

UNDERSTANDING THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY OF FRANCE AND RECENT TENSIONS WITH TURKEY

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Abstract: As one of the ancient powers of the Mediterranean, France has been implementing active policies in recent years in response to geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region under Emmanuel Macron's Presidency (2017-). These policies recently caused some political problems between France and Turkey. In this piece, main elements of French policy towards Eastern Mediterranean will be analyzed and issues that cause competition between France and Turkey will be revealed.

Keywords: *Eastern Mediterranean, French Foreign Policy, Turkish Foreign Policy, French-Turkish Relations, Emmanuel Macron.*

Article Category: Geopolitics/International Relations

Date of Submission: 22.12.2020

Date of Acceptance: 06.02.2021

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FRANSA'NIN DOĐU AKDENİZ POLİTİKASINI VE TÜRKİYE İLE YAŞANAN GÜNCEL GERĐİNLİKLERİ ANLAMAK

Öz: Akdeniz'in kadim güçlerinden birisi olarak, Fransa, Emmanuel Macron'un Cumhurbaşkanlığı (2017-) döneminde Dođu Akdeniz'deki jeopolitik gelişmeler karşısında aktif politikalar uygulamaktadır. Bu politikalar, Türkiye ile Fransa arasında son dönemde bazı gerginliklere neden olmuştur. Bu çalışmada, Fransa'nın Dođu Akdeniz politikasının ana unsurları analiz edilerek, Fransa ile Türkiye arasında rekabete neden olan konular açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dođu Akdeniz, Fransa Dış Politikası, Türk Dış Politikası, Fransa-Türkiye İlişkileri, Emmanuel Macron.*

Introduction

As one of the ancient powers of the Mediterranean, France has been implementing active policies in recent years in response to geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region under Emmanuel Macron's Presidency (2017-). These policies cause some political-diplomatic problems between France and Turkey, two historical NATO allies, in addition to personal disputes between the two countries' leaders and widespread negative image and perception among public opinion on both sides. It is not coincidental that according to a regular study conducted annually by Istanbul-based Kadir Has University, Turkish people began to perceive France as the second least friendly country to Turkey after Israel in 2020.² Moreover, in both countries' press, news and media representations of the other side are mostly negative. While the Turkish press wants to present French President Emmanuel Macron like a "little Napoleon"³ and as an "arrogant man"⁴, the French press also writes skeptically and very negatively about Turkish political positioning in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵

Lastly, two countries' Presidents began to engage in frequent quarrels with each other by trespassing the traditional lines of diplomatic criticism in 2020 although their first contacts in 2018 were quite hopeful and encouraging. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan advised Macron to have his brain checked by medical doctors⁶ after Macron's controversial statement about "the brain death of NATO" in an interview given to *The Economist*.⁷ Erdoğan also criticized Macron's visit of Lebanon after the huge explosion at the Beirut Port in August 2020

² Kadir Has Üniversitesi Türkiye Çalışmaları Grubu (2020), "Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması", Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/DPA2020_BASIN%5B1%5D.pdf.

³ For such a representation in the Turkish press, see; Çetiner Çetin (2020), "Küçük Napolyon Macron'un Türkiye karşılığı", *Habertürk*, 07.09.2020, Date of Accession: 02.12.2020 from <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/cetiner-cetin/2795567-kucuk-napolyon-macronun-turkiye-karsitligi>.

⁴ *Haber7.com* (2020), "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron'dan Türkiye'ye karşı küstah sözler", 30.08.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.haber7.com/dunya/haber/3008761-fransa-cumhurbaskani-macron-dan-turkiyeye-karsi-kustah-sozler>.

⁵ For such examples, see; Nathalie Guibert & Jean-Pierre Stroobants (2020), "L'activisme militaire de la Turquie empoisonne l'OTAN", *Le Monde*, 18.06.2020, Date of Accession : 03.12.2020 from https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/06/18/l-activisme-militaire-turc-empoisonne-l-otan_6043283_3210.html; Isabelle Lasserre (2020), "Erdogan sème la zizanie au sein de l'Otan", *Le Figaro*, 02.07.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/erdogan-seme-la-zizanie-au-sein-de-l-otan-20200702>.

⁶ *Hürriyet* (2019), "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Macron'a sert tepki", 29.11.2019, Date of Accession: 02.12.2020, from <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-macrona-sert-tepki-41385809>.

⁷ *The Economist* (2019), "Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead", 07.11.2019, Date of Accession: 01.12.2020 from <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>.

and claimed that France is engaging in “*neocolonialism*” in Lebanon.⁸ Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has also transformed into a harsh Macron critic in 2020. Çavuşoğlu first criticized France for supporting “*coup-plotters and pirates*” in the Eastern Mediterranean by referring to French support given to Libyan opposition leader and Libyan-American warlord General Khalifa Haftar.⁹ In addition, Çavuşoğlu resembled France to “*a rooster (cock crowing in the dirt)*”.¹⁰ French President Emmanuel Macron on the other hand criticized Turkish foreign policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean as a “*violation of Greek and Greek Cypriot sovereignty*”¹¹ and proposed sanctions against Turkey¹² since he claimed, “*Turkey only understands from actions, not from words*”.¹³ In terms of Libya policy also, Macron strongly criticized Turkish position and claimed that Turkey did not act in conformity with the Berlin Conference decisions by stating that “*things happening in Libya are Turkey’s historical and criminal responsibility*”.¹⁴ Lastly, Macron resembled recent military activism in Turkish foreign policy to reviving an “*empire fantasy*”.¹⁵ French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian also criticized Turkey recently because of change in the status of Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya*)¹⁶, a famous Byzantine cathedral that was transformed into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul and has been serving as a museum since the 1930s until recently. Polemics between the two countries started strangely due to a football match played in Konya in June 2019 between

⁸ *Le Point* (2020), “« Colonialisme », « spectacle » : Erdogan attaque violemment Macron sur le Liban”, 13.08.2020, Date of Accession: 01.12.2020 from https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/colonialisme-spectacle-erdogan-attaque-violemment-macron-sur-le-liban-13-08-2020-2387656_24.php.

⁹ *Sözcü* (2020), “Çavuşoğlu’ndan Macron’a sert tepki”, 30.06.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/dunya/son-dakika-cavusoglundan-macrona-sert-tepki-5903183/>.

¹⁰ *TGRT Haber* (2020), “Bakan Çavuşoğlu’ndan Macron’a Tepki: “Pislik İçinde Öten Horoz””, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74RVmN-49IM>.

¹¹ *Le Figaro* (2020), “Macron dénonce la violation des souverainetés grecque et chypriote par la Turquie”, 23.07.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/macron-denonce-la-violation-des-souverainetes-grecque-et-chypriote-par-la-turquie-20200723>.

¹² *BBC Türkçe* (2020), “Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron: Türkiye’nin AB sularındaki ihlalleri cezasız bırakılmaz”, 23.07.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-53510343>.

¹³ *DW Türkçe* (2020), “Macron: Türkiye’ye karşı kırmızı çizgi politikası uyguladı”, 28.08.2020, Date of Accession : 03.12.2020 from <https://www.dw.com/tr/macron-t%C3%BCrkiye-ye-kar%C5%9F%C4%B1-k%C4%B1rm%C4%B1z%C4%B1-%C3%A7izgi-politikas%C4%B1-uygulad%C4%B1k/a-54746555>.

¹⁴ *Le Figaro* (2020), “Libye: Macron condamne la «responsabilité historique et criminelle» de la Turquie”, 29.06.2020, Date of Accession: 02.12.2020 from <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/libye-macron-condamne-la-responsabilite-historique-et-criminelle-de-la-turquie-20200629>.

¹⁵ *Euronews* (2020), “Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron, Türkiye’yi ‘imparatorluk fantezisi’ kurmakla itham etti”, 02.09.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://tr.euronews.com/2020/09/02/fransa-cumhurbaskan-macron-turkiye-yi-imparatorluk-fantezisi-kurmakla-itham-etti>.

¹⁶ *France Diplomatie* (2020), “Turquie – Sainte-Sophie – Déclaration de Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères (10 juillet 2020)”, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/turquie/evenements/article/turquie-sainte-sophie-declaration-de-jean-yves-le-drian-ministre-de-l-europe-et>.

Turkish and French national football teams. While Turkish national team defeated France 2-0, the catcall made by Turkish football fans towards French national anthem “*La Marseillaise*” saddened and raged French officials including then-French Consul General in Istanbul Bertrand Buchwalter and French President Macron.¹⁷

As these statements and events indicate, Turkish-French relations have been passing through a rather difficult time due to two countries’ diverging political positions and clashing geopolitical interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus, as well as relations with Libya and Greece. In order to analyze these problems, in this research, first of all, French geopolitical ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean during the ongoing Emmanuel Macron Presidency (2017-) will be revealed in the light of a strategic report. Secondly, three issues (namely the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus Dispute, relations with Libya, and relations with Greece) that exacerbated Turkish-French tensions recently will be analyzed in light of geopolitical developments and statements made by two countries’ key political figures. Lastly, the research will suggest some ideas and plans to improve Turkish-French relations.

1. French Ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean during Macron Presidency (2017-)

A report published on behalf of French think-tank *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* (FRS)¹⁸ (whose Assistant Director Bruno Tertrais is an advisor to President Macron since his Presidential campaign¹⁹) by Nathalie Ruffié, Philippe Gros, and Vincent Turret, summarizes French ambitions and goals in the Eastern Mediterranean during Macron Presidency.²⁰ According to this report, the Mediterranean Sea is still a strategic location since it hosts 25 % of global maritime transport, 30 % of global oil transportation, and 31 % of global tourism activities.²¹ The report points out four important avenues for French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean as:

(1) Turkey’s efforts to become a regional power by using the Ottoman heritage,

¹⁷ *Ajansspor.com* (2019), “Emmanuel Macron: ”Milli marşımızın ıslıklanması kabul edilemez””, 09.06.2019, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://ajansspor.com/haber/emmanuel-macron-milli-marsimizin-islklanmasi-kabul-edilemez-306105>.

¹⁸ For the website of the institution; <https://www.frstrategie.org/>.

¹⁹ Vincent Jauvert (2017), “Ces diplomates qui s’activent pour Macron en coulisses”, *L’OBS*, 18.04.2017, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.nouvelobs.com/presidentielle-2017/20170418.OBS8155/ces-diplomates-qui-s-activent-pour-macron-en-coulisses.html>.

²⁰ Nathalie Ruffié & Philippe Gros & Vincent Turret (2018), “Stratégies de sécurité en Méditerranée”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note no: 4, October 2018, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/programmes/observatoire-des-conflits-futurs/publications/2018/4.pdf>.

²¹ Ruffié et al. (2018), “Stratégies de sécurité en Méditerranée”, p. 11.

- (2) The axis of resistance led by Iran and the Shiite axis,
- (3) Israeli reaction to Shiite axis and Palestinian opposition,
- (4) Weak Egyptian interests to become a regional power.²²

The report also mentions about the recent discovery of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean by Greek Cypriots, Israel, and Egypt and the problems in terms of delimitation of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the agreement on the exclusive economic zones between coastal states.²³ While the report also analyzes in detail foreign powers' approach to this region such as Russian, Chinese, American, and Gulf states' policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean²⁴, it also lists other problems in the region including illegal arms trade, illegal drug trafficking, irregular migration flow etc.²⁵ The report later sets French goals in the region as follows:²⁶

- Struggle against terrorism both within France and outside of France,
- Limiting and taking under control the irregular immigration flow within the region,
- Taking illegal arms trade and drug trafficking under control,
- Protecting the environment,
- Providing stability in Libya,
- Establishing a new constitutional order in Syria by eliminating ISIS completely,
- Protecting sea lines of communication and natural resources in the region.

The report, alongside of these set goals, proposes a coherent and comprehensive policy towards this region in harmony with EU Neighborhood Policy, NATO policies towards this region, French national interests, and Mediterranean partnership between coastal states. This policy's main parameters are:²⁷

- Providing military support to fragile regimes in the region,

²² Ibid., pp. 16-18.

²³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 23-26.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 26-29.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-39.

- Increasing military based intelligence activities in the region,
- Increasing the maritime power of France,
- Establishing a front line by taking profit of military bases in the Mediterranean islands in order to strengthen the defense of French homeland,
- Implementing a long-term strategy that will suit French Army's capacity, comparative advantages, and risks.

In accordance with this report, French President Emmanuel Macron's policy towards the East Mediterranean can be summarized on the basis of these main strategies and tactics:

1. As stated by French Rear Admiral and Mediterranean expert Jean-François Coustillière, while giving support to peace and stability in the region, protecting French national interests.²⁸
2. Becoming the main playmaker in Lebanon where there are "*special relations that cannot be explained enough with the colonial heritage argument*" as stated by Alain Frachon.²⁹
3. Maintaining good relations with Israel by making a new law outlawing anti-Zionism.³⁰
4. Supporting the Palestinian cause on the basis of international law and with a support given to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the rhetorical level in order not to lose the sympathy of the Arab world.³¹
5. Using geopolitical and diplomatic crises and events as an opportunity to boost (legal) French arms sales towards the region.³²

²⁸ Jean-François Coustillière (2007), "Risques et menaces sur la France", *L'Harmattan / Confluences Méditerranée*, 2007/4, No: 63, p. 25.

²⁹ Alain Frachon (2020), « Entre la France et le Liban, la couleur des sentiments », *Le Monde*, 07.08.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/08/07/entre-la-france-et-le-liban-la-couleur-des-sentiments_6048347_3210.html.

³⁰ Gizem Sade (2019), "Fransa'da Siyonizm karşıtlığının suç sayılması yasasına tepki: İsrail'in beklentilerini karşılıyor", *Euronews*, 05.12.2019, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/12/05/fransa-da-siyonizm-karstliginin-suc-sayilmasi-yasasina-tepki-israilin-beklentilerini-karsi>.

³¹ Raşa Evrensel & Halime Afra Aksoy (2020), "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron Filistin Devlet Başkanı Abbas'ı Paris'e davet etti", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 17.08.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/fransa-cumhurbaskani-macron-filistin-devlet-baskani-abbasi-parise-davet-etti/1944041>.

³² At this point, one should remember that French arms sales increased to a record 8.3 billion euro in 2019. See; *Ministère des Armées* (2020), « Rapport au Parlement sur les exportations d'armement de la France 2020 », July 2020, p. 37, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/exportations-d->

6. Unlike the Arab Spring period, supporting the regimes that follow French interests instead of democratic and populist movements in the region (particularly in Egypt).
7. Counterbalancing Turkey, a rising regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean by establishing close relations with Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and Israel and protecting the interests of French energy giant TOTAL.
8. Establishing a closer European cooperation in the region -due to shifting American towards Asia-Pacific- via military-security initiatives including PESCO and European Intervention Initiative (EI2) under French political leadership.
9. Establishing French supremacy in the Mediterranean against competing allies such as United Kingdom and Germany.
10. Using geopolitical clashes in the region as a way to weaken countries that act against French national interests (using ISIS threat to empower PYD/YPG in order to counterbalance Turkish power which was a political legacy of François Hollande).

This policy conducted by French President Macron has many supporters in France as well as harsh critics. Among the supporters, one noticeable and influential group is « *Le groupe de réflexions Mars* » or in short « *Groupe Mars* », a team of French intellectuals, politicians, and researchers. *Groupe Mars* strongly defends Macronist policies in the region on the basis of the idea that although Turkey and Greece are both NATO members, Greece and Republic of Cyprus are also EU members and according to 7th clause of the Article 42 of the EU Treaty (Mutual Defense Clause)³³, France has responsibility to protect its European allies.³⁴ Turkish political

armement-le-rapport-au-parlement-2020. Moreover, in the period of 2010-2019, French defence industry's five most important clients are listed as (in order): India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. See; *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³³ Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty states: “*If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.*” See; *European Parliament*, “Mutual defence clause (Article 42.7 TEU)”, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_en.pdf.

³⁴ *Le groupe de réflexions Mars* (2020), “Pourquoi l'intervention de la France en Méditerranée orientale a été nécessaire”, *La Tribune*, 06.10.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.latribune.fr/opinions/pourquoi-l-intervention-de-la-france-en-mediterranee-orientale-a-ete-necessaire-858828.html>.

scientist living in France, Ahmet İnel also points out that Turkey's announcement of "NAVTEX"s and sending of its warships to the region is largely understood as a provocation in the French and European public opinion although he admits Turkey has also some valid arguments and claims in the region.³⁵

Among Macron's critics, one important person to be mentioned is Didier Billion, the Assistant Director of French think-tank *Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques* (IRIS) and a well-known French expert on Turkish Politics. Billion points out the positive correlation between French support given to Greece and recent Greek decision to buy 18 Rafale jets from France³⁶ and underlines that Macron's sending of warships to region is a very bold move since some of the Turkish claims are not false.³⁷ Billion also adds that Macron's mistake is to act alone and not gaining the support of the EU and other important European countries.³⁸ Jean-Dominique Merchet from the French daily *L'Opinion* on the other hand criticizes the sale of Rafale jets to Greece since 9 of these sold 18 jets are given to Athens directly from the French Army and the other 9 will be delivered in 2023.³⁹ Turkish scholar Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney is also critical of Macron's bold moves in the Eastern Mediterranean and she thinks that supporting groups whose legality and legitimacy are questionable such as PYD-YPG in Syria and Khalifa Haftar forces in Libya is a risk for French economic interests in the region as well as European stability.⁴⁰

2. Turkish-French Disagreements in the Eastern Mediterranean

Turkish-French relations have been passing from a conflictual period due to differences in two countries' geopolitical preferences in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this part, three main issues that spoil Turkish-French relations will be analyzed.

³⁵ Arzu Çakır (2020), "Türkiye Doğu Akdeniz'de Politik Hata Yapıyor", *Amerika'nın Sesi*, 19.10.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/turkiye-dogu-akdenizde-politik-hata-yapiyor/5627276.html>.

³⁶ Ümit Dönmez (2020), "Des académiciens et journalistes français questionnent l'attitude irresponsable de Macron", *AA*, 16.09.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/monde/des-acad%C3%A9miciens-et-journalistes-francais-questionnent-lattitude-irresponsable-de-macron-/1975125>.

³⁷ Arzu Çakır (2020), "Türkiye Doğu Akdeniz'de Politik Hata Yapıyor", *Amerika'nın Sesi*, 19.10.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/turkiye-dogu-akdenizde-politik-hata-yapiyor/5627276.html>.

³⁸ Çağıl Kasapoğlu (2020), "Doğu Akdeniz: Fransa, Yunanistan'a destek vererek ne yapmak istiyor?", *BBC Türkçe*, 16.09.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-54175399>.

³⁹ Ümit Dönmez (2020), "Des académiciens et journalistes français questionnent l'attitude irresponsable de Macron", *AA*, 16.09.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/monde/des-acad%C3%A9miciens-et-journalistes-francais-questionnent-lattitude-irresponsable-de-macron-/1975125>.

⁴⁰ Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney (2020), "Batılı Ülkelerin Doğu Akdeniz Politikaları", in Kemal İnat & Muhittin Ataman & Burhanettin Duran (eds.) *Doğu Akdeniz ve Türkiye'nin Hakları*, SETA Books 60, p. 141.

2.1. The Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus Dispute

Cyprus is a geopolitically strategic island in the midst of the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus is divided politically into two different entities since Turkish intervention into the island in 1974 and so far negotiations and peace talks could not produce any significant outcome for reunification. Cyprus is vitally important for some countries' military and security policies. For instance, the United Kingdom has two large sovereign military bases in Cyprus (on the southern part) in Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Turkey has also many important military facilities and a large military presence in northern part of Cyprus (Turkish Cypriots established their state Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983, but so far only Turkey recognized this country). In addition, recently French Army has been granted privilege to use Evangelos Florakis Naval Base in Mari, Larnaca. With an agreement signed in 2017 (there was also a prior and limited agreement signed in 2007 between two countries on defense policies) and coming into force in 2020, France and Republic of Cyprus expanded their military partnerships.⁴¹ The agreement also paves way for France to protect ships (owned by French firm TOTAL) that have been making drilling activities in the region.⁴²

Map I: Military bases in Cyprus⁴³

⁴¹ *Naval News* (2020), "Defense Cooperation Agreement Between Cyprus And France Comes Into Force", 06.08.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/08/defense-cooperation-agreement-between-cyprus-and-france-comes-into-force/>.

⁴² Sina Kısacık & Fahri Erenel (2019), "Doğu Akdeniz Güvenlik Algılamaları Bağlamında, Kalıcı Yapılandırılmış İşbirliği Savunma Anlaşması (The Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO) ve Enerji Güvenliği Meselelerinin Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerine Olası Yansımalarını Anlamak", *Türkiye Siyaset Bilimi Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No: 1, p. 68.

⁴³ Tom Kington & Lucy Fisher (2019), "Cyprus seeks French military help in snub to 'distracted' UK", *The Times*, 17.05.2019, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/cyprus-seeks-french-military-help-in-snub-to-distracted-uk-xsfhx795q>.



In addition to the military/strategic importance, Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean are also conceived as a natural gas reservoir due to recent hydrocarbon discoveries in the region made by countries including Republic of Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt. Greek Cypriot government conducted a successful foreign policy in using these gas resources as a leverage to increase its diplomatic and economic relations with neighboring countries by using the EU's support after its membership into the Union in 2004. So, Nicosia was able to sign many exclusive economic zone agreements in the region (with Egypt in 2003, with Lebanon in 2007, and with Israel in 2010)⁴⁴ and strengthened its position although the Cyprus Problem continues to be a major problem that prevents energy companies and neighboring countries to make comprehensive energy agreements. At this point, many Turkish scholars and statesmen underline that Turkey's marginalization in the Eastern Mediterranean will not produce positive outcomes for the energy industry since Turkey is the country that has the longest shore in the Eastern Mediterranean and energy agreements without Turkey's inclusion could not be implemented safely. According to energy experts⁴⁵, without Turkey, LNG and pipeline options will not be very feasible as well. In

⁴⁴ Ömer Lütfi Taşçıoğlu (2018), "GKRY'nin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne ve Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'ne Ait Deniz Yetki Alanlarındaki Petrol ve Doğal Gaz Arama Çalışmaları ve Münhasır Ekonomik Bölge Anlaşmaları", *Social Sciences Studies Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue: 26, p. 5699.

⁴⁵ For a study on this issue, see; Sina Kısacık & Gamze Helvacıköylü (2020), "Doğu Akdeniz'deki Enerji Temelli Askeri Güvenlik Gelişmelerinin Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdenizli Komşuları ve Küresel Güçlerle Olan İlişkilerine Yansımaları", *UPA Strategic Affairs*, Vol. 1, No: 1, pp. 85-145.

this perspective, the most feasible option for the transportation of Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon resources to Europe seems to be a pipeline towards Turkey (from Israel and Cyprus), but political problems between Turkey and these countries prevent such a project to be implemented.⁴⁶

In addition, due to Greek Cypriot government's bold steps⁴⁷ together with some countries in the region including Greece, Egypt, and Israel, the tension continues to increase between two camps (Cyprus-Greece-Israel-Egypt-France-Haftar forces in Libya vs. Turkey-TRNC-Government of National Accord in Libya). For instance, a new geopolitical risk in the region is about the militarization of the conflict. Recently, the Greek Cypriot government joined a military exercise with Greece, France, and Italy in August 2020⁴⁸, while Turkey and TRNC responded to this exercise with another military exercise called Captain Cengiz Topel Mediterranean Storm immediately after.⁴⁹ Moreover, Turkish and French military ships recently engaged in an incident (Courbet Incident) which directed France to withdraw from NATO's Operation "Sea Guardian".⁵⁰ These events show the risks of militarization of the conflict and the necessity of diplomatic-political solutions to Cyprus Problem as well as Eastern Mediterranean Question. Here, a new French positioning as an intermediary force rather than a country against Turkey could be beneficial for both sides considering the diplomatic weight of France.

Map II: *Licences given to Greek Cypriot government to energy companies in different parcels around Cyprus*⁵¹

⁴⁶ Sina Kısacık & Gamze Helvacıköylü (2020), "Doğu Akdeniz'deki Enerji Temelli Askeri Güvenlik Gelişmelerinin Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdenizli Komşuları ve Küresel Güçlerle Olan İlişkilerine Yansımaları", p. 136.

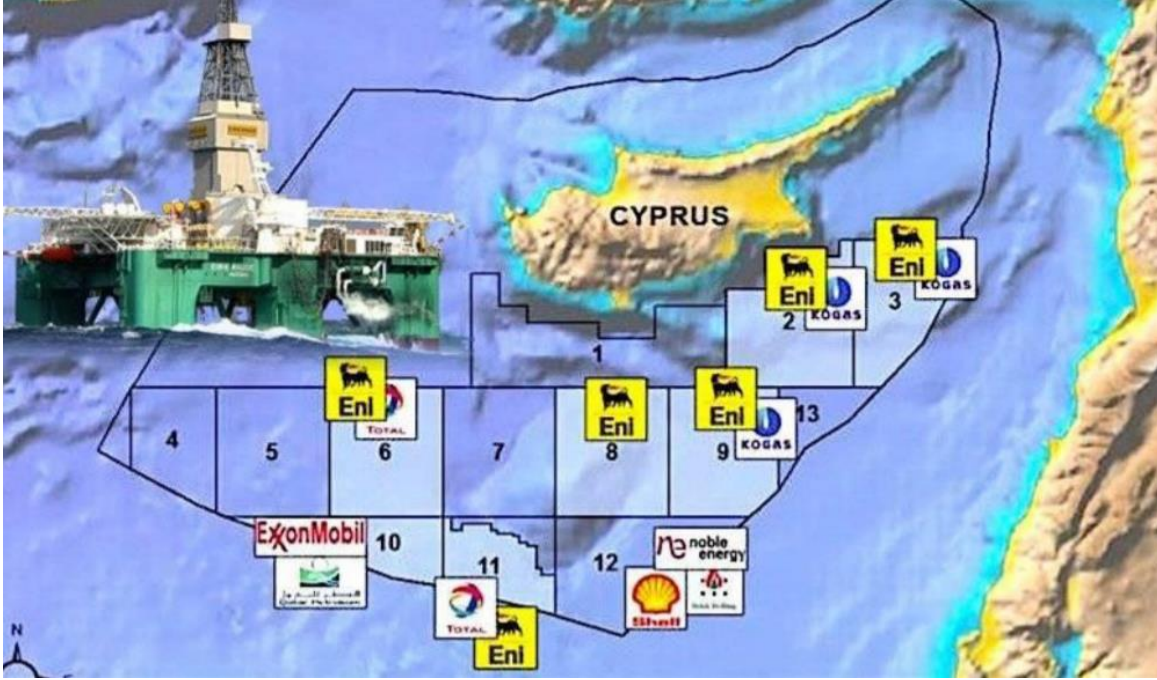
⁴⁷ For instance, Republic of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, and Jordan recently established EastMed Gas Forum (EMGF) in January 2020. The headquarters of the international organization is located in Cairo, Egypt. France also applied for membership to this organization while the United States aim to become a permanent observer member. See; Reuters (2020), "France asks to join Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum", 16.01.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-gas/france-asks-to-join-eastern-mediterranean-gas-forum-idUSKBN1ZF1V2>.

⁴⁸ DW (2020), "France joins Greece's naval exercises amid Turkey row", 26.08.2020, Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.dw.com/en/france-joins-greeces-naval-exercises-amid-turkey-row/a-54700105>.

⁴⁹ AA (2020), "Captain Cengiz Topel Mediterranean Storm Exercise", Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/pg/photo-gallery/captain-cengiz-topel-mediterranean-storm-exercise-continues/0>.

⁵⁰ France24 (2020), "France suspends role in NATO naval mission over tensions with Turkey", 01.07.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.france24.com/en/20200701-france-suspends-role-in-nato-naval-mission-over-turkish-warship-incident>.

⁵¹ Ömer Lütfi Taşçıoğlu (2018), "GKRY'nin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne ve Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'ne Ait Deniz Yetki Alanlarındaki Petrol ve Doğal Gaz Arama Çalışmaları ve Münhasır Ekonomik Bölge Anlaşmaları", *Social Sciences Studies Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue: 26, p. 5701.



2.2. Relations with Libya

During the Libyan civil war that is ongoing since 2011, Turkey and France has been supporting opposing sides. While Ankara strongly supports the Government of National Accord led by Fayez al-Sarraj with which it also signed an important deal on the delimitation of the Eastern Mediterranean in late 2019, Paris backs General Khalifa Haftar's forces. Although Haftar forces still possesses large territories under their control, after Turkey's military involvement, the Government of National Accord began to show considerable success on the battlefield and regained the control of some strategic locations. This created another geopolitical clash between Turkey and France and a new field of polemics between Turkish and French statesmen.

The French policy towards Libya is based on national interests rather than democratic principles. While France -together with the United Kingdom- displayed the strongest support to the military intervention in Libya in 2011 (*Opération Harmattan*), at the initial phase of the Arab Spring, French firm TOTAL received important privileges in regions controlled by General Khalifa Haftar.⁵² According to French strategists, the ideological backbone of French foreign policy

⁵² Furkan Polat (2020), "Küresel ve Bölgesel Aktörlerin Libya Politikaları", in Kemal İnat & Muhittin Ataman & Burhanettin Duran (eds.) *Doğu Akdeniz ve Türkiye'nin Hakları*, SETA Books 60, p. 220.

towards Libya is the fight against Islamist movements⁵³ since Fayed al-Sarraj is perceived as part of the Muslim Brotherhood movement which Gulf States (except Qatar), United States during Donald Trump's Presidency (2017-2021), Russia, and France consider as danger. According to Turkish academics, French foreign policy towards Libya is designed by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.⁵⁴ Turkish academics also criticize France for strengthening Russia in Libya.⁵⁵

With regard to Libya, French President Emmanuel Macron frequently accuses Turkey not to act in accordance with the Berlin Conference agreements especially on the provision of mercenaries and arms⁵⁶, while Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu⁵⁷ and Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar both claim that Macron is acting in a populist manner for keeping his electoral base in French domestic politics.⁵⁸

2.3. Relations with Greece

France, during Macron Presidency, also improves its strategic relations with Greece at the expense of angering Turkey. For instance, France openly supports Italy-Greece agreement about maritime jurisdiction rights signed on June 9, 2020 that provides full sovereignty to islands.⁵⁹ Encouraged by French and EU support, Greece has been recently claiming full sovereignty right for Kastellorizo (*Meis*), a very small island roughly 2 kilometers off the south coast of Turkey. These demands are quasi-unanimously seen as irrational and contrary to international law in Turkey. In terms of Greek-Turkish disagreement about the maritime jurisdiction rights, France acts as a full supporter of Greece unlike Germany, who tries to act as a moderator. Key Turkish political figures seem very sensitive on this issue since previously an unofficial map prepared by

⁵³ Ariane Bonzon (2020), "Le désastreux casting de la France en Libye", *Slate.fr*, 25.06.2020, Date of Accession: 01.12.2020 from <http://www.slate.fr/story/191889/france-libye-turquie-conflit-guerre-influence-diplomatie-ingerence-soutien-marechal-haftar>.

⁵⁴ Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney (2020), "Batılı Ülkelerin Doğu Akdeniz Politikaları", pp. 140-141.

⁵⁵ İdlir Lika (2020), *Fransa'nın Doğu Akdeniz'deki Tehlikeli Oyunu*, SETA Analiz, August 2020, Issue: 330, İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, p. 8.

⁵⁶ *Euronews* (2020), "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron: "Türk gemileri Libya'ya Suriyeli paralı asker taşıyor"", Date of Accession: 04.12.2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7gfWNdtdmg>.

⁵⁷ *A Haber* (2020), "Türkiye'den Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron'a "Libya" tepkisi |Video", 25.06.2020, Date of Accession: 02.12.2020 from <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/video/gundem-videolari/turkiyeden-fransa-cumhurbaskani-macrona-libya-tepkisi-video>.

⁵⁸ *DW Türkçe* (2020), "Akar: Haklarımızdan vazgeçilmesi söz konusu değil", 13.09.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.dw.com/tr/akar-haklar%C4%B1m%C4%B1zdan-vazge%C3%A7ilmesi-s%C3%B6z-konusu-de%C4%9Fil/a-54911502>.

⁵⁹ İdlir Lika (2020), *Fransa'nın Doğu Akdeniz'deki Tehlikeli Oyunu*, ss. 14-15.

two European scholars Juan Luis Juárez de Vivro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Mateo, known as the “*Seville Map*”⁶⁰, had angered Turkish public. As a reaction to “*Seville Map*”, two retired Turkish admirals (Ramazan Cem Gürdeniz and Cihat Yaycı) developed a nationalist strategic doctrine called “*Mavi Vatan*” (Blue Homeland/Patrie Bleue).⁶¹ Blue Homeland portrays Turkish claims over Aegean and Mediterranean Seas as the defense of the homeland on the waters and incites Turkish nationalism and military adventurism.

Map III: Blue Homeland⁶²



Another French attitude that angers Turkey in terms of relations with Greece is President Macron’s decision to send LaFayette frigate and two Rafale jets to Eastern Mediterranean in order to show solidarity with Greece. Macron’s decision was welcomed by Greek Prime Minister

⁶⁰ See; Juan Luis Suárez de Vivro & Juan Carlos Rodríguez Mateos (2006), “Maritime Europe and EU enlargement. A geopolitical perspective”, *Marine Policy*, Vol. 30, No: 2 (March 2006), pp. 167-172.

⁶¹ Esra Yalçınalp & Emre Temel (2020), “Mavi Vatan nasıl doğdu? Doktrin mimarları Cem Gürdeniz ve Cihat Yaycı anlatıyor”, 10.09.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54096105>; Matthieu Caillaud (2020), “Qu’est-ce que la « patrie bleue » ? Une conversation avec l’idéologue de la doctrine géopolitique turque”, *Le Grand Continent*, 26.10.2020, Date of Accession: 12.12.2020 from <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/10/26/cem-gurdeniz-geopolitique-maritime-turque/>.

⁶² Esra Yalçınalp & Emre Temel (2020), “Mavi Vatan nasıl doğdu? Doktrin mimarları Cem Gürdeniz ve Cihat Yaycı anlatıyor”, 10.09.2020, Date of Accession: 03.12.2020 from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54096105>

Kyriakos Mitsotakis and in a Twitter message, Mitsotakis thanked Macron.⁶³ It is not surprising that Greek decision to buy 18 Rafale jets took place after this decision.

3. Potential Avenues to Improve Bilateral Relations

Although Turkey and France are not in direct clash in any of these regions, as this research proves, it is obvious that two countries' geopolitical perceptions and strategic plans do not match. These crises have negative effects on both sides. Turkish economy was devastated in 2020 due to the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic as well as problematic relations with the U.S. and the EU. French economy, for its part, has also stagnated in 2020 due to the pandemic and President Erdoğan's call for an unofficial boycott of French products in Turkey and in the Islamic world. The two countries can consider working on some methods and mechanisms to improve their relations or at least to prevent the escalation of their disagreements. Since Turkey and France are two traditional allies within the NATO, this is absolutely necessary for the Western bloc.

Here are some policy choices which could ameliorate Turkish-French relations despite these abovementioned problems:

- Turkey and Libya could support the peace process in Libya since two countries have great influence over the governments in their camps. Turkish-French cooperation in Libya might lead to a new and more advantageous era for both countries in Libyan context with privileges provided to Turkish and French companies and governments.
- France could act as a mediator between Turkey and Greece and Turkey and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean instead of leading the anti-Turkey bloc. As a country having a strong diplomatic legacy, France could achieve this by creating reasonable middle grounds.
- France could actively support a diplomatic solution in Cyprus and an agreement about the transfer of hydrocarbon resources in this region to European market.
- French President Emmanuel Macron can make an official visit to Turkey in the coming years as a response to President Erdoğan's France visit in 2018. President Macron can

⁶³ Sina Kısacık & Gamze Helvacıköylü (2020), "Doğu Akdeniz'deki Enerji Temelli Güvenlik Gelişmelerinin Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdenizli Komşuları ve Küresel Güçlerle Olan İlişkilerine Yansımaları", p. 130.

encourage Turkey for making reforms in achieving full membership to the EU, instead of pushing Turkey more towards the Eastern bloc.

- Presidents and statesmen from both countries could prefer a more diplomatic and polite language in addressing to each other since they represent millions of people and there is no widespread historical enmity between Turkish and French nations.
- Politicians from both countries should avoid using foreign policy as a domestic policy instrument.

Conclusion

This paper tried to analyze French foreign policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean during Emmanuel Macron's Presidency in the light of a strategic report published by *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* (FRS), a French think-tank that is closed to President Emmanuel Macron. The research then focused on the reasons that create problems between Turkey and France. Accordingly, the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus Dispute, relations with Libya, and relations with Greece were analyzed as three main issues where Turkish and French interests diverge although two countries are not in direct existential conflict. The paper also suggested some ways to improve bilateral relations at the last part. The paper overall tried to show that Turkish and French political problems are not existential conflicts between two friendly nations and there could be cooperation and mediation for the solution of these problems between the two states in the near future.

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