

Original article

Sea-Air CO₂ Flux in the Northeastern Part of the Black Sea

N. A. Orekhova *, E. V. Medvedev, I. N. Mukoseev, A. V. Garmashov

Marine Hydrophysical Institute of RAS, Sevastopol, Russia

* e-mail: natalia.orekhova@mhi-ras.ru

Abstract

Carbon dioxide is one of the green gases and its entry into the atmosphere and further redistribution in the waters of the World Ocean not only plays a significant role in the climate on the Earth, but also affects the characteristics of waters. The research of inland seas, e.g. the Black Sea, makes it possible to study the influence of atmospheric CO₂ on the characteristics of waters and to assess the contribution of regional ecosystems to the total budget of the CO₂ flux of the World Ocean. The paper presents numerical estimates of the sea–air CO₂ flux, analyzes its direction and identifies factors that determine the values of the CO₂ flux in the northeastern part of the Black Sea during a cold period. For the analysis, the data obtained during the cruise of R/V *Professor Vodyanitsky* in December 2022 were used. The values of the sea–air flux of carbon dioxide were calculated taking into account the wind speed and pCO₂ gradient between the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere. According to the direct measurements of pCO₂, the value of the CO₂ flux in December 2022 varied widely from –0.05 to –8.74 mmol·m⁻²·day⁻¹, the average value being –2.11 ± 1.79 mmol·m⁻²·day⁻¹. It was established that during the cold season, the CO₂ flux was directed from the atmosphere to the sea surface. Thus, the waters of the Crimean coast serve as a stock of atmospheric CO₂. Local minima of flux values were observed in the southeastern regions of the Crimean coast. When analyzing the correlation of the CO₂ flux with temperature, wind speed and ΔpCO₂, the strongest relationship was found with wind speed (–0.93), while the weakest one was with ΔpCO₂ (0.22). Therefore, the intensity of the sea–air CO₂ flux was determined by wind speed, while the direction of the flux was determined by ΔpCO₂. The temperature contribution manifested as change in the concentration of CO₂ in the water column.

Keywords: CO₂ flux, Black Sea, carbon dioxide, partial pressure of carbon dioxide, carbon cycle

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Поток CO₂ на границе с атмосферой в северо-восточной части Черного моря

Н. А. Орехова *, Е. В. Медведев, И. Н. Мукошеев, А. В. Гармашов

Морской гидрофизический институт РАН, Севастополь, Россия

* e-mail: natalia.orekhova@mhi-ras.ru

Аннотация

Углекислый газ является одним из климатообразующих веществ, его поступление в атмосферу и дальнейшее перераспределение в водах Мирового океана играют значительную роль в формировании климата на Земле и влияют на характеристики вод. Изучение внутренних морей, таких как Черное море, позволяет исследовать влияние атмосферного CO₂ на характеристики вод и оценить вклад региональных экосистем в общий бюджет CO₂ вод Мирового океана. В работе приведены количественные оценки потока CO₂ на границе с атмосферой, проанализирована его направленность, выделены факторы, определяющие величину потока CO₂ в северо-восточной части Черного моря в холодный период. Для анализа использованы данные, полученные в ходе экспедиционных исследований на НИС «Профессор Водяницкий» в декабре 2022 г. Величина потока углекислого газа на границе вода – атмосфера рассчитывалась с учетом скорости ветра и градиента pCO₂ между поверхностью моря и приводным слоем атмосферы. По данным прямого определения pCO₂, значения потока CO₂ в декабре 2022 г. изменялись в широких пределах от –0.05 до –8.74 ммоль·м⁻²·сут⁻¹, среднее значение соответствовало –2.11 ± 1.79 ммоль·м⁻²·сут⁻¹. Установлено, что в холодный период года поток CO₂ был направлен из атмосферы в поверхностный слой вод. Таким образом, воды Крымского побережья служат стоком атмосферного CO₂. Локальные минимумы потока наблюдались в юго-восточной части Крымского побережья. При анализе корреляционной связи потока CO₂ с температурой, скоростью ветра и ΔpCO₂ наиболее сильная связь выявлена со скоростью ветра (–0.93), слабая – с ΔpCO₂ (0.22). Следовательно, интенсивность потока CO₂ на границе с атмосферой определялась скоростью ветра. Однако направление потока зависело от ΔpCO₂. Вклад температуры проявлялся в изменении концентрации CO₂ в водной толще.

Ключевые слова: поток CO₂, Черное море, углекислый газ, парциальное давление углекислого газа, цикл углерода

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Introduction

The global cycle of natural substances includes their transport among various biogeochemical reservoirs and regulating balance and budget of substances in the atmo-, litho- and hydrosphere. One of such natural cycles is the carbon cycle, the most important component of which is carbon dioxide (CO₂)¹⁾ [1–5].

¹⁾ Raven, J., Caldeira, K., Elderfield, H., Hoegh-Guldberg, O., Liss, P., Riebesell, U., Shepherd, J., Turley, C. and Watson, A., 2005. *Ocean Acidification due to Increasing Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide*. London: The Royal Society, 57 p.

CO₂ is one of the green gases [1–6] and its entry into the atmosphere and further redistribution in the waters of the World Ocean not only plays a significant role in the formation of the climate on the Earth [1], but also affects the characteristics of waters [1, 6, 7].

The waters of the World Ocean are still its natural stock despite the continuous increase in the level of atmospheric CO₂ (about 0.4% per year) and to date its content achieves more than 420 μatm (<https://gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/mlo.html>). They absorb up to 25% atmospheric CO₂ from anthropogenic emission, thereby support to reduce CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere [7]. However, its accumulation in the water column leads to negative consequences for the ecosystems of the World Ocean which is revealed in the disruption of natural balances, in particular carbonate ones, decrease in pH and oxygen concentration and emergence of oxygen deficiency zones. The Ocean's ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere decreases over time [8–10] and waters can even become a source of CO₂ for the atmosphere in some extreme cases [7].

The primary factor determining the influence of CO₂ on the state of marine systems is its flux from the atmosphere which depends, other things being equal, on the ratio of the partial pressure of CO₂ in the near sea surface atmosphere and the equilibrium partial pressure of CO₂ in the sea surface. This ratio determines the direction and values of the CO₂ flux.

An important aspect of the research of the sea–air CO₂ flux and the pCO₂ value in the sea surface is the study of the nature of changes on time scales from seasonal to interannual which is associated with significant spatial and temporal variability of biological and physical processes affecting these characteristics.

Inland seas are characterized by more intense physical and biogeochemical processes compared to open areas of the World Ocean. As a result, their ecosystem is more dynamic on a temporal and spatial scale and any external influence manifests itself more quickly. First of all, such manifestations include changes in the characteristics of the system: oxygen and CO₂ concentrations, pH values, as well as speed and direction of production and destruction processes [10]. Moreover, these ecosystems are characterized by a more pronounced response to changes in CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere which manifests itself primarily in a shift in the carbonate system equilibrium, as well as changes in redox conditions¹⁾ [5–7, 10].

The research of inland seas makes it possible to study the influence of atmospheric CO₂ on the characteristics of waters and to assess the contribution of regional ecosystems to the total budget of the CO₂ flux of the World Ocean.

The Black Sea is one of such inland seas. The shelf water characteristics of the northern part of the sea are largely determined by freshwater river runoff and atmospheric contribution, of the northeastern part – by the Azov Sea waters, of the deep-water part – by the Rim Current [11]. This sea is characterized by a wide range

of changes in salinity and temperature [11], high intensity and seasonal changes in primary production processes [12], high values of alkalinity and total inorganic carbon content [13–15]. All this largely determines the state of the carbonate system of sea waters, the CO₂ content in the sea surface and the formation of the sea–air CO₂ flux.

The factors listed above are influenced by seasonal variability. Accordingly, both CO₂ concentration and CO₂ flux also show intra-annual variability.

It can be assumed that during a cold period, the CO₂ concentration should be primarily determined by an abiotic factor – temperature and vertical transport of CO₂ by deep waters, as well as sea–air metabolic processes. In summer, the predominant factor should be biotic due to the occurrence of biogeochemical processes involving organic matter.

The purpose of this work was to obtain numerical estimates of the sea–air CO₂ flux and to identify its direction and the factors that determine the values of the CO₂ flux in the area of the Crimean coast of the Black Sea during the cold period when the contribution of the abiotic factor predominates.

Previously, the CO₂ flux estimates for this Black Sea ecosystem were carried out based on calculated data [13] or for a local area [14].

Materials and methods

The data obtained during the cruise of R/V *Professor Vodyanitsky* in December 2022 (the 125th cruise, 02–27.12.2022) were used in this work. According to [11], this period refers to late autumn.

Fig. 1 shows the area under study and sampling map. The studied area includes a 12-mile zone of the Crimean coast in the northern part of the Black Sea.

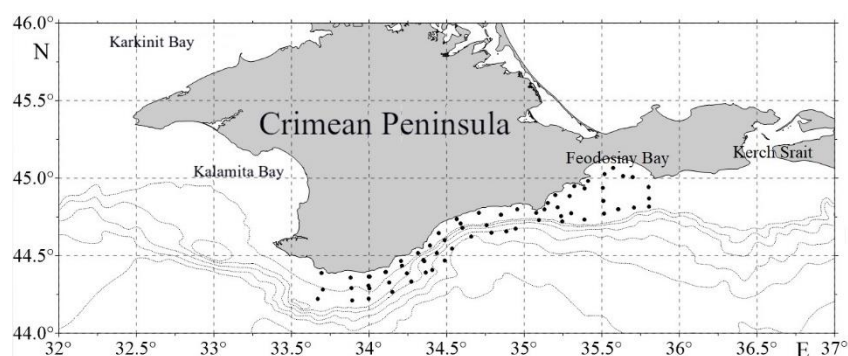


Fig. 1. Sampling map

Samples from the near sea surface atmosphere were taken at a height of 10 m above sea level. The air intake tube was located in such a way as to avoid the CO₂ influx from the working mechanisms of the vessel, if possible. An LI-7000 by LI-COR infrared analyzer with a working range of CO₂ concentration of 0–3000 ppm and water vapor of 0–60 mmol/mol was used to determine the volumetric concentration and partial pressure of CO₂ directly. In this case, the measurement error is less than 1% of the measured values [15].

Water samples were taken from the sea surface (1–3 m) using a continuous seawater supply system. Next, the water was transported at a constant speed to an equilibrator with the help of which equilibrium was established with a certain volume of atmospheric air at the temperature of sea water according to the method described in [15]. Air from the equilibrator was pumped at a constant speed through the cell of the LI-7000 by LI-COR infrared analyzer in which the concentration of CO₂ and water vapor was determined at the cell temperature. The temperature of the cell is determined by a temperature sensor installed inside it and is in equilibrium with the temperature of the atmosphere surrounding the equilibrator. Next, the carbon dioxide concentration was converted to the partial pressure of carbon dioxide:

$$p\text{CO}_2 = x(\text{CO}_2) \cdot p_{\text{ATM}},$$

where $p(\text{CO}_2)$ is partial pressure of carbon dioxide, μatm ; $x(\text{CO}_2)$ is carbon dioxide concentration, $\mu\text{mol/mol}$; p_{ATM} is atmospheric pressure, atm .

The temperature and salinity of the sea surface were measured with an IDRONAUT OCEAN SEVEN 320PlusM WOCE-CTD multiparameter probe, and at shallow water stations (less than 50 m) – with the GAP AK-16 hydrological CTD probe.

Meteorological parameters were measured with recording equipment of the hydro-meteorological data collection complex [16]. A sensor for measuring wind speed and direction was installed on a side boom 1.5 m long in the direction of the port side on the foremast, with the north direction chosen according to the vessel's heading. The sensor is installed at a height of about 8 m from sea level. The data passed quality control with the rejection of unreliable fragments and were reduced to a standard observation height (10 m) [17]. According to the recommendations of the World Meteorological Organization, the measured parameters were averaged over 10 minutes, and further analysis was carried out for the averaged values. Wind gusts are given as instantaneous wind speed values over 5 s [17].

The values of the sea–air flux of carbon dioxide were calculated using the equations and assumptions described in [18] taking into account the wind speed and $p\text{CO}_2$ gradient between the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere:

$$F_{\text{CO}_2} = k \cdot K_0 \cdot \Delta p\text{CO}_2, \quad (1)$$

where F_{CO_2} is sea–air flux of carbon dioxide, $\text{mmol} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{day}^{-1}$; K_0 is CO₂ solubility, $\text{mol} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{atm}^{-1}$; $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ is gradient between partial pressure of carbon dioxide

in the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere, atm; k is gas transport rate, $\text{m}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$, parameterized as a wind speed function:

$$k = 0.251 \cdot U^2 \cdot (\text{Sc}/660)^{-0.5},$$

where U is wind speed, $\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$; Sc is Schmidt number; ratio 0.251 is empirically de-rived parameter, $\text{cm}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}\cdot(\text{m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1})^{-2}$ [19].

In [18], it has been established that the intensity of the carbon dioxide flux is determined by the state of the sea surface (bubbles, roughness) at wind speeds of more than $15 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$. Wind speeds of more than $15 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ were not recorded during the 125th cruise. Thus, only wind speed and pCO_2 gradient were taken into account when assessing fluxes.

Results

In December 2022, the average wind speed was $4.2 \pm 3.8 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ with its minimum of $0.7 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ and maximum of $8.2 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$. The sea surface temperature varied within $9.6\text{--}14.1 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ with its average value of $13.04 \pm 1.06 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$.

The average pCO_2 value of the sea surface was $388 \pm 9 \text{ } \mu\text{atm}$ while pCO_2 of the near sea surface atmosphere varied within a narrower range and the average value was $434 \pm 4 \text{ } \mu\text{atm}$. Thus, the pCO_2 gradient between the sea surface and near sea surface atmosphere (ΔpCO_2) was predominantly determined by the pCO_2 variability in the sea surface. The values of ΔpCO_2 varied from -32.7 to $-70.90 \text{ } \mu\text{atm}$ with its average of $-45.64 \pm 8.56 \text{ } \mu\text{atm}$. It can be noted that the sea surface was undersaturated with carbon dioxide relative to the atmosphere during the period under study.

Based on the data obtained from equation (1), the CO_2 flux values were calculated.

The CO_2 flux intensity varied over a wide range from -0.04 to $-8.74 \text{ mmol}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$, the average value being $-2.11 \pm 1.79 \text{ mmol}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$. Negative flux values indicate that the Black Sea waters absorb CO_2 from the atmosphere serving as its stock during the period under study. The calculated flux values are consistent with previously obtained data concerning the waters of the Crimean coast [14] and of the European shelf northwestern part [5].

Spatial variability of CO_2 flux values was characterized by heterogeneity (Fig. 2, *a*). Local minimum values and maximum flux intensity were observed in the area of the eastern coast of Crimea, as well as in its southern part (Fig. 2, *a*).

In terms of quality, the CO_2 flux spatial variability coincides with the distribution of temperature, wind speed and ΔpCO_2 in the sea surface (Fig. 2). Minima of temperature and ΔpCO_2 of the sea surface, as well as maximum wind speed were observed in zones of maximum intensity and minimum flux (Fig. 2).

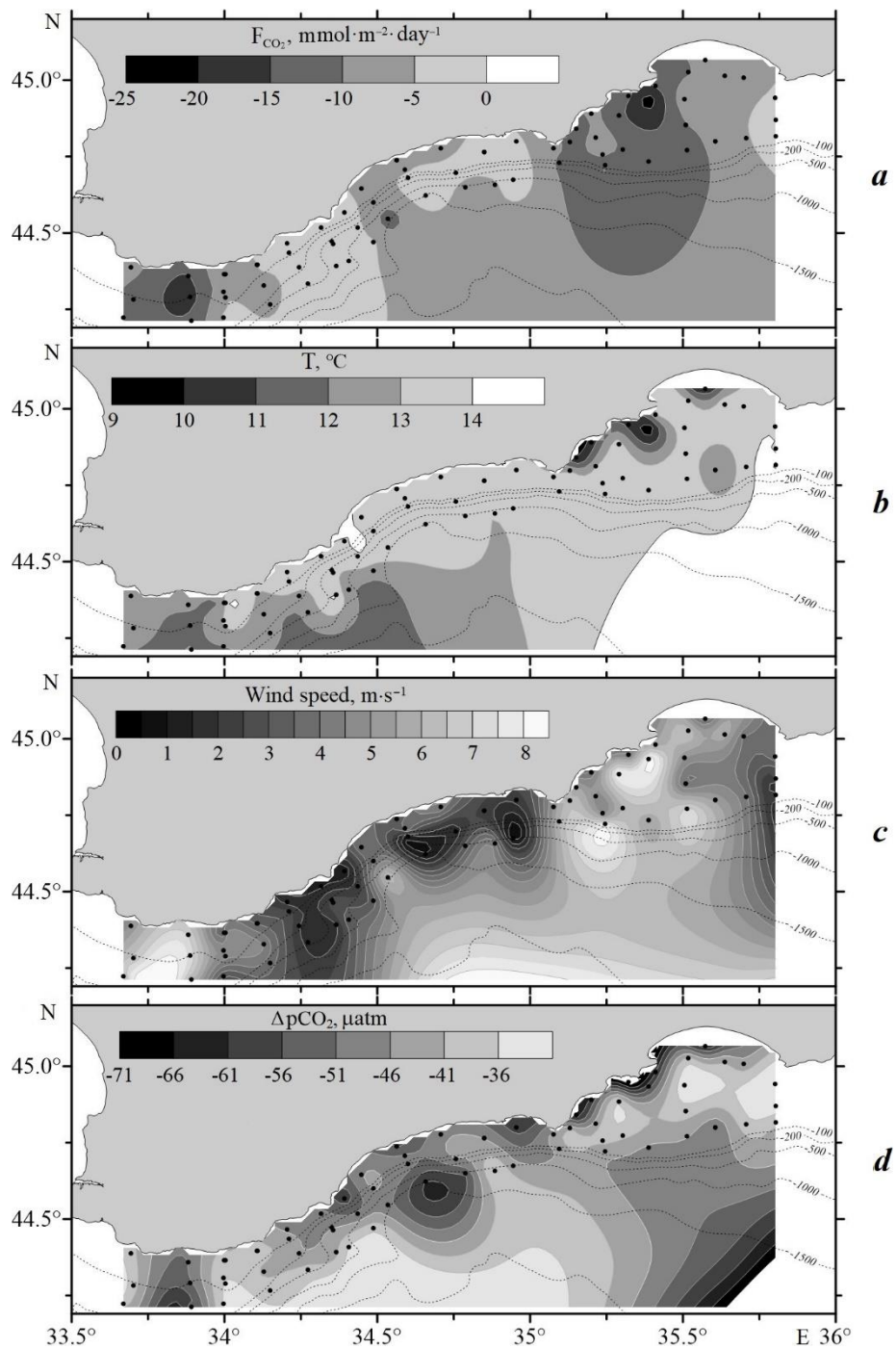


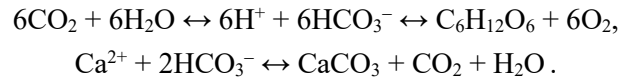
Fig. 2. Spatial variability of the sea-air CO₂ flux (a), temperature (b), wind speed (c) and gradient of pCO₂ (d) by data of the 125th cruise of R/V *Professor Vodyanitsky*

Discussion of results

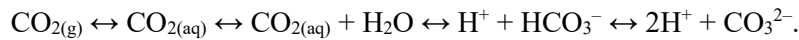
It is known that the CO₂ flux value depends on wind speed and ΔpCO₂ to the greatest extent [18, 19].

Analysis of our data showed that the CO₂ flux was determined primarily by wind speed in December 2022 (Fig. 3). The correlation ratio (−0.93, it is statistically significant with probability belief p = 0.99) indicates a strong linear relationship. The relationship is inverse in itself. Flux direction determines ΔpCO₂ between the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere. In turn, ΔpCO₂ is determined by the ratio of the partial pressure of CO₂ in the atmosphere and the equilibrium partial pressure of CO₂ in the sea surface.

The pCO₂ value of the sea surface is proportional to the concentration of CO₂ in water. The concentration of CO₂ depends on the biogeochemical factor when the production or removal of CO₂ occur due to the transformation of organic matter and the formation of carbonates, proceeding according to the following equations:



In addition, the CO₂ content in the sea surface depends on temperature which affects not only the CO₂ solubility, but also the intensity of biological processes, as well as the shift in chemical equilibria in the carbonate system [19]:



Changes in CO₂ concentration can also be caused by water dynamics, in particular by the CO₂ influx with waters from underlying layers [20].

Therein, the weak correlation of the CO₂ flux with ΔpCO₂ was unexpected (correlation ratio 0.22, it is statistically significant with probability belief p = 0.95).

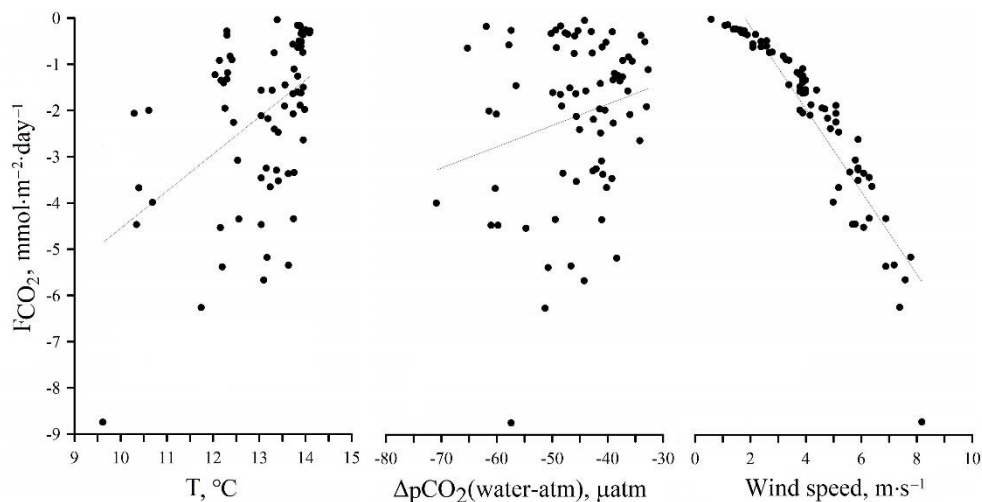


Fig. 3. Dependence of CO₂ flux (F_{CO₂}) on temperature, ΔpCO₂ and wind speed

A decrease in $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ is characterized by a decrease in the flux (Fig. 3). In turn, a decrease in $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ indicates a decrease in the difference between $p\text{CO}_2$ of the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere. As $p\text{CO}_2$ of the near sea surface atmosphere showed almost no changes during the period under study (fluctuation range $\pm 1\%$, average $p\text{CO}_2 = 434 \mu\text{atm}$), the decrease in the difference is due to an increase in $p\text{CO}_2$ and, accordingly, in the CO_2 concentration in the sea surface.

An increase in the CO_2 concentration in the sea surface at its low temperatures (about 13°C) can be caused either by an increase in the CO_2 solubility with a decrease in temperature, or by the dynamics of water ensuring the CO_2 influx from underlying water layers, as well as by the decomposition of organic matter formed during the autumn blooming [12, 21].

The correlation of the CO_2 flux with the sea surface temperature was moderate enough (correlation ratio 0.47, it is statistically significant with probability belief $p = 0.99$). The sea–air intensity of the CO_2 flux decreased with increasing temperature (Fig. 3). However, since the intensity of the flux is also affected by $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ in addition to the wind speed, in this case it is advisable to consider the absolute values (to modulo) of the flux which determine its intensity. Thus, it should be noted that an increase in temperature leads to a decrease in $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ and, accordingly, a decrease in CO_2 flux during the cold season.

Therefore, we can conclude that in December 2022, the predominant contribution to the intensity of the flux is made by the wind speed while the direction of the CO_2 flux is determined by the difference in $p\text{CO}_2$ between the sea surface and the near sea surface atmosphere.

Conclusions

The waters of the northeastern part of the Black Sea serve as a stock of atmospheric CO_2 during the cold season.

According to the direct measurements of $p\text{CO}_2$ in the sea surface and in the near sea surface atmosphere, the values of the CO_2 flux in December 2022 varied widely from -0.048 to $-8.74 \text{ mmol}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$, the average value being $-2.11 \pm 1.79 \text{ mmol}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$. At the same time, no pronounced features of spatial variability were identified. Local minima of flux values were observed in the eastern and southern regions of the Crimean peninsula.

In terms of quality, the CO_2 flux spatial variability coincided with the distribution of temperature, wind speed and $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$.

When analyzing the correlation of the CO_2 flux with temperature, wind speed and $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$, the strongest relationship was found with wind speed (-0.93), while the weakest one was with $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ (0.22). When the wind speed increases, an increase in the intensity of the CO_2 flux is observed, while the direction of the CO_2 flux is determined by $\Delta p\text{CO}_2$ and, accordingly, by the value of $p\text{CO}_2$ and the CO_2 concentration in the sea surface.

The measurements were carried out at the Center for Collective Use R/V *Professor Vodyanitsky* of A.O. Kovalevsky Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas of RAS.

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About the authors:

Natalia A. Orekhova, Leading Research Associate, Head of Marine Biogeochemistry Department, Marine Hydrophysical Institute of RAS (2 Kapitanskaya St., Sevastopol, 299011, Russian Federation), Ph.D. (Geogr.), **ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1387-970X**, **ResearcherID: I-1755-2017**, **Scopus Author ID: 35784884700**, natalia.orekhova@mhi-ras.ru

Eugene V. Medvedev, Junior Research Associate, Marine Hydrophysical Institute of RAS (2 Kapitanskaya St., Sevastopol, 299011, Russian Federation), **ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6093-5102**, eugenemedvedev@mhi-ras.ru

Igor N. Mukoseev, Senior Engineer, Marine Hydrophysical Institute of RAS (2 Kapitanskaya St., Sevastopol, 299011, Russian Federation)

Anton V. Garmashov, Senior Research Associate, Marine Hydrophysical Institute of RAS (2 Kapitanskaya St., Sevastopol, 299011, Russian Federation), Ph.D. (Geogr.), **Scopus Author ID: 54924806400**, **ResearcherID: P-4155-2017**, ant.gar@mail.ru

Contribution of the authors:

Natalia A. Orekhova – problem statement, processing, analysis and description of the study results, article text editing

Eugene V. Medvedev – *in situ* data obtaining, measurement data processing, discussion of the results

Igor N. Mukoseev – *in situ* data obtaining, graphic material preparation

Anton V. Garmashov – metadata obtaining and processing, discussion of the results

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