Germany's Black Sea Policy Stops Short of Georgia

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Gas bought by a German state-owned company already crosses Georgia, yet the documents in which Berlin sets out its Black Sea interests do not mention the country. Since 2025 Securing Energy for Europe (SEFE) has been buying Azerbaijani gas under a ten-year contract for up to 1.5 billion cubic metres a year. The gas reaches Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor, which begins with the pipeline across Georgian territory.[1] Over the past year the Federal Foreign Office has declared the Black Sea back on the strategic map, the Franco-German Defence and Security Council has set out its security priorities, and Berlin has agreed a connectivity declaration with the five Central Asian states. None of these texts names Georgia or the eastern shore of the Black Sea.[2] [3] [4] What Berlin has instead is a set of measures taken in response to democratic backsliding. None of them states what would have to change for the measures to end.

1. WHAT HAPPENED

On 11 February 2026 Germany and the five Central Asian states adopted the Berlin Declaration. It describes the Trans-Caspian Corridor as a multimodal transport link between Central Asia and Europe, and Germany has contributed 2.7 million euro to the corridor's coordination platform. The declaration names neither Georgia nor the South Caucasus nor the Black Sea.[2] At the Kiel Security Conference on 19 June 2026 Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said that the Black Sea had returned to the strategic map of Western countries and called it a contested battlespace. He named no country on its eastern shore.[3] In Toulon at the end of August 2025 the Franco-German Defence and Security Council had announced a joint input paper on the Black Sea region, to be drafted by a working group of both foreign ministries.[5] The paper has not been published. The Council's conclusions of 17 July 2026 deal with Ukraine and with Iran, including the Strait of Hormuz, and do not mention the Black Sea.[4]

The European framework developed over the same period. In May 2025 the Union replaced the Black Sea Synergy with a strategic approach, and in July 2026 it reported on its implementation. Georgia appears in the connectivity chapters, as a natural transit corridor whose role depends on steps taken by its authorities. It does not appear in the security part. The main security project, a Maritime Security Hub in Constanța and Varna, was presented by Romania and Bulgaria as a joint concept in June 2026. The strategic approach relies on existing budget lines and has no financial instrument of its own.[6]

Georgia was also kept away from the table. Its foreign minister was not invited to the cross-regional ministerial on security and connectivity in Luxembourg on 20 October 2025. According to the Georgian foreign ministry, the European External Action Service offered participation at ambassador level, which Tbilisi called unacceptable and declined. The High Representative later stated that Georgia had not been invited.[7]

The measures Berlin has taken are addressed to the government. In December 2024 the development ministry stopped planned projects with the Georgian state worth 237 million euro, among them water infrastructure in Batumi, energy networks and green hydrogen. Support for civil society continued.[8] Berlin recalled its ambassador for consultations in October 2025, and in March 2026 the Commission suspended visa-free travel for holders of Georgian diplomatic, service and official passports.[9] Since the summer both countries have new ambassadors in place, and the Georgian government speaks of a reset.[10]

2. WHAT IT MEANS

Table 1 shows that the omission follows a pattern. Where the subject is connectivity, Georgia is named and its role is made conditional. Where the subject is security, Georgia is absent. Where the subject is the route from the Caspian to Europe, the documents pass from one end of the route to the other without naming the countries in between. The pattern reflects the instruments each institution has at hand and does not follow from any decision taken about Georgia. Its effect is that Georgia's coast lies outside the planning in which German interests are defined.

Table 1. Documents and meetings on the Black Sea and connectivity since May 2025, and the place of Georgia in them

DATE	DOCUMENT OR MEETING	GEORGIA
28 May 2025	EU strategic approach to the Black Sea region	Named in the connectivity part, role conditional
29 August 2025	Franco-German Defence and Security Council, Toulon	Black Sea named, Georgia not named
20 October 2025	Cross-regional ministerial in Luxembourg	Foreign minister not invited
11 February 2026	Berlin Declaration with Central Asia	Not named
15 June 2026	Concept for the Maritime Security Hub	Not named
19 June 2026	Speech at the Kiel Security Conference	Not named
3 July 2026	EU implementation report on the Black Sea	Named in the connectivity part only
17 July 2026	Franco-German Defence and Security Council, Nörvenich	Not named, Black Sea not mentioned

Sources: notes 2 to 7.

Georgia's transit value has risen because of wars fought elsewhere, and it will not stay at its present level. After drone attacks on tankers at the Caspian Pipeline Consortium terminal near Novorossiysk in July 2026, Tengizchevroil sent part of its crude by rail to Batumi: about 20,000 tonnes in July and a planned 100,000 tonnes in August. The pipeline itself carries around 70 million tonnes a year.[11] The volumes were small, but they showed what the route can be used for. Alternatives are being built at the same time. Armenia's parliament ratified the framework agreement on the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) on 28 October 2026, and Turkey has begun restoring the line from Kars towards Gyumri.[12] Once both are in operation, freight from the Caspian will be able to reach Turkey, and from there Europe, without crossing Georgia. Georgia will keep its ports, which offer the shortest sea link from the South Caucasus to the EU ports of Constanța and Varna. Its advantage as a land bridge is real but limited in time. The government in Tbilisi has so far acted as if it were permanent.

Every instrument Berlin has used so far runs through the Georgian government: development funding, the ambassador, visa rules. Part of the route could also be secured on the European side. Since July 2025 German authorities have asked tankers sailing east through the Fehmarn Belt for proof of insurance against oil pollution. Irregularities can lead to action by the flag state and to listing.[13] The measure works because the waters are German. The Union has no such waters in the eastern Black Sea, but it has means that do not depend on Tbilisi. When ships were attacked off Bulgaria in October 2026, it supplied satellite imagery to Bulgaria and Romania at their request.[14] It can check the origin of oil products at its own ports, and it can attach conditions to projects it funds, such as the submarine cable that is to land at Anaklia. No measure of this kind has been proposed for the eastern basin.

Russia is pursuing its own projects on the same coast, at a time when Europe is present there mainly through sanctions and one cable project. A Russian-backed terminal at Gali, in occupied Abkhazia, is intended to route regional freight to Russia.[15] Levan Davitashvili, economy minister until June 2025, became chair of the supervisory board of the company building the refinery at Kulevi three months later. In July 2026 the Union imposed a transaction ban on that refinery.[16] The evidence points less to Russian direction of Georgian policy than to commercial ties within the governing elite that make the coast available to Russian interests.

Oversight of these routes depends on organisations that Berlin funds and Tbilisi restricts. Of 114 regional community organisations active in 2024, only 37 were still working in 2025. Since March 2026 foreign grants have required government consent, and receiving them without consent is a criminal offence.[17] Customs data, company registers and public reporting are only as reliable as the people able to check them, so the pressure on civil society also affects the infrastructure. It runs against the wishes of most Georgians, 71 per cent of whom supported EU accession in early 2026.[18]

There is a case for Berlin's restraint. Any offer addressed to Georgia could be presented in Tbilisi as a reward, and the Union has deliberately tied Georgia's role to the conduct of its authorities. The argument applies to budget support, security cooperation and political upgrading. It does not apply to satellite monitoring, vessel tracking or checks on the origin of crude and oil products, since none of these needs Georgian consent. Berlin has so far used none of them for the eastern basin.

3. WHAT TO WATCH

Three dates and one missing document will show whether the gap narrows.

Kulevi. The transaction ban on the Kulevi refinery applies from 25 January 2027. The operator says the plant has processed only non-Russian crude since 23 August 2026 and has asked to be removed from the list.[19] Whether the Union requires independently verified evidence of origin before it lifts the ban will show how far measures aimed at assets, and not at governments, reach in practice.

The budget. The Maritime Security Hub has no funding of its own until the multiannual financial framework for 2028 to 2034 is agreed, and the Chancellor has said he aims for agreement before the end of 2026. The negotiation will show whether the Hub receives a budget line and whether its work extends to the eastern basin.[20]

The next Black Sea report. On last year's timing, a further implementation report would follow in summer 2027. It will show whether Georgia appears in the security part or again only under connectivity.[6]

The Franco-German paper. It was announced in August 2025 and has still not appeared. It would be the first German government text to define an interest on the eastern shore, and its absence is at present the clearest measure of how little the subject has advanced in Berlin.[5]

The new ambassadors and the talk of a reset have not changed this picture. A reset announced without stated conditions would leave the position where it has been since December 2024, with Berlin having said what it will not do and not what it wants.

NOTES

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