamchire, located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea in the Abkhazia region, has historically functioned as a modest port facility. Initially built during the Soviet era, it served as a military base for submarines during World War II. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the port's significance diminished, leaving it largely underutilized except for regional maritime activities.



In 2009, Russia announced plans to establish a naval base at Ochamchire. However, only smaller vessels, such as patrol boats of the Federal Security Service (FSB), were stationed there. The port saw minor upgrades in 2017, allowing it to accommodate Coast Guard vessels. Additionally, in 2009, dredging operations increased the port's depth from 3.8 to 9 meters, allowing it to accommodate ships with a displacement of up to 10,000 tons.

Russia's renewed focus on the port began after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Satellite imagery from 2022 onward has shown continued construction, dredging, and expansion efforts at the port. Recent reports suggest that Russia aims to transform Ochamchire into a more capable logistics hub, potentially supporting military and commercial activities. Abkhazia's de facto authorities have also expressed interest in the project, considering it an economic opportunity.

## Ukraine focuses attacks on Russian Black Sea Fleet

Ukraine is attempting to sink or severely damage Russian warships with unmanned maritime vehicles of "Magura V5" and "Sea Baby" types

In two years, Ukraine has destroyed or damaged a total of 27 ships and boats belonging to the Russian Black Sea Fleet



## Russia's Strategic Rationale

Russia has been searching for alternative naval outposts since Ukrainian forces severely damaged its assets in Crimea. The Black Sea remains one of the most contested maritime zones, and Moscow's move to establish a permanent presence in Ochamchire aligns with its broader goal of fortifying its positions against NATO's increasing role in the region.

### 1. Military Implications: An Alternative to Crimea?

Satellite imagery confirms that construction activities have increased at the port, hinting at dredging operations and infrastructure expansion to accommodate larger vessels. Although the base currently lacks the capacity to host major warships, continued modernization efforts suggest an ambition to develop Ochamchire into a logistical and refueling hub.



Beyond its military function, Ochamchire is poised to become a crucial hub for bypassing Western sanctions. Since the U.S. and EU imposed restrictions on Russian exports, Moscow has been actively seeking alternative trade routes, **deepening** economic ties with Turkey, and **using** Abkhazia as a transit point for goods that would otherwise face sanctions.

**Turkey's Balancing Act:** Ankara has maintained economic ties with Russia despite being a NATO member. A functional port in Ochamchire could **enable** the rerouting of sanctioned goods through Turkish intermediaries.

**Energy Exports:** Given that EU restrictions limit Russian oil exports, a Black Sea route through Abkhazia provides another avenue for discreet shipments.

## Georgia's Strategic Dilemma



### 1. The Impact on Georgia's Black Sea Security

For Georgia, the presence of a Russian naval base so close to its sovereign territory is a direct threat. This move further solidifies Russia's hold on Abkhazia, which has been under Russian control since the 2008 war.

**Potential NATO Response:** As NATO **increases** its presence in the Black Sea, a Russian base in Ochamchire could heighten the risk of military confrontations.

**Impact on Georgia's Military Strategy:** Georgia, which aspires to NATO membership, faces an uphill battle in securing its territorial waters against Russian expansion.

## 2. Economic Risks: The Middle Corridor and Anaklia

**Georgia's Middle Corridor Initiative**, a key alternative trade route connecting Europe and Central Asia, could face disruption if Russia's naval presence intimidates investors and shipping companies.

**The Anaklia Deep-Sea Port**, which was meant to boost Georgia's strategic importance as a trade hub, now faces uncertainty, with Western investors hesitant to commit to a project so close to a militarized Russian outpost.

### Policy Recommendations

#### 1. Enhancing Diplomatic Efforts

Georgia must strengthen diplomatic ties with NATO and EU partners, advocating for stronger deterrence policies against Russian military expansion.

Increased engagement with Turkey is essential to ensure that Russian trade routes via Abkhazia remain restricted.

#### 2. Strengthening Maritime Security

NATO and the U.S. should increase naval patrols in the Black Sea, ensuring that Russia does not expand its military footprint unchecked.

Georgia should invest in coastal defense systems to deter any potential maritime incursions.

#### 3. Economic Countermeasures

The West and international financial institutions must accelerate funding for the Anaklia Port, reinforcing its position as an alternative to Russian-controlled Black Sea routes.

Security guarantees should be increased for investors in Georgia's Middle Corridor to prevent economic isolation.

### Conclusion

! Russia's expansion into Ochamchire is not just a military maneuver – it is a strategic chess move with economic and geopolitical consequences. While the port is not yet a fully operational naval base, its development signals Moscow's intent to reshape the Black Sea power balance. The international response – particularly from NATO, the EU, and regional allies – will be crucial in shaping future stability in the Black Sea region.