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## Rivalry in the New Geopolitics of the Mediterranean: Turkey's Geostrategic Vision and Its Effects on Foreign (Energy) and Security Policies

### *Doğu Akdeniz'in Yeni Jeopolitiğinde Rekabet: Türkiye'nin Jeostratejik Vizyonu ve Dış (Enerji) ve Güvenlik Politikalarına Etkileri*

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**Abstract:** The Eastern Mediterranean (EM) has endured significant geopolitical alterations in the last decade through the new oil and natural discoveries. The energy issues in the region present geostrategic inferences for the states to assure their economic, politic and geostrategic interests and also accelerate the rivalry among the surrounding states and external powers. In addition, new oil and natural sources discoveries have triggered and increased regional insecurity and instability. Turkey with her geopolitical position is one part of the rivalry in the context of the new geopolitics of the Mediterranean. As a rival, Turkey has struggled for and maintaining its economic and geopolitical interests. Moreover, Turkey aims to be a regional energy hub in the region as a transit route and by its growing gas market. Turkey has distinctly presented a pretentious foreign policy approach with multilateral diplomacy and military deterrence in the regional political debates. The article analyses Turkey's geostrategic vision and its effects on Turkey's Turkey's foreign and energy security policies.

**Keywords:** Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey, Energy Geopolitics

**Öz:** Doğu Akdeniz, son yıllarda keşfedilen petrol ve doğal kaynaklar vasıtasıyla önemli jeopolitik değişimler yaşamaktadır. Bölgedeki enerji konuları, bölge devletlerinin ekonomik, politik ve jeostratejik çıkarlarını temin etmek ve sürdürmek adına jeostratejik sonuçlar ortaya çıkarmakta ve Doğu Akdeniz'i çevreleyen devletler ile dış güçler olmak üzere taraflar arasında rekabeti arttırmaktadır. Yeni petrol ve doğal kaynakların keşfi ayrıca bölgenin güvenliğini ve istikrarını olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Türkiye de jeopolitik konumu ile Akdeniz'in değişen jeopolitiği bağlamında rekabetin önemli bir parçasıdır. Rekabetçi olarak Türkiye de ekonomik ve jeopolitik çıkarlarını koruyup sürdürmek istemektedir. Üstelik Türkiye genişleyen doğal gaz pazarı ile bölgesel enerji transfer merkezi olma amacındadır. Türkiye bu amacına yönelik çok taraflı diplomasi ve bölgedeki politik

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tartışmalar içinde askeri caydırıcılığa da yer vererek iddialı ve inatçı bir dış politika yaklaşımı ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin jeostratejik vizyonunu ve bu vizyonun Türk dış politikasına ve enerji güvenliği politikasına olan etkilerini analiz etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Doğu Akdeniz, Türkiye, Enerji Jeopolitiği

## Introduction

At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Middle East gained importance and attraction in global politics through the discoveries of oil and natural gas reserves. Thus, the Middle East took place in the centre of the international geopolitical rivalries. Almost a century later, energy discoveries in the EM are unlikely to bring about such tectonic shifts in the strategic fortunes of the Levant, yet they have generated a fresh interest in their potential impact on existing regional disputes and power constellations (Grigoriadis, 2014: 124). From 2008 onwards, the security and political order of the EM subsystem, as it is operating since the onset of the Cold War, collapsed due to worsening relations between the two most important regional allies of U.S., Turkey and Israel, and continuing turmoil in the Arab World, and that order was replaced by a proxy civil war in Syria and Libya, a geopolitical rivalry between Turkey, Israel, Cyprus and Greece, as well as between the West and international actors like Russia, Turkey and Iran, who enthusiastically aspire to review the regional status quo in Western Eurasia (Marketos, 2021:47). In other words, the discoveries of energy reserves have caused to blaze the rivalries among the regional and international actors in the context of their interests, and also led to a growing geopolitical shift on all surrounding states. On the other hand, Andreas Stergiou (2019:11) highlights that “the new reserves could have a major, positive effect on Europe’s gas-diversification strategy, enabling European Union (EU) countries to realize a long pursued goal, namely, to significantly reduce their dependence on Russian gas imports”. The new reserves and expected discoveries in the Levantine Basin have evoked an important question: how will be delineated the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of all littoral states in the EM? The answer to the question has still remained its mystery and complexity in terms of the East-Med’s (in)security and (in)stability.

As one of the rivals – a large energy importer and a transport hub – Turkey has adopted an assertive foreign policy for the interests in the region. Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has promoted itself as an indispensable energy hub for Europe, indeed, Turkey is becoming an increasingly important transit country for energy supplies, especially from the Caucasus (Azerbaijan), to the EU (TAP and Anatolian Transit Gas Pipeline—TANAP, among others) (Giannakopoulos, 2016:12). Besides, Turkey has revised its foreign and energy security policies, and geostrategic vision in the context of the EM’s new geopolitics.

The importance of the EM region has increased in the 2000s thanks to the discovery of oil and natural gas deposits in the offshore areas. In this sense, especially the finding of important natural gas reserves in Cyprus Island, Israel and Egypt as well as the possibility of the discovery of gas in such littoral states as Lebanon has been attracting both the interests of the regional countries and outer-regional countries. Since the discovery of natural gas reserves in the offshore areas of the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCAS), Israel and Egypt, these three countries have been intensively searching for the monetization of these reserves via two pipeline and one LNG projects. When all the advantages and disadvantages of these three alternatives are examined in detail by the international energy experts, it is seen that a probable Turkish-Israeli Natural Gas Pipeline comes into the forefront as the most economical and rational one. However, the several disagreements between the countries such as Israel-Lebanon, Turkey-Greece-GCAS, Turkey-Egypt and Turkey-Israel remain the main barriers before the commercialization of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas reserves. Here Turkey believes that if all the littoral states realize the potential of “Win-Win Situation” and refrain from such activities as East-Med Pipeline and East-Med Gas Forum excluding Northern Cyprus and it, Ankara is / will be open to every kind of cooperation.

The discovery of energy resources in the EM Sea in the beginning of 2000s changed the political dynamics in the region. For a decade, GCAS focused on forming alliances in the region via the

agreements with the world's top energy companies while the economic interests shaped the international politics and regional cooperation. Meanwhile, Arab Spring changed the political scene and the dynamics of political balances in the region. Against the agreements that were signed with energy companies, Turkey mostly remained silent and did not actively react to these political and economic developments in the region until 2019 when Turkey and Libya signed an agreement changing the direction of warfare in Libya. As a second step, Turkey sent troops to Libya. The main motivation of Turkey was to gain a partner in the region regarding its security and strategy and, Libya seemed to be the only choice.

With this in mind, this article aims to analyse Turkey's geostrategic vision and its effects on foreign (energy) and (energy) security policies in the context of the new geopolitics of the East-Med. Focusing on Turkey's growing gas market and transit route potential Turkey's political approaches and acts for the region, and future projection in the EM will be discussed by considering the instruments used such as an assertive foreign and energy security policies. In this vein, the article begins by decoding the driving factors of the East-Med's significance in global geopolitics. It then jumps into the discussion of the fundamental parameters of the struggle regarding the monetization of East-Med gas deposits by the examination of the most discussed alternatives to primarily the European markets. In the third part, the issue delves into Turkish foreign (energy) policy and its reflexive implications on the East-Med. Also, the challenges faced by Turkish foreign policy and the reactions towards the regional developments are analyzed in line with the recent changes in the dynamics of alliances.

### **1. The Eastern Mediterranean in Global Geopolitics and Back to Power Politics**

As a sea or land, regions have gained more significance in terms of international politics and its dynamics such as power and purpose in global affairs. Richard Haas states that many of the most important economic, military, and diplomatic interactions take place at this level for the simple reason that proximity matters and many countries that count for little at the global level, because of a lack of either reach or relative weight, have a much greater impact on their neighbours (Haas, 2017:104). He also highlights that regions are affected to each other. Besides, Henry Kissinger (2014:340) emphasizes that "the contemporary quest for world order will require a coherent strategy to establish a concept of order within the various regions and to relate these regional orders to one another". As a term, *regions* are surely encased in uncertainty and dissension. It is clear that it is hard to find a consensus on an international region that has standard extents, features and social structure, but on the other hand, a subsystem as a term provides a clear and cognitive meaning and understanding. The regions of the Middle East and Eastern Europe are the instructive examples that reflect an ambiguity, disagreement and terminological chaos. Although those regions have dynamic and changing characteristics, they have never existed in the first place and gained an accepted core in international politics. They are generally perceived and identified as regional subsystems. In this context, to define a regional subsystem provides several useful attributes.

There are five main criteria in the context of a region's delineation such as geographical status of the region, the security dimension of the region, internal and external recognition of region, common historical background, economic interdependence and region's characteristics. Inevitably, a region has to encompass a certain territory and specific states, even if questions are raised about both and it is also quite possible to define a wider regional subsystem but argue that it should be divided into two or more *sub-regions* (Tziampiris, 2019:3). In time, the numbers of sub-regions might increase and decrease in inner and outer borders, and so the states' roles and approaches in the sub-regions do not show a persistence and change in the terms of their interests and regional actors' perceptions. As a second criteria, the concept of *security* should be analysed in a regional structure in the context of states' relations to each other in a region. Barry Buzan identifies security concept in a regional security complex and states that a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another (Buzan, 1983:106). Regional security complexes are the subsystems in a particular geographical area include a high level of threat felt by two or more major states. The third criterion is the balance and coherence of a region in terms of its *internal and external recognition*. A fourth one is the existence of a *common historical*

*background.* The common historical, cultural and experiences are the most important factors of definition and understanding of a region. As the fifth criterion *economic interdependence* constructively affects and dominates the relations among the states and contributes to the understanding and interiorization of region concept. *Unique characteristics* as the last criteria mean the region's distinctive commonalities from other regions. Those distinctive characteristics provide a major effect and status in comparison with other regions. Therefore, it is possible to say that a region can be described by the presence of a geographical region that may comprise sub-regions but should comprise several states.

As a distinct regional subsystem, the East-Med has often been considered as one each part of Western and Eastern in the context of geographical, political and strategic concerns. Despite its relatively small size the EM includes the states of Turkey, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Egypt and GCAS, and including Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Gaza as the self-declared states but it is clear that the core states of the EM are likely Turkey, Greece, Israel, Egypt and GCAS. The EM states occasionally present a much degree of coherence in comparison with the Mediterranean region as a whole despite their discrepancies and disputes to one another. Moreover, the East-Med has a religious complexity such as the populations of Muslim, Orthodox and Jewish. In respect of the East-Med's internal and external identifiability, the uncertainty related to the EM emphasizes on external identifiability and its regional characteristics and historical background take part in internal identifiability.

In the perspective of the region's security issues there are many hazardous and conflictual events in recent years such as the civil war in Syria, armed conflicts and internal disturbance in Libya, prejudicial conflicts centred Islamism throughout the region, the uncertainty and civil rebellions in Egypt and Turkey's geostrategic vision and persistent regional aspirations in the region; and, more recently, a refugee crisis involving millions that have affected not only regional states but also the domestic politics of several European states and quite possibly the very nature and future of European integration (Tziampiris, 2019:24). The EM has been in a location in which great powers, regional states and non-state actors have increased the rivalry among them and the balance of power policies have been tested. In addition to those security issues in the region, new energy reserves findings off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, Greece's rediscovery of its southeastern neighbourhood, developments in the Cyprus Problem, and Turkey's new foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have created unprecedented (in)security linkages and connections among the 'Middle Eastern' and 'European' states of the EM, giving rise to a geopolitical space with distinct significance (Tziarras, 2019:5). In this context, the EM has a wider security environment including four main interrelated dynamics such as discoveries of energy resources, rivalry and enmities in growing geopolitical shift, security challenges, and interventions and containments of external Powers. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fate of the Middle East altered through the discoveries of oil and natural gas reserves and this alteration provided the Middle East taking part in the centre of international politics (Grigoriadis, 2014:124). Approximately a century later the discoveries of energy reserves in the EM has presented the same fate for the region, but on the other hand, the developments in the region have provided for the EM a changing geopolitics and security dynamics. The discoveries of natural gas reserves in the region have presented more advantages for the region states in the aspects of their economies, strategic visions, and approaches and outlooks in international politics. It is clear that energy discoveries have provided an attraction and importance to the region as a whole geopolitically and geo-economically, and on the other hand, the discoveries have made energy security a current issue. As one of the core states of the region, Turkey has cared about and revised its energy security policy and geostrategic vision for the region in the context of the EM's new geopolitics through the energy findings. The findings have also accelerated the geopolitical rivalry among the regional states, particularly between Turkey and Greece&Israel. The issues of (in)security have been affected by the worsened relationships between Turkey and the others, especially after 2010. Besides, the historical and traditional background of the relationships and enmities among Turkey, Greece, GCAS and Israel have affected the geopolitical rivalry and (im)balances of power. Apart from the historical and traditional security concerns and challenges over the region's geopolitics and power balance, the region has economic, social and humanitarian problems in the centre of security such as the phenomenon of immigration through the Arab Uprisings and the civil war in

Syria. Millions of people have been forced to leave their countries and the properties have been destroyed. These problems have impressed neighbouring areas and especially created refugee crisis that has affected Turkey, Greece and the EU at the most in terms of economic, social, cultural and domestic policy structures. On the other hand, Islamist terrorist attacks and jihadist groups' armed actions have caused massive humanitarian security problems. The interventions, containments and attraction of the growing interests of external powers as the least dynamic of the region's security environment has tempested the structure and balance of the EM over the past decade. Not only the United States and Russia but also the European Union, Turkey and China as external powers have tried to get more involved in the region's affairs in the context of their interests. The existence of external powers has provided turmoil, instability and insecurity for the East-Med, and created a harsh rivalry in the region and antagonism among external powers, region states and non-state actors. The antagonism among those rivals and the resulting geopolitical bargaining will have a significant impact on national foreign policies in the EM and the networks of commercial, energy and security cooperation (Tziarras, 2019:7).

As a result, the EM has gained importance by the energy reserves findings over the past decade and has new geopolitics affecting all dynamics in the region. Besides, the East-Med's new geopolitics has revealed a rivalry in the region and it has caused multidimensional problems in the region and neighbouring areas. As one of the rivals, Turkey has tried to protect and maintain its ambitions and strategic interests in the region by adopting a pretentious foreign policy and using an instrument such as diplomacy in the political debates of the region. Turkey has also adopted intervention and containment policy on security and energy developments in the EM.

## **2. The Competition on the Monetization of the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Reserves**

Before mentioning the monetization alternatives of EM, it has to be pointed out some important facts on this issue. When the energy aspect in the EM is examined, as stated by the "Fact Sheet 2010–2014", a document of the U.S. Geological Research Institution, 1.7 billion barrels of theoretically recoverable oil reserves and 3.5 trillion cubic meters (tcm) of officially recoverable natural gas reserves are situated within the Levantine East Basin. According to Mehmet Ögütçü, a world-famous expert on international energy diplomacy, when we take into consideration the natural gas consumption within the world per annum occurs as 3.5 trillion cubic meters, if we drill and extract all the claimed reserves in the EM, we can hardly meet just our one-year natural gas demand. Also for Ögütçü, when we consider, our daily oil consumption as 100 million barrels, the EM reserves only meet the global demand for 17 days. Ögütçü, therefore, highlights that the EM energy discoveries should not be overemphasized. Moreover, to Ögütçü, the world experiences a period having abundant oil and natural gas. In this sense, the prices are decreasing in natural gas and the buyers are seen as "the most important ones". Ögütçü points out that the extraction of EM gas will be more costly when compared with current other producers and its sales markets are very limited (Ögütçü: 2020:143).

After this estimation, littoral states in this region have been increasing their initiatives to ascertain oil and natural gas resources within their offshore areas. There exist eight fundamental deposits within the EM namely Cyprus, Eratosthenes High, Latakia, Levant, Judea, Nile Delta, Western Arabian province and Zagros province. Among them, the Levant basin possessed by Tel-Aviv remains the most significant one within the context of proven natural gas resources. The first finding occurred within the Noa field in 1999 which was followed by the explorations in Mari-B field in 2000. Extra discoveries realized in Dalit and Tamar in 2009, Leviathan in 2010, Aprehodite and Tanin in 2011 have put forward the huge prospect of the area in terms of offshore energy generation primarily for natural gas. The Tamar and Leviathan natural gas deposits have been the greatest regional offshore findings having approximately 320 bcm and 600 bcm of natural gas separately. The finding of abundant natural gas resources within the Levant Basin has paved the way for exploration and drilling activities by other countries in the region. The GCAS has expanded its exploration activities in 2011 into the offshore territory wherein 180 bcm of gas was found. In a one-sided decision by GCAS, the exploration, as well as drilling areas nearby Cyprus Island, would be separated in 13 blocks where the drilling operation was carried out by such international energy companies as Eni, Total, EXXON-Mobil, Shell, Noble Energy,

Qatar Petroleum, Delek Group and Kogas. The two most noticeable gas findings would occur in Block 12 of the Aprehodite and Aprehodite Field that is positioned at the Israeli section of maritime borderline with the Cyprus Island. After the exploration operations within Israel and GCAS, the huge natural gas resources found in Egypt in 2015 has allowed Egypt to turn out to be a natural gas exporting country. Egypt had faced a noticeable decrease in terms of natural gas generation from the highest level of 5.8 billion cubic feet (bcf) daily in 2009 to 3.9 bcf daily in 2016 however thanks to the numerous offshore natural gas exploration operations within the offshore of Egypt has altered the energy outlook of the country. The West Nile Delta, Nooros, Atoll and Zohr fields have been the key areas in terms of exploration operations. The Zohr Natural Gas Field has been the most significant finding in Egypt at that time possessing nearly 850 bcm of gas, transforming it the biggest natural gas deposit within the Mediterranean. This has allowed Cairo to liberate itself from reliance on LNG imports and augment its export capacity. Therefore, Cairo's advancement in natural gas finding operations has surpassed the operations of Israel and GCAS. Furthermore, the new finding within the Nile Delta Area projected to have the daily 20 million cubic feet production has empowered the stance of Cairo as a clear natural gas exporter (Biresselioğlu: 2019:122-123).

When considered from Egypt, it shows ambiguities related with the developments on global LNG market, geopolitics and reform in energy policy. Following the turning out to be a clear natural gas importing country ever since the last years, it is projected that within the early times of forthcoming decade Egypt will begin to export natural gas again. Within the context of Observatoire Méditerranéen De L'Energie (OME)'s conservative scenario, Cairo's export prospect will stand approximately 17 bcm as of 2030, however as of 2040, Cairo will turn out to be a marginal gas seller, within the context of the proactive scenario, its export prospect possibly will surpass 30 bcm as of 2030 and decrease nearly to 25 bcm by 2040. When we come to Israel and GCAS, they can transform from energy importers to exporters by the development of their offshore gas areas. For Israel, 60 per cent of the electricity produced is acquired from natural gas generated from the Tamar Field. The advancement of the Leviathan Field has not begun because of the regulatory difficulties which have resulted in its advancement a hardly competitive one when compared with the inexpensive LNG imports. The firms that control both fields have signed many agreements for exporting the gas into Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, however, the geopolitical conflicts, the absence of regional export infrastructure, low natural gas prices and unclear regulatory frameworks do constitute noticeable challenges. The OME's outlook envisions Tel-Aviv's gas export prospect to reach its highest level within the second half of the 2020s at nearly 20 bcm per annum, yet to decrease sharply to unimportant levels as of 2040. It should be mentioned in this context that on the last day of 2019, the huge Leviathan field has begun the production. Following this, Tel-Aviv has quickly begun exporting some portion of its new natural gas to Egypt via the realizing the reverse stream from the pipeline within the Sinai that had previously transported Egyptian gas to Israel. Since Egypt, stands currently self-sufficient in terms of natural gas, the Tel-Aviv gas will assist in activating Egypt's unused liquefaction plants to be operational and enables Egypt to turn back into the LNG export business. The then Egyptian Energy Minister Tarık el-Molla has addressed that "Europe is our customer. We have another ready-made solution. We have the infrastructure." (Yergin, 2020:257). In terms of Cyprus, it may add another 5 bcm per annum between 2025 and 2040 into the export capacity of the region providing that the Aphrodite field were to be advanced. Nonetheless, to realize this, the problems with Turkey ought to be resolved. For some experts, it is observed that a more stable geopolitical order coming into the forefront in the EM and envisage reconciliation between Ankara and Tel-Aviv that may be resulted in a step forward in terms of the monetization of the latter's gas reserves. But, geopolitical tensions assist to supplement a dejected gas market condition in lessening firms' willingness for making investments into the offshore gas deposits of the region (Escribano, 2018:240).

The separated position of GCAS stands the fundamental reason for confrontation in terms of the natural gas exploration initiatives nearby the island. On the other hand, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, founded in 1983, has just been recognized by Ankara, the international recognition of GCAS allows for carrying out unilateral drillings that result in the violation of Turkey's continental shelf located at the Blocks 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Therefore, the clashing interests of regional neighbours and

organizations constitute legal concerns within the context of drilling the offshore oil and natural gas. The EEZ offered by Greece and the GCAS and Turkey's continental shelf claims is confronted. This emerges from the reality that Turkey is not one of the signatory states of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), in contrast, Greece and GCAS are the signatories, therefore, the parties to this convention. Here, within this framework, Ankara grounds its stance especially over the pact, equitable solution clauses and also conditional provisions as mentioned within the articles 74 and 83 of UNCLOS concerning with the EEZ and Continental Shelf (CS) correspondingly. Ankara too alleges that "the delimitation of the continental shelf in a semi-enclosed sea like the Mediterranean ought to be achieved by settlement concerning for to the rights and interests of the related countries by following international law. The jurisdictional judgement that Cyprus Island in the West and the Greek Islands within the region encompassing Castellorizo cannot create complete EEZ/CS in line with international law since they interfere with the equitable delimitation" (Bireselioğlu, 2019:124). Işıksal and Maaitah underline that the existing problems in the EM have too necessitated Turkey's purchase of S-400 Missile Defense System. There stands an important confrontation regarding the EEZ between Turkey, Greece and GCAS. While Greece and GCAS allege that the EEZ of Turkey remains 41.000 square kilometers, Turkey alleges that it stays 145.000 square kilometers. Therefore, there exist nearly 3.5 times difference between each party allegations and this disagreement may cause to a military confrontation within the region. Within this context, for Işıksal and Maaitah, the S-400 air defence systems similarly encompass and guard the EEZ that Ankara alleges (Işıksal and Maaitah, 2020:258).

When it is examined from the commercialization of natural gas reserves discovered within the EM, three possibilities have extensively been deliberated among the relating states and energy firms.

*East-Med Pipeline:* When the Israeli energy minister Yuval Steinitz has expressed that his country has already found much more than they are capable of consuming, this applies not only to Israel. Within this context, as of January 2, 2020, Greece, Cyprus and Israel have agreed on a contract to construct an 1180 mile-undersea pipeline that will transfer East-Med gas to Greece after onto Italy. Here Turkey has immediately condemned this initiative which it has claimed that it will be crossing its waters. It should be underlined Turkey has sent its warships to accompany its drilling ships that Cyprus alleges as its own EEZ (Yergin, 2020:257). By this project, it is foreseen shipping the Israeli reserves over GCAS to European markets with 10 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas annually and also envisioned meeting 4 % its annual natural gas needs from the middle of the decade. This project is counted in the list of "EU List of Projects of Common Interest". The agreement represents an announcement of political willpower. But, it stays currently reliant on the construction consortium, under the control of the Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) and Italy's Edison, to afford the roughly six billion euros (\$6.7bn), which remain the predictable cost of the pipeline. The three guarantor states of the East-Med Pipeline have been underlining that the implementation of this pipeline is aimed at being a "win-win" condition for all the associated parties, and it is not established counter to other countries, principally Turkey. This trilateral pact made among Tel-Aviv (Jerusalem)-Nicosia-Athens on the building of East-Med Pipeline has been sincerely assessed by the EU spokesperson on January 2,2020 (Örmeci and Kısacık, 2020: 42-43).

A significant problem within the background of the putting into practice of the project stays in its high cost and the necessary capacity, for covering the costs has not until now actually been delivered. For the Greek daily newspaper '*To Vima*', it is projected that the conveyance cost of the natural gas might stand three times less costly if the pipeline passes through Turkey when compared with the direction suggested by the EM. In accordance with this forecast, Androulla Vassiliou, ex-Greek Cypriot EU Commissioner for Health and also for Education, Culture, Multilingualism & Youth, has assessed this pipeline as for a pipeline that will stand so costly that it will stand unmanageable to fund, for natural gas the price of which we do not identify if we can rationalize the spending and the volumes of which stand still indefinite (Örmeci and Kısacık, 2020: 42-43). Another important analysis on this issue has been shared by Greek energy expert Ioannis Michaletos. Michaletos has addressed that this pipeline might be realized at any time. Because according to him, East-Med is the rival of the Trans-Adriatic

Pipeline. Michaletos has underlined that the total capacities of Nord Stream 1-2 are 110 bcm per annum. They are supplying gas cheaper and from a very short distance. Thus Michaletos believes that for this reason, the EM cannot compete with them. He too adds that the global crisis caused by COVID-19 Pandemi possibly will affect the construction of EM. Michaletos mentions that due to COVID-19, consumption and prices have decreased. Therefore, this project may not be economically feasible due to the current prices. Michaletos lastly underscores that if this economic situation continues like that for a longer time, all kinds of investments are very difficult to realize (Sputnik International, 2020). Ögütçü mentions that the agreement among Israel-Greece-GCAS on the construction of East-Med is just a worthless political manoeuvre. According to Ögütçü, this project is not warmly welcomed by Egypt and Israel has been continuing to discuss with Turkey on the monetization of its resources. For Ögütçü, no one has the will and power to afford this project. Consequently, Ögütçü believes that the fate of East-Med Pipeline will not differ from Nabucco, signed many agreements on it for 12 years (Ögütçü, 2020:147-148).

*Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG):* The second alternative for the shipping of East-Mediterranean natural gas principally to the European markets stands the LNG. In this opportunity, the building of an LNG plant in Vasilikos stands deliberated. It is scheduled to convey not only the GCAS's gas but also the Israeli resources. Nevertheless, this choice remains very difficult for the implementation owing to inadequate natural reserves of GCAS and Israel's persistence over the building of this plant within its territory owing to national security reasons. Additionally, one correspondingly had better indicate that Tel-Aviv does not sponsor any type of an alternative for the transference of its gas reserves beforehand securing the pipeline opportunity (Örmeci and Kısacık, 2020:45). Fatih Birol, the executive director of International Energy Agency, believes that it is not an accurate behaviour to expect a very big and game-changing role from the EM because as it is also pointed out by Ögütçü that the world is in the middle of natural gas bonanza. Within this context, Birol underlines that the Qatari LNG has a very dominant place in the EM. Moreover, it should be added that the formation of a very great project within the context of natural gas coming from Qatar, U.S., Israel and Egypt is economically very hard and also one should include some political problems in that regard. Birol highlights that Egypt was firstly considering using its capacity in its domestic consumption and has started to produce for a time ago. It ought to be considered in this manner that, for Birol, there is going to be a serious LNG export from Egypt and by the discovery of Noor Field, Cairo will have a nearly 20-bcm together with the two. Birol thinks that considering Israel, it uses its current natural gas production for its domestic consumption now. Moreover, Tel-Aviv has plans to export LNG or integrate Egypt in the future. Birol lastly stresses that there exists a surplus in the global natural gas market (Tzanetakou, 2019).

*Turkey-Israel Pipeline:* The third alternative concerning this subject stands the building of a Turkish-Israeli pipeline. In previous years, numerous discussions have been realized concerning the execution of this pipeline (Erşen, 2019). As stated by the Oslo Peace Institute, the entire charge of East-Med is anticipated as 16 billion Euros. When activated, the overall revenue is projected at 44.7 billion Euros. Yet again, consistent with the estimates of the Oslo Peace Institute, the whole probable charge of the LNG option is estimated as 10.3 billion Euros, while the entire turnover remains forecast as 41.1 billion Euros. About the same institution's calculations, the construction of Turkish-Israeli Pipeline is estimated to charge as 4 billion Euros, and the entire earnings are predicted as 56.8 billion Euros if this pipeline turns into operational. The most reasonable alternative for the EM natural gas resources appears to exist -undoubtedly-Turkey-Israel Pipeline. Nevertheless, owing to the continuing political disagreements between Ankara and Tel-Aviv (Jerusalem), along with social pressures, political threats may well minimize economic justification (Örmeci and Kısacık, 2020:45-46). One has to mention an important issue on Turkey-Israel Pipeline. Nevertheless, the new findings in the Aphrodite field on the offshore of the southern coast of Cyprus have altered the assessments in support of the EM project which was agreed regardless of its higher cost. The reasons for abandoning the Turkish-Israeli option can be enlisted as; Ankara's protracted sponsorship for Palestinians' search for independence that increased the tensionary situation between Turkey and Israel. In that context, it should be underlined that the Tel-Aviv's choice for exporting its additional natural gas to Europe via GCAS has been evaluated by Ankara as a strategic manoeuvre to weaken Turkey. Mustafa Akıncı, the former president of TRNC, has too



assessed the East-Med Pipeline as not a nonviolent route. Akıncı also underlines that a more economic, balanced and passive solution that will underwrite to regional peace ought to be selected. If this does not happen, according to Akıncı, this initiative will solely work for the permanent partition of Cyprus (Bireselioğlu, 2019:127-128).

It should be discussed that Ankara's drilling and exploration operations in the EM Region are seen illegitimate by regional actors and supranational organizations. The estimated result stands that these initiatives have inevitably harmed Ankara's affiliations with its neighbours primarily with the EU. For instance, Donald Tusk, the former president of European Council, has underlined that they fully corroborate Greece within the context of confrontation on the delimitation of the continental shelf and requests on Turkey to limit its operations within the region. Moreover, Ankara is under the threat of sanctions by EU officials ranging from ending the negotiations on the extension of the customs union and the suspension of Turkey's formal candidacy status to turn into a member of the EU. As a response to these statements, Turkey has declared that it will not accept one-sided deals that violate the rights and sovereignty of Turkey in the East-Med. To exemplify this, Fatih Dönmez, the Energy Minister of Turkey, has stated that considering any such deals attempting to underestimate Turkey and Turkish Cypriots' rights, a one-sided deal signed between the island of Cyprus and the regional countries will have no legitimacy for Turkey. Moreover, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Turkey, has underlined that it is/will be improbable for Turkey to recognize the third parties' involvement within the international court in the determination of maritime boundaries. An important initiative developed by the EM countries excluding Turkey and TRNC has been the East-Med Gas Forum set up in 2019 by Israel, Italy, the Palestinian Authority, GCAS, Egypt, Jordan and Greece for the regional collaboration. The central objective of this mechanism is forming a regional market to meet the interests and intentions of involving countries while decreasing infrastructure costs and maintaining competitive prices. This mechanism has firstly excluded Turkey, Syria and Lebanon but Damascus and Beirut have been invited to join it later on. Also in this sense, "The EM Security and Partnership Act" that adopted the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate in 2019 has demanded a U.S. committee report regarding the drilling operations of Ankara in the East-Med. Here, Turkey has not been addressed by name but this act has enabled the recording to the U.S. of any obstruction toward GCAS's drilling in its EEZ and also any unlawful operations within the East-Med (Bireselioğlu, 2019:128-129; Örmeci and Kısacık, 2020:46-54).

Here it is better to share some important analyses on this issue from foreign experts. Dr. Nimrod Goren, the founder and head of the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, has underlined that,

*"It is good to see a positive media discourse emerge on potential cooperation between Israel and Turkey. It will more difficult for Turkey and Israel to move forward now. Israel should not rule out Turkey's participation in regional gas-related mechanisms and forums on the Mediterranean, and can benefit from more inclusive regional cooperation..."* (Erşen, 2019).

Another important analysis on this issue has been made by Brenda Shaffer, a visiting researcher at Georgetown University's Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies (CERES) and senior fellow at Atlantic Council. Shaffer has underscored that;

*"Throughout crisis in the relations between Turkey and Israel, Ankara has supported conducting discussions with Israel on potential gas supply to Turkey or transit through Turkey. It is true in the current period as well. It was a huge mistake not to include Ankara up to this point in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. It cannot be a forum for cooperation if it does not involve a key player. I hope this will be corrected. Washington should press to include Turkey..."* (Erşen, 2019).

This part of the paper will be concluded with some significant analysis of Mehmet Ögütçü. Ögütçü mentions that *the EU countries consume an average of 450 bcm natural gas per annum. In line with this, EU has been trying to decrease the share of Russia but for Ögütçü, it is easy to estimate that after the becoming operational of Nord Stream-2 and Turk Stream-2, more purchasing of natural gas from North Africa and Norway, LNG supply and also the reaching of Caspian gas via Southern Gas*

*Corridor, the EU will not be interested in Eastern Mediterranean's gas that is expensive and highly influenced from geopolitical crises. Ögütçü underscores that it is not an exaggeration that the basis of the problems in the East-Med is not just hydrocarbons. In this sense, to Ögütçü, the strategic target of expelling Turkey from Cyprus and the narrowing down as well as the closure of Turkish war and commercial ships' passing into Greater Mediterranean and over the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea into the Red Sea (Ögütçü, 2020:143).*

### **3. Turkish Foreign Policy and Its Reflexive Implications on the Eastern Mediterranean as a Geopolitical Puzzle and Bonanza**

Turkey's interest in the EM has its roots back to the Ottoman Empire. Starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mediterranean Sea has become as the setting where the big battles have been fought and at the end, the winner held the power of controlling the sea roads and the international trade. In addition to these historical perspectives, in the 1980s Turkey has switched to an import economic model which has led Turkish foreign policy to drive relations within the region based on economic welfare. Therefore, Turkey has prioritized focusing on the economic relations rather than centuries-long disputes with its neighbours.

However, this hands of the wheel strategy for Turkish foreign policy was left behind when AKP came in power in Turkey. AKP's main perspective was defined as becoming a regional power by following a broader foreign policy horizon which resulted in major shifts in the basic principles of Turkish foreign policy. Although "zero problems with the neighbours" policy was designed as a tool for Ankara's passion to become a key player in regional politics, it not only led to a major failure to achieve this goal but also created an environment of competition instead of collaboration in the region. Regarding the old saying "enemy of my enemy is my friend", Turkey with its hands put the bricks on the wall which will isolate itself in terms of regional politics.

Another reason for the change in Turkish foreign policy rhetorics can be explained with the input of domestic politics. The rhetorics of being a strong and powerful country to shape the perceptions of millions inside was carefully followed but caused the criticisms about Turkey's assertiveness to rely on Neo-Ottomanism by bringing back the Ottoman Empire. Neo-Ottomanism suddenly became a tool for suspicious attempts of Turkish foreign policy to dominate in the ex-lands of Ottoman Empire regardless of its intention to create a peaceful region supporting "zero problems with the neighbours" policy. Even though this rhetoric increased AKP's popularity among millions domestically, on the contrary, it harmed Turkey's strong image of being a member of a western world.

Whilst Turkey was trying to find its way to balance internal and external rhetoric, Arab spring started new chaos in the region and pushed the lost dynamics of Turkish foreign policy even further. Arab spring replaced the lifetime dictatorships in the region with the newly elected governments. At the heart of such tension, its implications on Turkish foreign policy were inevitable. Although at first Turkey played an observer role, as the tension rosed, new political parameters had to be defined to manage political relations with these countries for the sake of Turkey's long-term interests.

As Turkish foreign policy evolved for closer relations with the Middle East during AKP term, Turkish-Israeli relations have lost its basis and the US-Israel-Turkey triangle was broken. Turkey's intentions on building closer relations with Arab countries, especially with Palestine, caused Israel to question whether Turkey was still an old friend in the region. Following the political crisis of "one-minute", "lower-chair for Turkish Ambassador" and "Gaza Flotilla Raid", the alliance was heavily damaged and this led Israel to search for another option for regional cooperation (Cohen and Freilich, 2014:4). As Turkey got closer with the Arab world, which has been defined as the enemy of Israel for long, Israel replaced the empty seat from Turkey with Greece and GCAS regarding its security concerns.

In the meanwhile, Turkey seemed to be rolling with its new partner, Egypt, where Muslim Brothers came in power as a result of Arab Spring. However, a possibility of Turkey-Egypt-Qatar alliance would not be acceptable by Israel since this could be a threat for security reasons. Turkey was aware that Egypt is one of the most important states about Mediterranean gas because it has the second-longest coast on the Mediterranean Sea and wanted to prioritize to sign an agreement with Egypt as well

with the perspective of any economic agreement would be nonsense if the states with the longest coasts are not involved. Not long after, Mursi was removed from the government via a coup d'Etat and his position was filled by Sisi in Egypt (Bakeer, 2013:3) However, this replacement has become a major turn point for not only Turkish-Egyptian relations but also Turkey's policy regarding East Mediterranean.

Turkey's critics related to the coup d'Etat in Egypt and the endless support for Mursi, deepened the gap between the two countries. While Turkey's such explanations were perceived as an intervention into Egypt's internal politics, the bloc against Turkey was getting crowded. Moreover, Egypt has signed agreements with Israel and Greece to strengthen their collaboration furthermore. The former enemies, Israel and Egypt, signed an agreement which foresees Israel selling gas to Egypt for the next ten years and enables Egypt to export the overage amount left by the internal demand.

The competition between Turkey and Egypt on the routes of the gas pipelines became tough. Turkey was involved in various pipeline projects due to its important geographic location which creates a disadvantage for Egypt's economic interests. But the EastMed project which was initiated by Israel was an opportunity for Egypt since Turkey was eliminated due to the tension in the political relations. Egypt has also started to build closer relations with Greece and agreed on the definition of their marital economic zones and claimed that their collaboration is proper regarding international law (Merz, 2020:3). However, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs evaluated this agreement as invalid since the zones declared to the UN remain in the area of Turkish continental shelf. The most crucial part of this agreement lies on the fact that it did not include Meis island meaning that Egypt not willing to be part of a trilateral dispute and despite all, remaining an opportunity for a possible peace talk with Turkey.

However, in the fast pace politics of the EM, Turkey's involvement in Libya changed the direction of the inside war and Egypt, as Libya's neighbour, defined this as a threat for its security. Turkey has supported the government of Fayiz-es-Sarrac, which is recognized by the UN, from the beginning against General Haftar who gathered the support of the states such as US, UAE, France and Russia. In November 2019, Turkey and Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya signed an agreement on security and military collaboration and the definition of economic zones which accelerated the process of building blocks in the region (Helvacıköylü, 2020). Moreover, the agreement was labelled as against international law since GNA does not represent the whole country. Following this agreement, GNA also requested military support from Turkey and the Turkish Grand National Assembly approved to send Turkish troops to Libya. This resulted in a major debate both domestically and internationally. Turkish opposition parties criticized this decision since there were too many uncertainties in the details of such a plan which could create security risks for Turkey. At the international level, Turkish military involvement in Libya was evaluated as promoting warfare in Libya and the region rather than diplomacy.

While the bets on a possible war between Turkey and Egypt were rising, the politics changed the direction towards a possible war between Turkey and Greece. The two states have experienced their ups and downs ever since the Liberation War of Turkey and the politics of Greece against Turkey has mostly backed up by European Union but this time major political actors, U.S. and Russia, also supported Greece about the East Mediterranean policy. Right after the sign of the agreement between Turkey and Libya, Greece deported the Ambassador of Libya after declaring him as *persona non grata* and signed the declaration of economic zones with Egypt as a missile action towards Turkey. Moreover, the political tension started to evolve into military tension in the Mediterranean Sea with the series of maritime military joint exercises and declaration of NAVTEX regarding the drilling activities.

The status of Cyprus has always been the major problem between the two states and EU membership of Southern Cyprus with the name of the GCAS has made the issue even more complex (Aydintaşbaş, 2020). Even though GCAS does not represent whole Cyprus, since Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is not recognized internationally, all the agreements signed by GCAS with other states and energy companies eliminate the stakes on behalf of Turks in the island. Therefore, Turkey and TRNC are left alone by themselves against a bunch of alliances.

The main reason why EU is involved in the EM gas relates to the fact that Russia is the main energy supplier for EU and certainly the union wants to balance this risk of Russia threatening Europe about political disputes via this economic tool. In this perspective, the EU fully supports Greece and GCAS against Turkey regardless of any international law or other political facts (Tanchum, 2019). Additionally, there seems to be a big stake for energy companies about Mediterranean gas. French energy companies have made several agreements and France sent its military maritime ships with the purpose of protecting these companies against any hot conflicts. In addition to this, France has organized military exercises with Greece and GCAS to be prepared in case of possible warfare (Tanchum, 2020). Such practices target Turkey and TRNC. This conflict of the interests arises because Turkey's existence at the table makes the slice smaller apart from the unknown intentions of Turkish foreign policy whether to collaborate with Russia or the EU and U.S. This uncertainty about Turkey draws an image of an unreliable partner whose actions cannot be predicted.

U.S. was involved in this conflict due to the same reasons with the EU. In addition to the security concerns of Israel and economic benefits for American energy companies, U.S. does not want Russia to gain control over the Mediterranean gas. For this reason, U.S. supports Greece and EU against Russia and in this game, Turkey was the spoiler. On the other hand, U.S. seems to follow a hands-off strategy. Even if U.S. Senato approved the sales of weapons for GCAS, the crisis management was mainly left for Germany to handle (Kısacık and Helvacıköylü, 2020:50). Germany tried to lead negotiations between Greece and Turkey to prevent a war between NATO members while France insisted to push further the lines intentionally calling out all the EU members for applying sanctions against Turkey (BBC News Türkçe, 2019). Even though official statements have been made regarding Turkey should stop its drilling activities, no sanctions were decided to be applied at the first step.

Russia, on the other hand, avoided to explicitly make biased comments on Turkish-Greek dispute but continues to take advantage on behalf of itself to militarize the region. Whilst heading to achieve its centuries-long aim of controlling the Mediterranean Sea and building a naval hub at the Syrian port of Tartus to increase its military power in the region (Kısacık and Helvacıköylü, 2020:52). Russia also offered to lead the negotiation talks between Turkey and Greece to calm down the tension in the region. According to Russian foreign policy, U.S. is labelled as an outside player that is trying to step into each and every issue in the region by dividing the lines bolder rather than supporting peaceful solutions. In that sense, Russia plays a role of promoting peacemaking in the region while continuing to increase its own military bases and political power in the region.

As a result of Turkey's intentions for building closer relations with Arab world and becoming a regional power, the partnerships, which were built around the balance of politics, have been broken one by one. The tendency of Turkish foreign policy to raise the hand in the game resulted in lose it all. To recover the regional relations, Turkey should focus on calming down the tension and improving the relations. However, it can be said that Turkey may need to give up on its claims regarding the interests in the Mediterranean Sea to divide the alliances against.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Over the past decade, energy policy issues in the EU zone have been increasing and gaining attention because of the important developments. These include the confrontation of the EU (and the West in general) with Russia and the military struggle in the Ukraine, which jeopardize Russian energy supplies to the EU while at the same time highlighting Europe's over-dependence on these deliveries and recent progress within the EU towards a fully integrated EU energy market (Energy Union), the latest stage of which was marked by a publication of the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 July 2015, entitled "Council Conclusions on Energy Diplomacy" (Giannakopoulos, 2016:11). The EU concentrates on recent developments in the East-Med which have caused to a geopolitical shift acting upon all boarding states, especially Greek Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Turkey, Egypt, and also other Arabic countries; is evenly affected by these developments. By the energy findings over the past decade in the EZZs of Israel and Greek Cyprus, as a region, the East-Med has gained strategic importance and taken place in the centre of a multidimensional geopolitical rivalry. As a border state and one part of the rivalry, Turkey

has taken action according to the developments in the East-Med. Turkey has mainly tried to protect and maintain its ambitions and strategic interests in the region via pretentious foreign policy and some instruments such as diplomacy and military deterrence in the political debates of the region.

The EM region has been increasing prominence with the discovery of important energy reserves in the offshore regions of the coastal states within the region. The finding of oil and natural gas reserves especially found in Israel, Egypt and Greek Cyprus and their commercialization by transporting them to principally to the European markets have been of great concern for these states for many years. But when the several significant energy experts' evaluations are taken into the consideration, it can best be understood that due to the oil and natural gas consumption levels as well as the natural gas bonanza, the ever-increasing role of LNG exports by such countries as Qatar, U.S. and so on, the EM natural gas should not be overexaggerated. Also in this context, when all the options on the commercialization of East-Med natural gas deposits are assessed in detail, it is mostly agreed by the people studying on this issue that the Turkish-Israeli option represents by far the most economic and sensible one. But when some deep-rooted problems among the littoral states in the EM region are taken into account, it seems unlikely that the commercialization of East-Med gas can happen in short or medium terms. Moreover, one should add that for some major energy experts like Mehmet Ögütçü underline that by the becoming operational of Russian Turk Stream, Nord Stream-2, new LNG capacities and also the Southern Gas Corridor, the European Union possibly will not need gas coming from East-Med having lots of geopolitical complexities. When we come to Turkey, Ankara thinks that all the riparian states located at the East-Med have equal rights on benefiting the natural richnesses of the region. In this sense, Turkey highlights that such initiatives as East-Med Pipeline and East-Med Gas Forum that exclude Turkey and Northern Cyprus are irrational ones and in violation of international law. Therefore, Ankara has been proposing the resolution of this deadlock via diplomatic ways. In this manner, Turkey's offer to organize an EM Summit with the participation of all relating countries should be considered as a good initiative. In the final analysis, the escalation of the deadlock within the region through increasing militarization continues/will continue to hinder the prospects of monetization of energy reserves in the region. No one in the EM region does / will not another confrontation in the East-Med region in which a lot of conflicts occur. Time and cyclical developments will better set forth the probability of commercialization of East-Med reserves.

For decades, Turkey's foreign policy orientation was shaped around its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's "peace at home, peace in the world" philosophy. With this perspective, the modern West-oriented Turkish Republic has been successful in the peaks and flats of its history. After AKP came in power, this philosophy has been revised to "zero problems with the neighbours". According to the aftermath of 18 years, now it can be stated as "zero friends" and there are problems all around for Turkish foreign policy. Starting with the Neo-Ottomanism rhetoric, Turkey has gained the antipathy of its neighbours many of which were mostly ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, EU countries and the Arab world also accused Turkey of chasing after imperialist dreams. Even though this rhetoric was left, Turkey could not gain its popularity back since the region faced Arab spring and the political scene of the region has started to change.

For sustainable resolutions in the region, Turkey needs to focus on building the bridges with especially Egypt and Israel to balance the regional politics against its interests. Moreover, Turkish foreign policy should be reshaped regarding security concerns returning to its basics. This strategy can change the direction for Turkey's position and leverage its relations with old friends and regional rivals.

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