

The European Parliament's Stance In The Eastern Mediterranean Dispute Between The European Union And Turkey

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The Conceptual Issue of the Eastern Mediterranean: Island of Cyprus

The Mediterranean region attracts the attention of various states due to the fact that it contains the islands of Cyprus, Sicily, and Malta; connects the Eastern Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal; and is bordered by the Middle Eastern countries, which contain more than half of the world's oil resources (Yaycı, 2020: 19). The Eastern Mediterranean is crucial because of its rich oil and natural gas resources as well as its capacity to meet the needs of a country like Turkey, which is heavily dependent on foreign energy (İnat & Duran, 2020:10). Actually, the legal and political status of the island of Cyprus is the most obvious cause of strife in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Due to its strategic location, the Island, known as Cyprus and a part of Anatolia, is situated on a critical geographical position between east and west. The Island's proximity to countries in the Middle East adds to its significance. The Island of Cyprus was home to a number of civilisations, including "Assyrians, Egyptians, Iranians, Romans, Arabs, and Turks," and was ruled by the Ottoman State from 1571 until 1878. Throughout its history, Cyprus has never been referred to as the "Cyprus Nation/People" (Güner, 2020: 99). The island of Cyprus, which is around 65 kilometres from Mersin city in Turkey, has an undisputable strategic importance in the geopolitics of the entire Mediterranean. Because the strategic value of the island actually stems from the strategic importance of the Medite-

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rranean. The ship traffic of the Mediterranean is about 4000 ships per day. This accounts for almost half of the world's ship traffic (Keser & Ak, 2018).

The history of the Island of Cyprus and, therefore, the struggle for power and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean dates all the way back to the 1960s. While the Greek Cypriots advocated for Island's integration into Greece using the concepts of Megali Idea and Enosis, Turkish Cypriots promoted the Taksim Thesis¹, which envisages the Island's transformation into a bi-communal and two-state structure (Derman & Kurban, 2016: 456). A conflict erupted because the demands of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots were incompatible, and the Greek Cypriots, aided by the international community, particular-

ly the European countries, launched armed attacks on the Island. Turkish Cypriots resisted and founded the Turkish Resistance Organisation to put an end to the armed attacks directed at them. Given the fact that the issue on the Island had turned into an existential crisis for the Turkish Cypriots, Turkey launched the Cyprus Peace Operation in 1974, securing the existence of the Turkish Cypriots on the Island. Turkey ensured the life safety of Turkish Cypriots and was able to establish an environment conducive to putting its Taksim Thesis into action (Orhun, 2017: 39-42). Turkish Cypriots declared their independence in 1983 by asserting their right to self-determination. The same year, Greece joined the European Economic Community, causing the supranational organisation known as the European Union today to take sides in the Cyprus and Eastern Mediterranean conflict.

Since the discovery of the natural gas

¹ Taksim means partition in Turkish and Taksim Thesis refers to separation of The Turks and Greeks and supports the idea of two different states in the island.

and oil reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean in the last decade has made the region very attractive, it has been observed that not only the European Union but also the region's states, Russia, the USA, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), France and the UK have entered the regional competition in order to gain the largest share of these resources and to benefit from the Eastern Mediterranean's strategic location. The fight for sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is located on the energy transmission lines and has energy resources as well as its dominance in the Middle East and Africa, has taken on an international dimension. Cyprus is one of the regions influenced by this power struggle due to its location in the core of the region. However, the process has worked against the TRNC in the struggle for sovereignty on energy and rights due to Cyprus' political division into the TRNC and the GCASC², the non-recognition of the TRNC by the international community, and the Greek Cypriot Administration's EU membership (Algür, 2020: 56). New claims and problems regarding rights to and sharing of these reserves have arisen as a result of the de facto two-state situation between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and Turkey's unilateral non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus (Yıldız, 2015:2).

² The Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognized name of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus and not recognized by Turkey.

Energy discoveries in the region have the potential to foster both cooperation and conflict. While the discovery, exploration and marketing of resources necessitate collaboration among regional countries, it also introduces new variables to the international disputes in the region, making the problems even more complicated. Furthermore, many countries outside the region have been involved in the process through energy companies, and the region's importance to great powers is growing day by day. These developments have resulted in a multidimensional equation involving regional states, great powers and non-state actors. Although the Eastern Mediterranean has attracted the attention of the great powers throughout history due to its strategic importance, it has become one of the focal points of global competition in the last decade. Turkey, on the other hand, is having problems in its bilateral relations with riparian countries over the Eastern Mediterranean. The discovery of energy resources in the region has raised sovereignty issues regarding maritime jurisdictions (Ozan, 2020: 159-179).

Turkey and Greece are the only relevant parties to the contested area in the Eastern Mediterranean. While the fact that the TRNC is not recognised by the international community already poses a significant problem, the status of the Island of Meis, located 2.1 kilometres off the coast of Turkey and 580 kilometres away from mainland

Greece, creates a dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece. In this respect, according to Greece's claims, the Island of Meis confines Turkey to the Gulf of Antalya and grants Greece with a maritime jurisdiction area of 40,000 square kilometres. Turkey, on the other hand, regards the Greek claims that the Island of Meis, located 580 kilometers away from mainland Greece, may allow Greece to have a continental shelf as irrational and unlawful.

1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) article 74 and 83/1 states that "The delimitation of the continental shelf between States with opposite or adjacent coasts shall be effected by agreement on the basis of international law, as referred to in Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, in order to achieve an equitable solution." While the geographical features in the Eastern Mediterranean lead to disagreements among some countries about the Exclusive Economic Zone and maritime boundaries, the situation has become more complicated as some countries in the region determine the EEZ through bilateral and trilateral agreements and cooperation on the issue, as well as the exploration and drilling licenses they grant to international companies and the start of these exploration activities (Noi, 2019: 13).

The aforementioned UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides for

the fair and equitable sharing of the delimitation of maritime jurisdictions and the use of the seas' subsurface and surface resources among states. When we look at the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean, however, we can see how the principles of equity, fair solution, proportionality, and non-closure are being violated. The GCASC's granting license to multinational companies to conduct seismic exploration and drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, while ignoring the Turkish Cypriots on the island, sparked outrage in Turkey and the TRNC. In actuality, the GCASC disregards the equal rights of the Turkish population on the island and the TRNC as a sovereign state, signing agreements on behalf of the entire island with other states. The Greek Cypriot Administration is not the only state with the exclusive right to sign on behalf of the entire island. This situation is recognized as an excess of power under the law, and although Turkey has repeatedly brought it to the UN's attention, the UN has yet to take any decision to deter the GCASC (Ercan & Kılınc, 2020: 26).

The GCASC's admittance to EU membership in 2004, as representing the entire island, hampered Turkey's membership process and put it in a difficult position in terms of international recognition of the TRNC. The EU has become a party to the problem as a result of the GCASC's membership and has evolved into a dimen-

sion that supports Greece's and the GCASC's theses and policies. On the other hand, the EU, Greece, and the GCASC must acknowledge that the Eastern Mediterranean is a matter that directly concerns Turkey's national security and, as a result, its energy security. First and foremost, it is critical in terms of reducing Turkey's dependency on foreign natural gas sources in order to meet the country's growing demand. In addition to ensuring energy equity, it is important for Turkey to take part in natural gas lines to be transmitted from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe as part of its strategy to become an energy hub. Given that many of the states in the region (Syria, Israel, Egypt, and the GCASC) are currently experien-

cing difficulties owing to differences of opinion, this option appears remote, but the situation could alter depending on future actions. Another important reason for Turkey's presence in the region is its guarantor role and ties with the TRNC. Turkey finds it unacceptable that the TRNC, which is always first in Turkey's foreign policy, is ignored by other states, particularly by the GCASC and Greece, with some fait accompli. Moreover, the recent steps taken by Turkey as a requirement of its security policies, which are part of its foreign policy, have shown that the country may also respond to the region with soft or hard power if necessary (Öztopal & Yiğittepe, 2020: 269).



Adopting the arguments of its member states on the issue of delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas between Turkey-the TRNC and Greece-the GCASC, the EU has described any activity undertaken by Turkey in areas it has declared as its own continental shelf but which are also claimed by the GCASC and Greece for themselves as a violation of its member states' sovereign rights. The EU has made numerous decisions blaming Turkey for its use of exploration and drilling vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the Turkish Naval Forces flying a flag in these areas. The overlap between Turkey's declared maritime areas and parts of the continental shelf claimed by the GCASC and Greece is at the heart of the EU-Turkey dispute. With its Eastern Mediterranean policy, the EU, which openly supports its member countries in this conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean, has demonstrated an attitude that encourages these countries' illegal actions (Avan, 2020: 104-105).

THE EU SUPPORTED PROJECT: EAST-MED

Due to natural gas and oil reserves, Turkey, Greece, the GCASC, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt, all of which have coastlines in the Eastern Mediterranean, faced off against each other. With its current situation considered, Syria struggles to find in itself the strength to deal with this issue. Cyprus and Israel will take a small portion of the natural gas which will

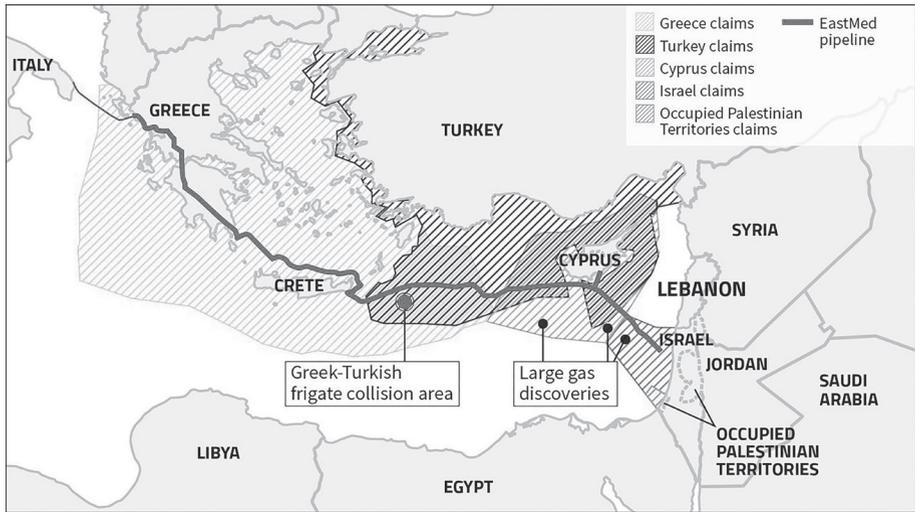
be extracted in the region. It is not yet clear how the remaining gas will be transported. It is also unclear how the sharing will take place among states (Akkoyun, 2020: 420). The deterrence method has been bolstered by the weakening of the EU anchor and the power vacuum that has recently emerged in the Middle East, resulting in the 'triangle strategy,' first between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, and then between Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt (Roussos, 2016: 107). The GCASC, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt who gathered in Cairo in January 2019, announced that they established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. The aim of the forum is to cooperate in the production, consumption and marketing of regional resources and to transform the Eastern Mediterranean into a new energy hub. Israel, Greece and the GCASC want to realise a pipeline project called the East-Med, which will transfer gas from the south of the Mediterranean to Greece and from there to Europe. The EU supports the project for the construction of the line despite the fact that it is still being debated whether the planned pipeline is technically and economically viable, whether there is enough gas to fill such a pipeline in the region and whether there will be sufficient demand for gas in the areas where the line would reach (Eriş, 2020: 18).

On January 2, 2020, an agreement of \$6 billion was struck among Greece, Israel and the GCASC for the cons-

truction of EastMed. As previously announced, Athens, Tel Aviv, and Nicosia convened in Athens and signed a \$6 billion agreement for the transmission of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas to Europe via the pipeline which would be built under the Mediterranean. The said line is projected to transport 20 billion cubic meters each year. The EastMed pipeline, which is envisioned to be approximately 2,000 kilometres long, is intended to meet 10 percent of the EU’s gas needs, reducing Brussels’ dependency on Moscow for energy import at least to a certain extent (Kısacık & Helvacıköylü, 2020: 101).

region where natural gas discoveries are concentrated in the Eastern Mediterranean and be delivered to energy markets via the Levant-Cyprus-Crete-Greece route.

- 200 km offshore pipeline running from the Levant basin to the island of Cyprus
- 700 km offshore pipeline connecting the island of Cyprus to the island of Crete
- 400 km offshore pipeline from Crete island to Greece



Source: (GlobalWitness, 2020)

East-Med Project is essentially comprised of two parts: offshore and onshore areas. According to the current planning of the project, the pipeline is stipulated to pass 1,300 km under the sea and 600 km on land. The pipeline is scheduled to start from the

- 600 km long land pipeline stretching from the Peloponnese peninsula in the south of Greece to the northwest of the country

Through the pipeline project in question, natural gas is envisioned to be

supplied to the domestic markets of Cyprus, Crete and Greece, which are on the transit route, as well as the transfer of resources to Italy via Greece. In addition to the high expenditures, it would be useful to look into the natural gas demand patterns of Europe in order to better understand how economic the East-Med project is. Looking at Europe's natural gas imports, its high dependence on Russia stands out. This is the reason why the European Union carries out its policies primarily to increase the diversity of source countries. In addition, Europe, which has changed its energy infrastructure to use renewable resources and made significant progress in this field, is gradually reducing its dependence and demand on natural gas (Kavaz, 2020: 5-6).

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasizes in its statement on the EastMed project that the Agreement is an attempt to isolate Turkey and the TRNC's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and that a project which seeks to disregard Turkey as the country with the longest coastline in the region as well as Turkish Cypriots who enjoy equal rights over the natural resources of the Island as the inhabitants of the GCASC, will fail. The statement also noted that the safest and most cost-effective route for delivering the region's natural resources to Europe is through Turkey, and that attempts to close the doors of cooperation to Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, are

a clear indication of a desire to make political calculations (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2020). Given that Turkey is entitled to enjoy its rights over the natural gas resources in the region and it has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is recommended that Turkey develop long-term strategies to develop alternative projects to ensure the delivery of the region's energy resources at a lower cost, particularly to the European market. (Alper, 2020: 38-39).

THE EU PARLIAMENT'S POSITION IN THE CRISIS

The ongoing tension in the Eastern Mediterranean is also putting the EU's strategic autonomy to the test. The EU is attempting to demonstrate that the Eastern Mediterranean crisis does not concern the EU only because the directly involved parties, Greece and the GCASC, are EU members, but also because of international law, norms, and values (Grigoriadis, 2021: 7). However, the fact that the EU signed the Treaty of Accession with the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus as the "Republic of Cyprus" in Athens on April 16, 2003, harmed all definitions and debates pertaining to the island of Cyprus and completely altered the foundation of international law (Özersay, 2004: 50). In this respect, the fact that the United Nations Security Council Resolution No.186, dated March 4, 1964, recognised the Greek Cypriot Administration as the Government of Cyprus drove world countries to

disregard London and Zurich agreements, thereby recognising the Greek Cypriot administration (Çelik & Çelebi, 2020: 176). The problem, which had become unsolvable following the relevant UN Resolution, became even more insurmountable due to the EU's biased stance.

The EU has thus far failed to formulate a uniform Cyprus policy based on principles agreed upon by all Member States. In the case of Cyprus, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, in particular, could not be implemented. The EU did not develop policies and actions to end the Turkish Cypriots' isolation and contribute to the resolution of the Cyprus problem (Uslu, 2008: 58). In this context, the European Parliament, as well as other EU institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission, have issued statements in support of the GCASC and Greece in all tensions related to the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus.

The European Parliament has issued numerous resolutions about Turkey's seismic survey, research and drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean region and blamed Turkey for violating the international law.

The first resolution by the EP regarding natural gas and oil resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region was issued in November 2014. After Turkey issued a NAVTEX directive on October 3, 2014 regarding its seismic

surveys in the Eastern Mediterranean, the EP adopted a resolution on Turkish actions creating tensions in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus³ on November 13, 2014, blaming Turkey for contesting legitimacy of Republic of Cyprus and its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and challenging a European company assigned for exploration and exploitation in EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus. In the Resolution of November 13, 2014, the EP urged Turkey to act according to international law, refrain from unilateral actions, respect the legality of the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus, avoid from illegal and provocative actions and refrain from violations of sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus. The Resolution underlined the importance of normalisation between Turkey and EU and requested that the European External Action Service and the European Commission would follow Turkey's activities in the EEZ of Cyprus (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016).

The EP adopted another resolution in September 2020 on the preparation of the special European Council summit focusing on the dangerous escalation and the role of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴ The EP stresses that

³ European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2014 on Turkish actions creating tensions in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus (2014/2921(RSP))

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the preparation of the special European Council summit focusing on the dangerous escalation and the role of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean (2020/2774(RSP))

the EU attaches strategic importance to the entire Mediterranean and accuses Turkey of taking unilateral steps and challenging its neighbours. The Resolution states that Turkey's exploration and drilling activities cause militarisation of the Eastern Mediterranean and calls on Turkey to de-escalate the tension and find a solution by diplomatic means. The EP expressed its full solidarity with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus and urged Turkey to refrain from disputes and threats that could cause negative impact on its neighbours, also the EP called on a forum within the NATO to discuss arms controls in the Eastern Mediterranean (European Parliament, 2020a). On the other hand, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs defined the resolution unacceptable and stated that the resolution was adopted only for the sake of membership solidarity. Turkish side expressed that the EP was losing credibility with its biased, one-sided and unfair discourses and it would keep protecting rights and interests of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020a).

On November 26, 2020, the EP adopted the resolution on escalating tensions in Varosha following the illegal actions by Turkey and the urgent need for the resumption of talks.⁵ The resolution was principally about

Cyprus, opening of Varosha and election results in the Northern Cyprus and once again the EP called on Turkey to refrain from exploratory drilling and not to violate the sovereignty and sovereignty rights of the Republic of Cyprus (European Parliament, 2020b). In response to a question about the resolution, the spokesman of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the EP's recommendatory resolution was prejudiced and disconnected from realities over the Cyprus issue. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the resolution was dictated by the Greek Cypriot Administration and it would not make a constructive contribution to the Cyprus issue, and invited the EP and the EU to face the realities on the Cyprus island (European Parliament, 2020b).

Lastly the EP adopted a resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Turkey (2019/2176(INI)) on May 19, 2021 and alongside the other subjects about Turkey and the EU, the EP stated its concerns about Turkey's activities in Greek and Cypriot waters and reaffirmed its position in the Eastern Mediterranean issue. The EU, on behalf of the EU, calls on de-escalation, dialogue and cooperation on neighbourly relations accusing Turkey for illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean again (European Parliament, 2021). In respect thereof,

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 26 November 2020 on escalating tensions in Varosha following the illegal actions by Turkey and the urgent need for the resumption of talks (2020/2844(RSP))

⁶ European Parliament resolution of 19 May 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Turkey (2019/2176(INI))

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it rejected the biased text including false and unfair allegations defending only Greek and Greek Cypriots' arguments regarding the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus issue (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The EU had to become a party to the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean, both because of its members, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, and for the strategy of diversifying its energy supply. The Cyprus issue, which has been unresolved for nearly a half-century, is undeniably the root cause of the dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean. The EU displays a unilateral and biased attitude in the context of the borders of maritime jurisdictions and the legal and political status of the island of Cyprus. As known, it is a reality that the EU, which claims to be a normative power in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms, disrespects the fundamental political rights of the Turkish Cypriots.

The Eastern Mediterranean issue seems to be one of the most significant topics in the future Turkey-the EU agenda. The likelihood of a frozen conflict zone like Cyprus evolving into a hot conflict zone should be considered, and the EU's biased and exclusionary attitude towards the Turkish Cypriot community and the TRNC should be reviewed in the light of European values and EU expe-

riences. Achieving peace and stability in the region would only be possible with equitable resource sharing. In this context, the European Parliament, as a representative of European people, should approach to the dispute on an equitable ground. Instead of adopting resolutions, the EP representatives should be dealing with the issue rationally, taking into the Turkish Cypriots' rights consideration. The EP can play an active role with win-win policy considering the Turks' rights in Cyprus and contribute to peace and stability in the regions.

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