



The Black Sea flank: three drones in three days

Romania shot down a drone over the Black Sea, the third in three days to violate its airspace. After years of absorbing incursions, a NATO member is now firing.

INCIDENT DETAILS • 5WH

Who Actor - Russia. Romania attributed the incursions and summoned its ambassador. Casualties - none.

What A Romanian F-16 shot down a drone that had violated Romanian - and therefore NATO - airspace: the third shoot-down in three days.

Where Over the Black Sea, in Romanian territorial waters about 12 km north-east of Sulina, at the mouth of the Danube.

When Sunday 26 July 2026; entered airspace about 10:08, neutralised 10:13.

Why Likely a deliberate test of NATO and EU air defences and reaction times.

How Radar detected the drone outside Romanian airspace; an F-16 under NATO command downed it five minutes later.

IMPACT

- Human/physical: no casualties; drones brought down over uninhabited ground and territorial waters.
- Operational: a demonstrated shift to active interception on NATO's south-eastern flank.
- Reputational: each incursion forces a choice between absorbing a violation and firing.
- Adversary gain: deniable, low-cost pressure that maps detection and reaction and ties down air policing.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

A A 650 km border with Ukraine along the Danube

B 24 Jul 2026: the first shoot-down

C 25 Jul 2026: the second

1 Radar detects the drone outside Romanian airspace

2 F-16 scrambled under NATO command

3 10:08: the drone crosses into Romanian airspace

4 10:13: neutralised over territorial waters

5 Russia's ambassador summoned

ASSESSMENT, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Repetition is the message - three in three days is a pattern, not an accident.
- Firing is now the norm on this flank, which raises the debris and escalation question.
- The cost exchange still favours the prober - cheap airframes against fast jets.
- It is a realistic possibility that further incursions test the same threshold.