

## Russian Navy Vessel Spotted at New "Base" in Abkhazia



Sister ship Vasily Bekh, which was sunk by Ukraine in 2022 (Russian Ministry of Defense)

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The Russian-backed government of Abkhazia, Georgia appears to have just hosted its first Russian Navy vessel, according to satellite imagery released by naval analyst H.I. Sutton. The development means that Russia now has access to another port on the eastern edge of the Black Sea, farther from the risk of a Ukrainian drone strike.

Abkhazia is a Moscow-aligned breakaway region created during the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia. That year, after NATO signaled that it would consider Georgia's application to join, Russian forces intervened in support of ethnic separatist groups in the border regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. After several months of Russian preparation, the hostilities were over in two weeks. After the brief clash was over, the

Russian Army cemented its presence on the ground with permanent base infrastructure.

In October 2023, as the Black Sea Fleet was looking for alternatives to the vulnerable port of Sevastopol, the head of Abkhazia's Russian-funded government announced that there would be a new Russian Navy base at the small port of Ochamchire. This site is technically on the territory of the nation of Georgia, according to the internationally-recognized Georgian government, which objected strenuously. (Only five nations recognize Abkhazia as an independent state.)

Despite Georgia's protests, the first full-size Russian Navy vessel appears to have moored at Ochamchire. According to H.I. Sutton, a Project 22870 rescue tug disappeared from satellite imagery of Novorossiysk on July 1 and reappeared at the Georgian port on July 5, possibly carrying missile tubes on her back deck.

While termed a "rescue tug," these vessels have carried military supplies for Russian units before; one of these tugs, the Vasily Bekh, was sunk by Ukrainian forces using anti-ship missiles in June 2022.