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Research Articles

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**ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**TÜRKİYE'S DESECURITISATION OF ENERGY  
RESOURCES IN THE EASTERN  
MEDITERRANEAN  
AFTER RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR**

Mehmet Ferhat FIRAT\*  
Rahman DAĞ\*\*

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**Abstract**

After the Russia-Ukraine war, energy politics has become a subject of security studies due to the European states' energy dependency on Russian natural gas. With the Russia-Ukraine war, Eastern Mediterranean gas has become more critical for the energy security of the European Union (EU). However, the ongoing disputes and impossibilities regarding the transfer of Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe have opened the door for the actors to re-evaluate the securitised energy relations. Türkiye has been securitising discovered energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean with discourses on the violation of its maritime sovereignty and ignoring the Turkish Cypriots by the actors in the region. This paper argues that Türkiye's energy politics in the region tends to take the opposite direction, from securitisation to desecuritisation. Türkiye's decades-long energy hub projects will serve to this end and gain more importance for Europe.

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In this sense, Türkiye accelerated its desecuritisation initiatives by taking normalisation steps with the regional actors Israel, Egypt, and Greece, against which Türkiye securitised energy resources.

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine War, Securitization, Desecuritisation, Energy Security, Eastern Mediterranean

## **Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı Sonrasında Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdeniz'deki Enerji Kaynaklarını Güvenlikdışılaştırması**

### **Öz**

Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı sonrasında Avrupa devletlerinin Rusya doğalgazına olan bağımlılığı nedeniyle enerji politikaları güvenlik çalışmalarının konusu haline gelmiştir. Rusya-Ukrayna savaşıyla birlikte Doğu Akdeniz gazı Avrupa Birliği (AB)'nin enerji güvenliği açısından çok daha önemli hale gelmiştir. Ancak Doğu Akdeniz gazının Avrupa'ya transferi konusunda süregelen anlaşmazlıklar ve imkansızlıklar, aktörlerin güvenikleştirilmiş enerji ilişkilerini yeniden değerlendirmelerinin kapısını araladı. Türkiye, bölgedeki aktörler tarafından deniz egemenliğinin ihlal edildiği ve Kıbrıs Türklerinin görmezden geldiği söylemleriyle Doğu Akdeniz'de keşfedilen enerji kaynaklarını güvenikleştirmiştir. Bu makale, Türkiye'nin bölgedeki enerji politikalarının, güvenikleştirmeden güvenlikdışılaştırmaya doğru ters yönde ilerleme eğiliminde olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Türkiye'nin onlarca yıldır sürdürdüğü enerji merkezi olma projeleri bu amaca hizmet etmiş ve Avrupa açısından daha da önem kazanmıştır. Bu anlamda Türkiye, enerji kaynaklarını güvenikleştirdiği bölgesel aktörlerle İsrail, Mısır ve Yunanistan, normalleşme adımları atarak, güvenlikdışılaştırma girişimlerini hızlandırmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Güvenikleştirme, Güvenlikdışılaştırma, Enerji Güvenliği, Doğu Akdeniz

### **Introduction**

The Russia-Ukraine War, which started on 24 February 2022, has directly affected the territorial integrity of Ukraine's regional security and the security of Europe's natural gas supply. Before the war, the European Union (EU) countries imported 45% of the total natural gas they consumed from the Russian Federation (Russia). This figure meant that



approximately 300 million m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas was imported daily. With the beginning of the war, just like with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, there has been a significant decrease in the natural gas imported by Europe from Russia because of the sanctions imposed by the EU. As a result, according to Comext and Eurostat (2023) estimates, EU imports of natural gas dropped significantly by 17% in total, compared with the same quarter in 2022. Natural gas imports from Russia fell from a monthly average of 5.1 million tonnes in the second quarter of 2022 to 2.5 million tonnes in the second quarter of 2023.

The natural gas resources have been used as diplomatic leverage between Russia and the EU. Right after that, EU member states have urgently sought to diversify natural gas suppliers to keep the wheels of their industries running. Therefore, among several efforts, the discovered natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean attracted more regional and European attention. Given the effects of the energy needs of developed and developing economies, it has been inevitable that the energy issues are moved from the economic and political to the security realm and evaluated as an existential element (Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicka, 2016). Here, it is necessary to analyse the position of Türkiye, having used securitising discourse on energy resources until the Russia-Ukraine war. Recently, changing international dynamics strengthened Türkiye's position, especially in meeting the EU's energy gap. This situation has caused all parties, especially Türkiye, to review all their energy-related policies and be obliged to re-analyse the bilateral relations. It can be seen in Türkiye's increasing efforts to become an energy centre, decreasing the dose of its securitising discourses, and especially in the signs of normalisation of relations with Greece, Egypt and Israel.

It can be claimed that a normalisation process has begun in the relations between the Eastern Mediterranean countries in the new energy equation that emerged after the Russia-Ukraine war. How successfully this process can be completed depends on how the region will approach chronic problems outside of energy relations. While chronic problems such as the ongoing deadlock on the Cyprus issue and the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts may increase tension from time to time, the need for cooperation between countries in the transfer of energy can be a balancer in the relations. It is a fact that Israel's operations against Gaza after the last Hamas attacks on Israel endangered the recent normalisation process. Israel even declared that it was cutting gas exports to Egypt. The normalisation process carried out between Saudi Arabia and Israel with the Abraham

Accords (Singh, 2022) resulted in Saudi Arabia's withdrawal from the agreements with the start of conflicts. If evaluated from Türkiye's perspective, it can be seen that Türkiye has a more moderate approach to Israel's attacks on Gaza after the Hamas attacks compared to past events. Türkiye's declaration that it can mediate between the parties and undertake any constructive role to end the conflicts as soon as possible undoubtedly reflects the normalisation process it has recently entered into with Israel. The Israeli-Palestinian conflicts will definitely have repercussions on the Eastern Mediterranean energy relations. However, in this study, the normalisation environment that the regional countries entered, especially with the softening of their discourses after the Ukrainian war, will be subjected to process analysis in the light of the securitisation-politicisation-desecuritisation (Wæver, 1995) theory of the Copenhagen School.

The article's main argument is that Türkiye's established energy infrastructures, such as pipelines and energy infrastructure projects, make potential desecuritisation possible. The only considerable energy project for transmitting the natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean was the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (East-Med) project, excluding Türkiye due to severe relations with the regional actors. Still, it could not get international financial and political support because of the high cost and time ineffectiveness. To substantiate the structure of the paper, a short explanatory section on Türkiye's position in the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean should be provided. Then, the reasons, as mentioned earlier, can be related to changing Turkish energy politics in the Eastern Mediterranean from Securitization to desecuritisation of natural gas.

### **1) Türkiye's Position in the Energy Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean**

International reports stated that the current gas reserves detected in the Eastern Mediterranean correspond to 47 per cent of the world's total. In addition, the gas exploration activities carried out recently have also resulted in significant reserve discoveries. For instance, as a result of the studies carried out by Israel at the Tamar (2009) and Leviathan (2010) fields, gas reserves of more than 1 trillion cubic meters have been found. In the same way, more than 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves were identified in the Aphrodite field in 2011 by the Greek Cypriot Government. It has been stated that the gas reserves discovered by the Italian company

Eni in the Zohr field of Egypt in 2015 are around 850 billion cubic meters (Carlson, 2016).

The report published by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in 2010 stated that there are 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 3.45 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves in the so-called *Levant Basin* located between Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Cyprus (Schenk et al., 2010). In the same report, it is estimated that there are approximately 6.3 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, 6 billion barrels of liquid natural gas and 1.8 billion barrels of oil reserves in the *Nile Delta Basin*. It is estimated that the natural gas reserves in question will be able to meet the 30-year natural gas needs of Europe and the approximately 572-year natural gas needs of Türkiye (Elias, 2019).

Another feature that increases the region's strategic importance is its location in transit energy transportation. For example, regarding energy transportation, approximately 5 billion barrels of crude oil are transported to Western countries annually via the Suez Canal and the Arab Oil Pipeline or the Suez-Mediterranean Pipeline (SUMED) (Mann, 2023). As a result, new regional energy alliances are being established to extract and process the reserves after their discovery and transfer to the market. These alliances have varied in accordance with the political tensions among the regional states, but how to handle the energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has been at the centre of interactions.

The energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean have a serious energy potential that can be a game changer in regional and international dynamics. However, since the early 2000s, when the discoveries began, disagreements on the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) issues have become increasingly evident among the countries in the region. The most important of these is the ongoing continental shelf disputes between the Türkiye-Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) and Türkiye-Greece. The starting point of the disputes on maritime areas is the parcellation issue that Türkiye - the country with the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean- considered a violation of its rights. The first case was the EEZ agreement between the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus and Egypt in 2003, which Türkiye did not recognise and submitted a note to the UN on 2 March 2004 expressing its objection (Kısacık, 2023). When the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus signed the EEZ agreement with Lebanon on 17 January 2007, Türkiye requested that Lebanon not put the deal into effect. In its note of 23 July 2007, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs also



referred to the letter expressing its objection to the EEZ agreement signed between the GASC and Egypt on 2 March 2004 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007). With this, Türkiye's existing legitimate and legal rights were registered under the established rules of international law. Türkiye wants the continental shelf and EEZ restrictions in the Eastern Mediterranean, a semi-enclosed sea according to international law, to be made only in a way that considers the rights and interests of all relevant parties. Türkiye stated that the outer border of the continental shelf of Türkiye would be determined by the agreements based on equity with the relevant coastal state in which all relevant or unique conditions are considered (Baseren, 2021). Türkiye has constantly expressed its views on this issue in the notes it gave and in the answers delivered to the notes of Greece. For example, in the note given on 12 March 2013, Türkiye stated that the exploration and extraction licenses granted to TPAO are for the fields located within the continental shelf of Türkiye. On the same note, references were made to the previous notes of Türkiye (Jia, 2014).

In contrast, Türkiye intervened in seismic surveys conducted within its own EEZ borders through its naval forces. During the process experienced within the scope of the Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon discoveries, tensions have decisively increased between Türkiye and other parties. In this process, attitudes and discourses have severely affected the securitisation of the issue. Türkiye has often stated that it will not recognise the licenses granted by the GASC and will intervene to stop the activities based on these licenses (Grigoriadis, 2022). In this context, actions such as the *Mediterranean Shield Operation* and the *Blue Homeland Exercise* were carried out by Türkiye. The exploration works carried out with the drilling ships named *Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha*, *Fatih*, *Oruç Reis*, and *Yavuz Seismic Research* also show that Türkiye does not compromise on its theses in the Eastern Mediterranean.

## 2) Türkiye's Desecuritisation of Natural Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean

Securitisation originates from issues apart from military threats, as the classic security perspective suggests. It is actually a critical approach to the core idea of realist international relations. To realism, the security understanding is solely based on the threats from the other states, mainly asserted as military hard power. However, since the Second World War, not only the source of threats but also the military aspects of security studies

have dramatically changed (Snyder, 2014). The national and transnational groups, primarily categorised as terrorist organisations, have proved that they could threaten a state's national security.

Additionally, possible military intervention by other states cannot be solely seen as a national security issue since environmental, social, cultural, economic, and even religious issues can be perceived as security issues, too. These developments in international politics have led to a massive amount of literature on securitisation and then the de-securitization process. In a conflict or war, states take extraordinary measures in terms of the decision-making process and also in policy implementations. In this sense, Barry Buzan and his colleagues Ole Waever and J. De Wilde (1998) came up with the securitisation theory explaining how an issue which was not considered a national security issue could be turned into a security issue. This process starts with convincing audiences, electorates in all types of democracies, that a specific issue, the referent object, poses an existential threat to the embedded social, cultural, environmental, and economic order, which could lead to a tremendous loss or disorder for the state (Waever, 1995).

The current nature of politics has been highly interrelated. So, an issue that has not even been considered a security issue could cause significant eradication of a state structure in a couple of subsequent phases. That is why theoreticians of securitisation have already classified possible issues into the sectors in which securitisation is applied. These sectors are mainly social, environmental, economic, military, and cultural (Buzan and Waever, 2009). They are closely related and can be used together for securitisation. This is because securitisation is also about constructing a threat by the policymakers and getting approval from the audiences. Nowadays, migration issues are evaluated within the security realms as people believe that migrants could change the demographic nature of a state, which could change dominant identity, cultural purity, religious diversity and eventually economic degradation. In this process, policymakers articulate the migration issue and migrants as an existential threat in the foreseeable future (Huysmans, 2000). Climate change has recently been considered a national and international issue, but handling it from a security perspective requires extraordinary measures, especially for the states that could be immediately affected or harmed more than the other nations (Warner and Boas, 2017).

In short, securitisation is about how to handle an issue within or out of an ordinary political process. If it is taken seriously enough to think that extraordinary measures are needed, then the issue is being securitised. Securitisation Theory is a theoretical contribution to the international relation produced by the Copenhagen School. To them, eventual measures to deal with the securitised issue are considered war. Before going that far, the school suggests a desecuritisation process through which a securitised issue could be brought back to the ordinary political realm (Wæver, 1995). In this process, the securitisation process could be reversed. By reducing the emphasis on the existential nature of an issue, theoretically speaking the referent object, the issue is levelled down to be a political matter. In this stage, political dialogues between the national groups or international actors can find a solution to the specific issue.

Under the light of this theoretical explanation, energy security is a new dimension to security studies. From the sectorial approach designed by the Copenhagen School, energy security can be directly associated with environmental, social and military security. In detail, energy is a fundamental input for the healthy and safe functioning of the economy. In a society where the energy supply is interrupted, industrial production might slow down or even stop, and delivering previously produced products to domestic and foreign markets will not be possible. The breaking of cold chains, the increase in food safety risks (food security), the inability to meet hygiene and sanitary needs, and the onset of epidemics are also risks that will arise after one step for the society in question and the economy of that society. In such a scenario, where the basic needs of modern life cannot be met, the economy and the welfare status could collapse. Even the armies that are unable to move will lose their operational capabilities and cannot take to the battlefield (Blazev, 2021). As summarised above, there is a clear mutual commitment between energy security and economic and military security, and it is assessed that the absence or deprivation of energy poses a threat to decisiveness. Based on this assessment, Buzan (2015, p. 278) has determined that “energy should be securitised and treated as a security issue”.

Regarding the scope of the paper, since the discovery of the natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye has stressed its own maritime jurisdiction and fair share of these resources by referring to Turkish Cypriots as opposed to the unilateral energy policies of Greek Cypriots (Dağ and Fırat, 2020). In a sense, Türkiye has related its maritime sovereignty with the energy dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean and

turned it into a referent object to convince its own audiences and international actors. Since the discoveries, Türkiye has used a harsh foreign policy discourse against violations of its maritime jurisdiction and performed political and military support to the Turkish Cypriots. Up until the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye successfully securitised energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and, within this period, sent its seismic vessels to the region and even provided security for them with warships (Dağ and Fırat, 2020). Additionally, by sending its navy, Türkiye prevented international energy companies from searching and drilling offshore of Greek Cyprus on the ground that these unilateral actions violated its maritime jurisdiction and the rights of Turkish Cypriots in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Energy security is about getting the resources at an uninterrupted and reasonable price (Yergin, 2006). Initiated with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, European states and the US have been seeking to decrease the natural gas dependency of the European states on Russia. Once Russia launched war against Ukraine in February 2022, Russia used its energy resources as leverage against the European states and in response, European states applied sanctions against Russian energy. In this power struggle, despite several criticisms about the Turkish foreign policy regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye stands in a mediatory position in political terms and energy scope. Russian President Vladimir Putin pointed out Türkiye as a spot market for its natural gas resources. European states confirmed Türkiye's energy hub investments and infrastructure could serve as a bridge to diversify natural gas suppliers in Central Asia, the Middle East and most notably, the Eastern Mediterranean (Anadolu Agency, 2022).

After the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye's decades-long energy hub projects have the potential to de-securitise energy resources for all actors in the Eastern Mediterranean as potential producers and in Europe as primary consumers. This paper argues that Türkiye has initiated a desecuritisation of energy politics in the Eastern Mediterranean, relying on being the best option with its pipelines and projects and geostrategic position providing the safest and cheapest energy transmitting routes from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, on the contrary to the East-Med project that was planned by regional actors. In this regard, Türkiye has been seeking good relations with Israel, Egypt, and Greece, with whom its bilateral relations were severe.

### 3) Pipelines and projects

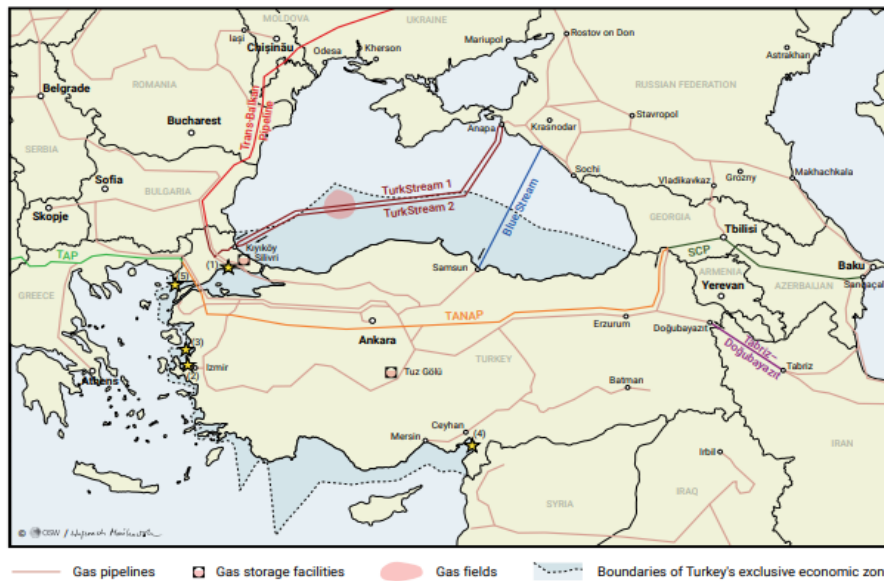
Türkiye has a high level of energy need due to its population and industry. However, it lacks hydrocarbon resources to meet this need. Besides, it is quite close to the regions with intensive hydrocarbon resources. Russia, the Caspian basin and the Middle East are located around the first belt of Türkiye from the north, east and south. On the other hand, it is adjacent to the energy-hungry and population-intensive European geography from its own west. This geostrategic location offers the advantage of reaching various resources to meet Türkiye's energy needs while highlighting the decency of being a bridge between source and consumer countries.

Since the 1990s, Türkiye has successfully attempted to transfer this advantage of its geography from potential to action. In this context, it hosts many transit pipelines and can safely supply hydrocarbon resources from these lines to third parties. Nevertheless, the diversity of energy sources in terms of the type of energy and the source countries is a vital policy element (Çelikpala, 2013). Several developments experienced in the 2000s offered new opportunities for Türkiye to become an *energy centre*, especially in the field of natural gas. These developments can be listed as follows (Kısacık, 2023);

- Completion and commissioning of the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline and the Trans Adriatic Natural Gas Pipeline, which deliver Azerbaijani gas to Europe,
- Completion and commissioning of the South Stream project, which Russia has designed to disable Ukraine, under the name of Turkish Stream,
- Increasing hopes for the solution of the status problem in the Caspian to complete Trans-Caspian projects,

Natural gas pipelines currently active in Türkiye are the Russia-Türkiye Natural Gas Pipeline (West Line), the Blue Stream Natural Gas Pipeline, the Eastern Anatolia Natural Gas Pipeline Project (East Line), the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline (BTE), Türkiye-Greece natural gas interconnection, Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Turkish Stream.





**Map 1:** Gas Infrastructure in Turkey (European Gas Hub, n.d.).

Following the agreement signed between Türkiye and the USSR in 1984, the Russia-Türkiye Natural Gas Pipeline (West Line) was constructed in 1986. The Russia-Türkiye Natural Gas Pipeline, first supplied with gas flow in 1987, reached a maximum carrying capacity of 6 billion m<sup>3</sup> in 1993. 15 November 1997, the Blue Stream Gas Pipeline was reconstructed under the agreement signed with Russia and opened in November 2005. It has a total length of 1611 km and an annual carrying capacity of 16 billion m<sup>3</sup>. The construction of the Eastern Anatolian Natural Gas Main Transmission Line, which started with the agreement signed between Türkiye and Iran in 1996 and completed at the end of June 2001, is another pipeline (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, 2023). This line, which has a length of 1491 km, has an annual capacity of 10 billion m<sup>3</sup>. The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline, which provides gas extracted from the Shah Sea field of Azerbaijan to be delivered to Türkiye, is a pipeline constructed in accordance with the agreement signed between Türkiye and Azerbaijan in 2004, and gas flow started on 4 July 2007. This line, which serves as the basis for TANAP, has a length of 980 km. Yet another, the interconnection of the Southern European Gas Ring, the Türkiye-Greece Natural Gas Interconnection, is the line that was built between Türkiye and Greece under the agreements dated 23 February 2003 and started gas supply as of November 2007 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, 2023). This connection line, which provides for transporting gas extracted from the Middle East and Caspian natural gas resources to

Europe, is an essential part of Türkiye's strategy to become a base for energy transportation.

Turkish Stream is also an important project for Türkiye's strategy of meeting its energy needs and becoming a centre. The cancellation of the South Stream Project, which is supposed to carry Russian gas to Europe under the Black Sea and through Bulgaria, after the sanctions imposed due to the annexation of Crimea, has put the Turkish Stream Project on the agenda as an alternative route (Çelikpala, 2013). With the official agreement signed for the opening of the Turkish Stream on 8 January 2020, the project consists of two pipelines, each of which has an annual carrying capacity of 15.75 billion m<sup>3</sup>; one of the lines has been built to provide gas flow to Türkiye and one to Europe. Finally, the Turkish Stream was commissioned in early 2020. From this line, a total of 34.8 billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas flow was provided to Europe (Schislyaeva, Evgrafova, Butakova, and Mishalchenko, 2022).

In addition to pipelines, liquefied natural gas (LNG) is another crucial alternative to Türkiye imports. Türkiye's LNG imports, on the other hand, are realised in two separate ways. The first is realised under a long-term contract from Algeria and Nigeria, while the second is realised without needing a long-term contract called spot LNG. The central countries where Türkiye imports spot LNG are Qatar, the USA, Egypt, Trinidad and Tobago, Norway, Angola, France, England, Belgium, Spain, Ecuadorian Guinea, and the Netherlands. This reveals Türkiye's quest to ensure diversified energy resources and routes at the core of its energy strategy (Andrei, 2022).

The efforts of EU countries to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels through investments in renewable energy over the past two decades are well known (Hafner and Raimondi, 2020). However, the share of renewable energy sources in total consumption is still meagre. The EU's energy supply should be from the least costly options possible. Here, in the context of Türkiye's efforts to become an energy hub, investments in LNG storage facilities have the potential to provide this alternative. Türkiye aims to become a spot market, especially in natural gas, with its existing pipelines and LNG storage that it is trying to increase in number.

In addition to the policy of being a corridor and spot market within the scope of the strategy of being an energy hub, Türkiye has been making significant improvements in producing its own energy. In recent years, Türkiye has added many seismic research and drilling vessels to its inventory, accelerating its hydrocarbon exploration activities. Türkiye has two seismic research vessels, Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa and

MTA Oruç Reis, and drilling vessels, Fatih, Yavuz, Kanuni and Sultan Abdülhamid Han. It was found that there were natural gas reserves in some fields in the Black Sea in 2019. 320 billion m<sup>3</sup> and then 85 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas discoveries in the same field in October 2020 were announced in the Sakarya Gas Field region because of the studies concentrated in the region. This field, where a total of 405 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas has been discovered, is named Tuna-1 (Nedelcu and Rusu, 2022).

Another discovery of 135 billion m<sup>3</sup> was made in the same field in June 2021, called Amasra-1, less than a year after these discoveries. Although seismic research and drilling activities are still ongoing in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, it is claimed that the existing reserve discovered in the Black Sea will begin to be supplied in 2023 (Dang, 2023). Starting to produce natural gas as predicted and supplying it to the market will be crucial for Türkiye. Considering that Türkiye's average natural gas consumption in the last ten years is about 49 billion m<sup>3</sup>, it is understood that the discoveries made are almost equal to an estimated 12-year natural gas need. Although this figure does not seem very big in the long term for Türkiye, whose energy needs are constantly increasing, it is vital that both the natural gas import figures and the decrease in expenditure made in parallel give hope for discoveries as well as energy security in general.

After the NABUCCO project in 2013, which was not implemented, the EU, searching for alternative gas sources, has started to take a closer interest in Trans-Caspian projects. In this sense, the Southern Gas Corridor, which extends from Azerbaijan to Europe and includes TANAP, has become more critical. The TCGP, which is envisaged to deliver Turkmenistan's gas to Azerbaijan first and then to Europe via TANAP, is 180 miles long and is an EU Common Interest Project. The TCGP, which came to the agenda with the commissioning of TANAP in 2018, was supported by the EU with a grant in the same year (Hartmann, 2022).

While Türkiye's already established pipelines and ongoing projects have been there for several years, rivalry among the regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean led to Greece, Israel, and Egypt working on alternative pipeline projects to transmit the natural gas reserves from the East Mediterranean to Europe. It is the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline Project (the East-Med). Despite its high cost and long distance, the pipeline initially supported by the EU and the USA has not been approved by Türkiye since the beginning. In reaction to the East-Med, Türkiye signed a memorandum with Libya designing the EEZ between Türkiye and Libya in October

2019 that intercepts the route the East-Med Pipeline will pass through. After that, Türkiye defined the East-Med project as a project that has no chance of success unless the maritime jurisdictions in the Eastern Mediterranean are determined around fair principles, which cannot exclude Türkiye (Akşit, 2021).

In January 2022, the United States of America (USA) made a *U-turn* and stated that it had withdrawn its support from the East-Med Pipeline Project on the grounds that it is not economically sustainable and is far from environmental sensitivity (Stergio, 2023). Although the uncertainty about East-Med continues, the withdrawal of US support from the project has made its feasibility almost impossible. The subsequent developments point to a pipeline that could be created to transport Israeli gas to Europe via Türkiye.

Some moves that exclude Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation have ceased to be feasible due to Türkiye's securitising moves. The most important aspect is that the East-Med project, expected to provide significant advantages to Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration, has not found sufficient support, especially from the EU and the US. In addition, the new situation that Türkiye has created in the Eastern Mediterranean with the Libyan agreement has opened the door for Israel, Egypt and even Greece to reassess relations with Türkiye.

#### **4) Examination of Bilateral Relations of Türkiye with Greece, Israel and Egypt from the Energy Perspective**

##### **a) Türkiye-Israel**

The discoveries made by Israel, one of the important actors of the region, on the Tamar in 2009 and the Leviathan in 2010 have reshaped the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean. The fact that Israel started production in Tamar and the Greek Cypriot Administration declared an Exclusive Economic Zone around Cyprus prompted these two actors to cooperate. In fact, Israel shaped its hydrocarbon policies related to the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1960s and has continued its work to the present day (Harari and Sözen, 2023). The Exclusive Economic Zone Agreement signed with the Republic of Cyprus in 2010 can be seen as a requirement of this policy.

Since the Mavi Marmara incident, where they faced off militarily for the first time in their history, Türkiye and Israel, in fact, with a pragmatic understanding in areas that will not

attract public reaction (trade, tourism, cultural interaction, etc.), it has continued the cooperation. The normalisation agreement signed in 2016 after a long negotiation did not provide the desired rapprochement between the two countries. Undoubtedly, as well as the change caused by the 15 July coup attempt in Ankara's threat perception, the developments in Syria, particularly the diverging positions of Türkiye and Israel in the face of the status demands of the Kurdish population in Iraq and Syria, also contributed to this. On the other hand, Israel, which has gone on the path of diversifying its allies after the Mavi Marmara, has adopted a less compromising attitude towards Türkiye during the normalisation process, as it has reduced its loneliness in the region thanks to the close relations it has developed with both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf countries even with Azerbaijan in the early period (Singh, 2022). Meanwhile, the fact that the Donald Trump administration has adopted a very pro-Israeli stance on the Arab-Israeli problem has set the stage for new crises between Türkiye and Israel. As a matter of fact, relations were further strained when the United States recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved its embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018. Türkiye, which strongly criticised Israel's response to the protests which broke out on the Gaza border with disproportionate force, recalled its ambassador to Israel (Erdoğan and Habash, 2020).

Following the normalisation agreement, the expectations of the two countries over natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean were attached to the Cyprus problem. Israel became closer to Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration during the period of lack of relations with Türkiye. Naturally, after the normalisation with Türkiye is achieved, it is expected to make a change in this attitude. However, in this process, the prevailing securitising discourses in Israel have been constructed on the basis that Türkiye, especially President Erdoğan, should not be trusted (Turgut and Çakır, 2023). Since there is an unpredictable situation regarding how long the normalisation process with Türkiye will take, some groups within the Israeli government have developed discourses that the alliance with Greece and Southern Cyprus should not be abandoned. These discourses also ignore the views that Israel will have more maritime space in the event of an EEZ agreement with Türkiye than in the EEZ agreement with the Greek Cypriot Administration. Also, these groups developed discourses that the continuation of strategic relations with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration is more important for Israel's security.



Türkiye-Israel relations, which came to a breaking point due to the Palestinian issue and the Mavi Marmara attack, became even tenser due to the fact that Israel and other countries in the region were conducting hydrocarbon activities by ignoring Türkiye. However, by the time the Russia-Ukraine war started, Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Türkiye on 9 March 2022 was an essential step in the normalisation process between the two countries. In addition to being the first visit at the level of presidency since 2007, it is crucial that it includes important topics such as reconstructing economic relations and energy cooperation between the two countries. Significantly, the visit took place at a time when the viability of East-Med was becoming difficult. Shortly after the visit, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan decried cooperation on natural gas as one of the important steps that can be taken in bilateral relations and announced that high-ranking officials could be sent to Israel on this issue, reminding a natural gas pipeline that could be erected between Israel and Türkiye (Salsabila, Prasodjo and Suhermanto, 2022).

A pipeline that could bring Israeli gas to Türkiye was raised earlier in 2016. They agreed to conduct pipeline feasibility studies at the World Energy Council Meeting held in Istanbul on 13 October 2016. Designed as Leviathan-Ceyhan, this pipeline is designed to deliver natural gas to be produced from the Leviathan and Tamar fields of Israel to the port of Ceyhan (Andrei, 2022). In addition, the natural gas crisis between Russia and the EU after Russia's intervention in Ukraine facilitates the implementation of such a pipeline. Although no official steps have been taken regarding the pipeline that will deliver Israeli gas directly to Türkiye in the current situation, expectations about this issue have frequently appeared in the national and international press recently. Türkiye's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Fatih Dönmez, also recently expressed this situation and stated that Israeli gas can be easily transported through Türkiye (Daily Sabah, 2022).

### **b) Türkiye-Egypt**

Egypt made significant changes in Libyan politics during the crisis, simultaneously with Türkiye's role in Libya. By encouraging the discussion of peace plans in Libya, he changed his attitude towards the forces of Caliph Hafter. In addition, Egypt, stating that it complies with the continental shelf coordinates declared by Ankara, has opened the door to Türkiye for a number of possible arrangements in the Eastern Mediterranean (Fishman, 2023). On the other hand, Ankara

approved the new position of Egypt and stressed the importance of cooperation between the two countries, especially based on common interests. Senior diplomats and official authorities from Türkiye have repeatedly expressed the same message. In parallel with these developments, the communication between the two countries' intelligence services has paved the way for high-level bureaucrats to come together and discuss bilateral and regional issues. The first official rapprochement between Cairo and Ankara began in May 2021. During this process, delegations led by foreign ministers held exploratory talks. During the talks, bilateral and regional issues and ensuring security and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean region were discussed. The normalisation process between the two countries is progressing decently (Al-Fawwaz, 2021). All these steps can be seen not as an initiative independent of the developments in the region but, on the contrary, as part of a more extensive regional normalisation process. Changes in discourses are decisive for the evolution from conflict to cooperation.

Despite all this normalisation trend, maritime jurisdiction decoupling between the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean still stands out as the most critical common issue. If this happens, there will be a development that will create new dynamics for the entire region. As mentioned in the previous sections, a partial decoupling agreement was signed between Cairo and Athens. But in February 2021, Egypt announced it would enter a new oil and gas tender in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the announcement, Ankara's coordinates of the continental shelf were observed. During these periods, statements were also made by the Egyptian foreign ministry that a continental shelf agreement to be reached with Türkiye would be a development that would provide optimal benefits for the two countries (Bakeer, 2022). Although both countries are aware of the geostrategic importance of limiting their maritime jurisdiction, the parties' securitising discourses have not allowed this in the past. In recent years, the Eastern Mediterranean countries have begun to emphasise the cost of carrying out a regional agenda without Türkiye. Also, Ankara continues to strengthen the discourse that fair sharing of resources and cooperation are the best solution for everyone. In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Europe's desire to reduce its dependence on Russia for oil and gas, it can be emphasised that the importance of hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has increased even more.

### c) Türkiye-Greece

It can be claimed that Türkiye's normalisation process in its relations with Egypt and Israel could change the eastern

Mediterranean energy equation. However, achieving a total cooperation environment in the Eastern Mediterranean undoubtedly depends on the course of Türkiye-Greece relations. The continental shelf agreements that have been ongoing between the two countries in the Aegean Sea for many years have been moved to the Eastern Mediterranean with energy discoveries (Stergiou, 2023). As examined in previous sections, the securitisation process of the eastern Mediterranean between Türkiye and Greece has been carried out successfully since the early 2000s. Greece, especially after the accession of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus to the EU, evaluated the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean under the auspices of the EU and claimed that Türkiye posed a threat to the maritime sovereignty of the EU.

On the other hand, Türkiye has securitised the region to protect the rights of Turkish Cypriots and its own naval jurisdiction. However, the new situation recently, especially with the Russia-Ukraine war, has made it necessary for both countries to look for a new way in relations (Basuki, 2023). Undoubtedly, the economic difficulties experienced by both countries in recent years played a role in this. In addition, Türkiye's normalisation of relations with Egypt and Israel, with whom Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration formed an alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean, caused Greece to re-analyze its relations with Türkiye.

Although it is not possible to talk about a full normalisation in relations, disaster diplomacy between the two countries, especially after the 6 February earthquakes in Türkiye, enabled the beginning of a new era in relations. It can be observed that Türkiye-Greece relations are progressing in a positive atmosphere as of early 2023 (Diamantidi, 2023). The increasing visit traffic between the two countries continued with mutual constructive messages. In particular, Greece's closure of the Lavrion camp of the PKK terrorist organisation in July 2023 was considered an olive branch to Türkiye.

In addition to mutual positive messages, the joint NATO exercise can be cited as an example of the new positive environment regarding relations between the two countries. Turkish and Greek warships, which faced each other during the Oruç Reis crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean in the summer of 2020, carried out a joint exercise under the umbrella of NATO. The *Gökçeada* and *Göksu* frigates from Türkiye, the *Limnos* warship of the same type from Greece and the *HMS Duncan* destroyer from the UK participated in NATO's *Neptune Strike 23-2* exercise, part of which was held in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the exercise, warships of the three countries

worked on cooperation scenarios against possible air attacks. It should be noted that the Neptune Strike 23-2 exercise differs from previous NATO exercises in which Türkiye and Greece participated (Naval News, 2023). Previously, NATO exercise plans included some manoeuvres and refuelling scenarios for Turkish and Greek warships only during transit for training purposes. In this sense, it seems that the new exercise differs from the previous ones in terms of scope. In addition, the fact that two countries, which have been engaging in securitising discourses and actions against each other for a long time, are holding a joint military exercise is promising for a normalisation process in relations.

The chronic problems between Türkiye and Greece undoubtedly have many different dimensions. However, in light of our study's prediction, the conjuncture created by the Russia-Ukraine war has the potential to create an environment of cooperation in energy, especially for two countries experiencing similar economically troubled processes. In this context, it would not be wrong to say that normalisation signals between Türkiye-Greece-Egypt-Israel could affect a successful desecuritisation process.

## Conclusion

In analysing Türkiye's interests, many presidential speeches show Türkiye's determination to achieve its interests with its own path, solutions and programs. At the same time, it was declared that "no one will be able to prevent Türkiye from achieving its goals" (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Therefore, Türkiye's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean play a crucial role in realising the future development of energy resources. One of the critical interests that is directly defined by President Erdoğan is to ensure Türkiye's energy security. President Erdoğan said Türkiye has been "a major player in the international energy arena due to its geopolitical location and economic development" (Anadolu Agency, 2022) and that Türkiye's main goal is to realise this potential and become a regional energy hub (Ataman, 2023). Like the other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye is one of the importers of energy resources. At the same time, the President considers it a huge advantage that Türkiye is one of the key transit countries, thanks to a well-established energy infrastructure. However, discovering hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean significantly impacts Türkiye's energy interests. As Türkiye's energy consumption has grown substantially in recent years, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, efforts to increase domestic energy resources,

including potential supplies in the Eastern Mediterranean, have become an essential element of Turkish energy policy (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

The benefit from energy supplies would transform the Turkish transit role into the role of a regional energy hub. As a result, Türkiye would secure its own energy and contribute to the EU's energy security, thus rapidly strengthening its current position. Initially, it was even considered to use the route through the Turkish gas pipeline TANAP, which would transport natural gas to Europe. Although this option would be economically advantageous over the new East-Med project, there were regional disputes about the stability and safety of this option. However, given the structure of relations in the region, all the above-mentioned energy goals are conditional on cooperation between regional states, thanks to which all states could ultimately prosper.

Türkiye's decades-long energy hub policy can provide the required infrastructure from which all parties in the Eastern Mediterranean countries can benefit. As taken under close examination, well-connected pipelines, the uncertainty of the East-Med project, and changing energy dynamics due to the Russia-Ukraine war indicate that Türkiye's energy hub preparation could be used for energy transition from the source to the international markets. De-Securitization of energy resources, in this way, can lead to de-Securitization of previous political disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially bilateral relations of Türkiye with Israel, Egypt and Greece. Therefore, Türkiye's energy hub investments could ignite cooperation, which is beneficial for itself and the countries in the region. The new dynamics in the international system, especially after the Russia-Ukraine War, raised the likelihood of cooperation between Türkiye, Egypt, and Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean. In recent periods, the fact that the parties have emphasised cooperation instead of securitising discourses increases this potential.

The latest war between HAMAS and Israel in Gaza did not start once the paper was submitted. The recent conflict in Gaza and Turkey's stand against it might degenerate decade-long positive relations with Israel. However, Türkiye's diplomatic and discursive reactions against Israel have not yet turned into a direct conflict, as mostly expected, and could also be used to substantiate Turkey's moderate diplomacy in terms of energy politics in the Eastern Mediterranean. While the Gaza War continues, Turkey's relations with Greece and Egypt maintain their momentum with positive agendas in which energy security is one of the core subjects. Despite harsh



criticism and potential conflicts, energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean still remain a path to cooperation.

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