

BÖLGESELÇİLİK BAĞLAMINDA DOĞU AKDENİZ'E DAİR BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

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AN EVALUATION OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONALISM

ÖZ Bu çalışma Doğu Akdeniz'de potansiyel bölgeselcilik faaliyetlerini mahanist bir perspektifte nasıl analiz edileceğine odaklanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla çalışma Doğu Akdeniz'de gerçekleşebilecek potansiyel bölgeselcilik adımlarına mahanist yaklaşımların ne gibi etkisi olabileceği sorusuna dayanmaktadır. Çalışmada içerik analizi yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda bölgeselcilik kapsamında Doğu Akdeniz vaka olarak seçilmiştir. Çalışma metodolojisi olarak vaka analizi kullanılmakla birlikte tarihsel perspektif yoluyla süreç analizlerinden de yararlanılmıştır. Çalışma, teorik ve kavramsal tanımlamalar yapıldıktan sonra neden Doğu Akdeniz vakasının seçildiği üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Doğu Akdeniz'de son yıllarda hidrokarbon rezervlerine yönelik artan araştırma ve keşifler bölgenin güncel ve dinamik yapısını muhafaza etmektedir. Bölgenin enerji kaynaklarına sahip olan yapısı hem bölgesel işbirliklerini hem de olası çatışma ortamını beraberinde getirmektedir. Alfred T. Mahan'ın kuramsallaştırdığı deniz hâkimiyet teorisi ise hegemonik bölgeselciliği motive ettiği gibi paradoksal bir biçimde çatışma ortamını da körüklemeye potansiyelinde bulunmaktadır. Bölge içi veya bölge dışı aktörler için bölgeye yönelik geliştirilen stratejilerin başında gelen donanma kapasitesini artırma hegemonik bölgeselcilikten ziyade yeni bölgeselcilik kapsamında değerlendirildiğinde motive edici unsur özelliğini kaybetmektedir. Bu durum ise bölgeselcilikten ziyade çatışma riskini arttırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bölgeselcilik, Mahan, Doğu Akdeniz, Enerji, İş birliği, Çatışma

ABSTRACT This study examines how potential regionalism activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can be analyzed from a Mahanist perspective. Therefore, the study is based on the problematic of what kind of impact mahanist approaches may have on potential regionalism steps that may take place in the Eastern Mediterranean. Content analysis methods were used in the study. In this context, the Eastern Mediterranean was selected as a case within the scope of regionalism. The study methodology uses case analysis, but also utilizes process analyses through historical perspective. After theoretical and conceptual definitions are made, the study focuses on why the Eastern Mediterranean case was chosen. The increasing research and discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years for hydrocarbon reserves maintain the current and dynamic structure of the region. The region's energy resources create opportunities for both regional cooperation and a potential conflict environment. The theory of sea power theorized by Alfred T. Mahan, paradoxically, has the potential to motivate hegemonic regionalism as well as incite conflict. Increasing naval capacity, which is one of the primary strategies developed for the region by regional or non-regional actors, loses its motivating feature when evaluated within the scope of new regionalism rather than hegemonic regionalism. This situation increases the risk of conflict rather than regionalism.

Keywords: Regionalism, Mahan, Eastern Mediterranean, Energy, Cooperation, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study and Literature Review

In recent years, the importance of regional cooperation has been perceived by many actors and important steps have been taken on this issue on a global basis. Regionalism is emerging as a pivotal concept across various regions, gradually becoming a dominant trend in international relations. The study was constructed within the scope of regionalism, which is on its way to becoming a trend. The main problem emphasized in the study is a test conducted on whether the states in the Eastern Mediterranean can create intra-regional cooperation.

The literature on regionalism literature gained significant momentum after the 1960s, peaking in the post-Cold War era and continuing to the present day (Google Books Ngram Viewer, 2024) (see Table-1). With the changing conjuncture after the Cold War, regionalization activities gained momentum and studies on regionalism began to be added to the literature by some researchers (Borrmann & Koopmann, 1994; Börzel & Risse, 2016; Fawcett, 2008; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). In the conceptualization and definition of regionalism in the study, the definitions of regionalism researchers from the period when regionalism peaked has been utilized.

In the Turkish literature, numerous studies have focused on the European Union (EU) as an ideal model of integration. While the study benefits from studies analyzing the EU's policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean in one respect (Özer et al., 2017), it differs from studies emulating the EU in its general framework (Çakaş, 2018; Çalışkan, 2009; Demiral, 2014; Suyuş, 2019).

First of all, it is useful to distinguish the concepts of regionalism and regionalization (C, Shameem, 2017), which are used interchangeably by some researchers. While regionalization refers to a supranational, institutionalized organizational policy where states play a leading role in its establishment, regionalism is a broader concept that encompasses all social, economic, cultural, and political interactions among state and non-state actors within a particular region, including regionalization (Börzel & Risse, 2016). An induction that can be derived from this definition is that every regionalization can be included in a regionalism concept, but not every regionalism activity can be evaluated within the scope of regionalization.

Unlike other studies that analyze through constructivist movements (Donduran, 2020a; Rumelili, 2015), the theoretical framework in the analysis of the study problem was created within a realist-rationalist perspective, inspired by Alfred Mahan's theory of maritime sovereignty (Albrecht et al., 2020; Manship, 1964; Sumida, 2001).

The integration theory put forward by Bela Balassa in his study "The Theory of Economic Integration" (Balassa, Bella, 2010) foresees economic and political integration in five steps. However, the aforementioned theory ignores the "pressure" element in regionalism. When we look at the factors that push states to regionalism, there is the idea of "consent" for economic development and increasing the level of welfare. However there may also be a situation of being forced into regional activities with the "encouragement" of a regional actor for security needs or another powerful (hard-power) actor (Mehmetçik, Hakan, 2022).

In the post-Cold War period, the most important agenda of regionalism in some regions has been within the framework of economy and security (Kaya, 2023). While this study emphasizes economic and security

factors, it also examines energy transmission lines and natural resource exploration areas as additional dimensions of regionalism.

The significance of this study arises from the limited number of regionalism studies in the Turkish international relations (IR) literature and the effort to provide an original analysis of regionalism. In addition, the fact that the Eastern Mediterranean and regionalism activities cannot be associated in Turkish literature constitutes one of the starting points of the study. This study aims to serve as a reference for future research that seeks alternative solutions to ongoing disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly regarding the continental shelf and the delimitation of exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The importance and original value of the study emerges with the fact that it puts forward an idea of regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean and hypothesizes it. In the first stage of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks will be considered and the sea sovereignty theory and regionalism analysis will be made. In the next stage, the interests of the regional countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the potential of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean will be evaluated. Again, whether regionalism is possible in the Eastern Mediterranean will be analyzed throughout the study within the framework of the Eastern Mediterranean political economy.

Methodology and Scope of the Study

As stated in the title, the study discusses the possibility of alternative regionalism activities in the current situation by addressing regionalism policies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Additionally, it examines the historical evolution of the Eastern Mediterranean, assessing its structural transformation from past to present. As a result of this study, it also discusses why ideal comprehensive regionalism policies have not been achieved in the Eastern Mediterranean and what path can be followed to achieve these policies.

The study has limited itself between the 1960s and the present, both because regionalism came to the agenda in the 1960s and because of the Cyprus Problem, one of the most important problems in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Regarding methodology, this research employs a case study approach, positioning the Eastern Mediterranean as its primary case within the broader framework of content analysis research. In the study, which uses the case analysis methodology, while addressing historical, legal and doctrinal issues in the following sections, the process analysis method based on the historical perspective is also included.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theory of Sea Power

As seen in some academic studies, the foundation of the theory of the sea power is attributed to the great Turkish Admiral Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha, who said, “He who rules the seas rules the world” (Kurumahmut, Ali, 1998, p. 35; Quoted by: Yaycı, Cihat, 2021, p. 15). From this perspective, within the broader academic literature, the theory of sea power was formally conceptualized by U.S. Navy Admiral Alfred Mahan. According to Alfred Mahan, the path to world domination is through dominating the seas.

Alfred Mahan's work, *The Impact of Naval Forces on History*, has found a place in the hegemonic policies of the United States, Britain, Germany, Russia and Japan (İlhan, Suat, 2006, p. 34).

Alfred Mahan, a prominent defender of sea power, emphasized the importance of sea power in shaping the prosperity and influence of a nation. He emphasized the role of sea power in both protecting peacetime commerce and defense in wartime through the way of government's promotion of maritime industries. Mahan emphasized the importance of maintaining naval bases and colonies in order to spread sea power abroad. On the other hand, he also emphasized the need for a strong navy to protect a country's coasts and trade routes. In his strategic vision for the United States, Mahan argued that the U.S. should prioritize naval expansion to protect its coastal regions and control key maritime chokepoints, ensuring uninterrupted trade even in times of conflict (Mahan, Alfred T., 1890).

While Mahan's nationalist sentiments were the starting point of his theory, Britain was an important example for that period. Because Britain established its control and influence over the seas by establishing a strong navy, was able to maintain the balance of power in Europe and was able to take the dominant position in the world from France (Ercan & Algür, 2021, p. 198).

According to Mahan, there are important conditions that affect the naval power of a nation. He categorized these conditions as follows; 1) Geographical Location; 2) Physical Structure; 3) Extent of the Region; 4) Quantity of Population; 5) Character of the People; 6) Character of the Government. Among these, Mahan emphasized both the quality and quantity of a nation's population as critical determinants of its naval strength. To explain it in the simplest terms, a country with a sparse population and a wide coastline that needs to be defended in reverse is doomed to failure (example of the confederated State of America in the American Civil War). Conversely, a population dependent on trade is naturally driven to produce goods, develop shipping industries, and protect maritime commerce. Thus, a state that can meet the conditions in the above categorizations can increase its naval power at the right rate (Manship, 1964, pp. 20-21).

In one of his most well-known books, *"The Influence of Sea Power upon History"* Alfred Mahan explores the link between a nation's economic power and its ability to develop and effectively utilize naval power. He emphasizes that maritime trade constitutes a vital source of national wealth. According to Mahan, in times of war, a nation that can disrupt the enemy's maritime trade while safeguarding its own will shift the balance of national resources in its favor. In order to dominate maritime trade both in times of war and peace, states need a strong fleet. For this reason, Mahan advises a great state in times of peace to use all means to build a large navy. Thus, over time, the cumulative effect of a sound maritime policy and strategy, regardless of peace or war, is economic prosperity and regional expansion (Sumida, 2001, p. 103).

The importance of trade in Mahan's theory stems from the fact that maritime trade is cost-effective, widespread, and efficient, making it not only a pillar of economic strength but also one of the most effective tools in wartime strategy. A country whose trade is destroyed experiences material losses, after a while it cannot access the resources that are essential for continuing the war, and faces the destruction of the welfare of its people. In order not to face these situations, trade also forces a nation to become seafarers. Meanwhile could bring a country to its knees, the *Guerre De Course* (destruction of trade) strategy has been frequently applied throughout history. *Guerre De Course*, which can be defined as the plundering or destruction of a state with a weaker navy by means of piracy activities or a state with a strong navy by directly attacking enemy trade fleets. This strategy was seen in the France-Britain rivalry in the 17th and

18th centuries. Again, this strategy was put into practice by Germany in World Wars I and II (Demir, Fatih 2018, pp. 40-53).

In today's conditions, naval power, which is constantly advancing in the wake of technological development, has begun to consist of sophisticated ships such as nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers. Aircraft carriers, which were seen as support ships in World War II, are now seen as the pinnacle of technological development, combining sea control with air superiority. This capability not only provides effective support for amphibious operations but also enables the defense of vast maritime territories (Albrecht et al., 2020).

In the context of the general framework of the maritime dominance theory, whether regionalization in the Eastern Mediterranean can be achieved with naval power or not becomes problematic at this point. Maximizing naval power is a significant cost item that states shoulder. States may insist on other negotiation methods for regionalization by avoiding this cost item. However, its realization is manifested by disagreements on issues such as the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and maritime jurisdiction areas of states, which are the main obstacles to regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean, which will be examined in the following sections. Using naval power as a deterrent force to eliminate these obstacles both creates risks and may push states not to take risks regarding the disruption of their trade with each other. Therefore, in a scenario where a single state in the Eastern Mediterranean has deterrent force elements, there may be the potential to encourage other states to take steps towards regionalization. Indeed, the fact that more than one state has an equivalent naval force may escalate tensions and cause more serious obstacles to regionalization.

Region, Regionalism, Regionalization Concepts

In social sciences, a region is an integrated area that is homogeneous in terms of selected descriptive criteria and is separated from neighboring or regional areas by these criteria. Regions can be classified based on single or multiple characteristics. In the context of social sciences, they are most commonly categorized according to ethnic, cultural, linguistic, topographic, industrial (e.g., the Ruhr Area), or international political features (e.g., the Middle East) (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2024).

Despite the development of regionalism literature, there is no consensus on definitions. The reason for the lack of consensus at this point is that researchers cannot agree on the criteria required to define a region. However, although most researchers analyze the controversial concepts determined as criteria for defining a region, they agree that a region does not consist solely of physical proximity (E. Mansfield & Solingen, 2010, pp. 146-147).

Louise Fawcett, who has an important place in regionalism literature, draws attention to the importance of defining the region in a way that includes common points, interaction, and the possibility of cooperation, even if there are definitions that reduce the term region to a geographical reality. According to Fawcett, the sensitivity in defining the size of a region can be important for some actors. In some cases, if cooperation, partnership, and harmony are at a high level in areas called sub-regions, inclusiveness or exclusion can be achieved by keeping the welcomed actor in the region and the unwanted actor out in the process where regions or interests conflict. A notable example is the Southern African Development

Community (SADC), which was structured to exclude the Republic of South Africa during the apartheid era (Fawcett, 2004, p. 432).

Although some studies and authors suggest that the concepts of region, regionalism and regionalization are confused (Fawcett, 2004; E. Mansfield & Solingen, 2010), it is important to define these concepts separately. Some researchers define regionalism as a political process determined by cooperation and policy coordination, while regionalization is defined as an economic process in which trade flows and investment movements within the region grow more compared to the rest of the world (E. Mansfield & Solingen, 2010, p. 147). In the first chapter of his edited book “Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism” (East Asia-Beyond Japan), Peter Katzenstein defines regionalism as the conditions of institutionalization and regionalization as the process of bringing actors closer to each other (Katzenstein, Peter J., 2006, p. 1). T.J. Pempel, in the chapter titled “Introduction: Emerging Webs of Regional Connectedness” in his edited book “Remapping East Asia The Construction of Region”, defines regionalization as a bottom-up social process, while regionalism is defined as top-down intergovernmental actions that primarily involve institutionalization (Pempel, 2018, pp. 19-20).

According to Andrew Hurrell, regionalization is a consequence of regionalism. He describes regionalization as a social and economic process that develops indirectly, often driven by the growth of social integration within a region. Hurrell defines this process as informal integration or soft regionalism (Hurrell, 1995; as cited in: Mansfield & Solingen, 2010, p. 147). Louise Fawcett defines regionalism as a policy or project, while regionalization is defined as a process originating from regionalism as both a project and a policy (Fawcett, 2004, p. 433). Stubbs and Underhill state that regionalization is related to the intensity of interaction between countries or societies at the point where they can meet on the ground of a common history or a common problem perception. The countries that form the region form the region in question by interacting more intensely with each other, and this interaction process also meets the meaning of the concept of regionalization. At the same time, regionalism occurs with the emergence of institutions in the aforementioned “region”, and these institutions coordinate the interaction activities of the countries in the region by preparing an official infrastructure for the region (Stubbs & Underhill, 1994; cited by: İrfanoğlu, 2020). At the institutional level, regionalism includes the development of norms, rules and official structures provided by coordination, and at the interaction level, it manifests itself as the reorganization of political identities and loyalties from the state to the region (Heywood, Andrew, 2011, p. 482).

At this point, we come across two concepts: “process” and “institutionalization”. While in some definitions, process stands out as the criteria of regionalization and institutionality as the criteria of regionalism, in some definitions, the opposite is the case.

Although many definitions of regionalization are encountered in the literature, they are relations with institutional bodies that emerge through states, in other words, activities carried out under the roof of a supranational organization established by states among themselves. Regionalism, on the other hand, is a concept that encompasses all political, economic and social relations that occur between actors in a specific geography, including non-state actors (Mehmetcik, 2019, p. 73).

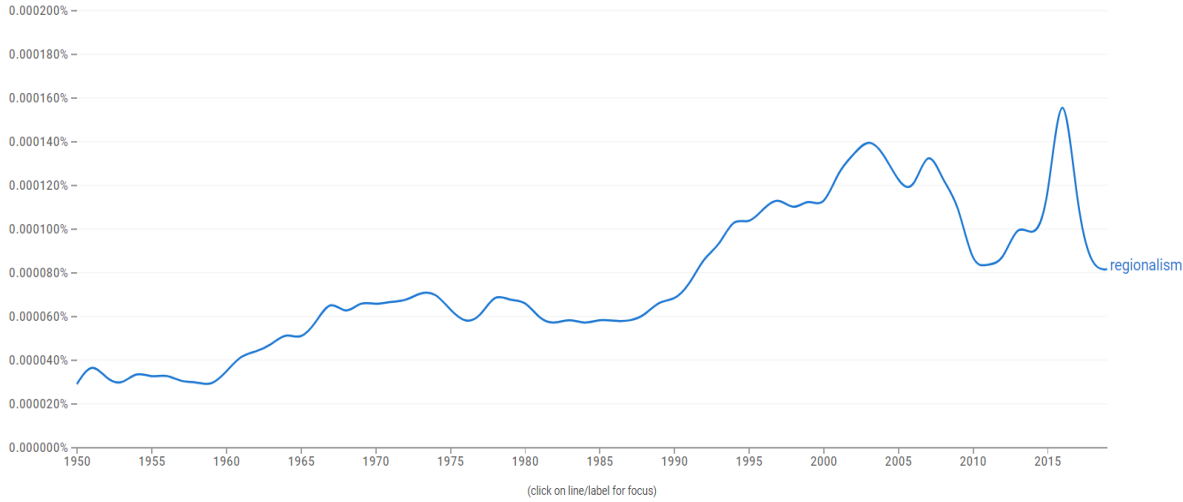


Table 1: “Regionalism” between 1950-2019, GNgram (Access Date 18.11.2024)

With the end of World War II, the number of international organizations that have legal identities and emerged through interstate agreements has increased. In addition to organizations with broader jurisdictions such as the UN, narrower international organizations have also emerged since World War II. At this point, while the history of regional integration can be traced back to the 1950s, the recognition of this concept was achieved with the European Union (EU) (Onursal Beşgöl, Özge, 2016, p. 526).

It has been observed that concepts such as regional integration and regional integration are also used in some studies instead of the concept of regionalization (Özel İhtisas Komisyonu, 1995, p. 57) (Onursal Beşgöl, Özge, 2016, p. 526). The scope of regional integration can range from intergovernmental cooperation among sovereign states to the transfer of authority from national governments to centralized decision-making bodies, aligning with supranationalism (Heywood, 2011, p. 482).

The problem of devolution of authority in regionalism emerges strikingly in the definitions pointed out by Heywood. The motivations that a sovereign state needs to devolve its sovereign authority are also hidden in the aims of regionalism activities.

Regionalization or regional integration may include economic, military or political dimensions, and on the other hand, it has a character that has economic weight (Özel İhtisas Komisyonu, 1995, p. 57) (Kaplan, 2011, p. 135). Regionalism can be divided into three types in terms of the motivations and expectations that cause regional countries to cooperate: a) Economic Regionalism; b) Security Regionalism; c) Political Regionalism (Heywood, Andrew, 2011, p. 482).

The primary motivation that pushes states to integrate is the desire to strengthen their economic interactions. While an increase in regional trade blocs can be observed since the 1990s, in the current conjuncture, states are forming free trade zones by signing trade agreements. They are also going even further and establishing customs unions and common markets (Onursal Beşgöl, Özge, 2016, p. 527). The EU can be given as an example of an ideal type of regionalism motivated by security. Karl Deutsch and his colleagues put forward 9+3 basic conditions in order to become a security community in their analysis of the European Community (EC, later EU), which they see as a “united security community”, in their book

chapter titled “Political Community and the North Atlantic Area”. These conditions are within the framework of the harmony of core values, a unique lifestyle, stronger economic relations and earning expectations, an increase in the political and administrative skills of some members, superior economic growth, mobility of individuals and predictable behaviors. Deutsch and his colleagues, who analyzed Europe from a historical and sociological perspective, stated that Europe, which had been the scene of constant wars and conflicts in the past, had become a security community (Deutsch, K.W., et al., 2014, pp. 121-138). Political regionalism, on the other hand, emerged with motivations such as protecting the common values of states in the same region and gaining a stronger diplomatic voice. The Council of Europe (1949), which was established with the aim of respecting principles such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, can be given as an example (Heywood, Andrew, 2011, p. 483).

Regionalism in international relations is a multidimensional phenomenon that emerges when states develop political, economic and security-based cooperation based on geographical proximity. This phenomenon is divided into various stages in the historical process. The first wave, which took shape in the post-1945 period and is referred to as "old regionalism" in the literature, was largely shaped by Cold War conditions, security concerns and developmental approaches (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). Old regionalism is fundamentally state-centered. The regional structures established in this period were mostly organized at the intergovernmental level, and actors other than the nation-state (NGOs, the private sector) were excluded from the system (Hurrell, 1995).

In regions where one state has a clear superiority over others, regional cooperation usually takes on a hegemonic structure. This situation is explained in the literature by the concept of hegemonic regionalism. Hegemonic regionalism is not only a form of leadership based on material power, but also the process of constructing regional norms, institutions and values by a hegemonic state (Hurrell, 2005).

Hegemonic regionalism has developed by adapting the concept of hegemony in international relations to the regional level. In this framework, the hegemonic state becomes the main actor shaping regional cooperation. Hegemonic leadership is not limited to military or economic superiority; it also includes ideological, cultural and normative dimensions (Cox, 1981).

This approach has been particularly informed by Hegemonic Stability Theory (Kindleberger, 1973; Gilpin, 1987) and neo-Gramscian thought (Cox, 1981). While the former argues that a strong leader is necessary for regional stability, the latter argues that the hegemon leads not only through coercion but also by establishing a normative order based on consent. This suggests that hegemonic regionalism can be directive rather than coercive.

The concept of new regionalism (second wave) emerged as part of the comprehensive transformation of the global system in the mid-1980s. When an analysis is made from a historical perspective, the reasons for a transformation such as new regionalism emerge. It is possible to reduce these reasons to four. First, the transition from bipolarity to multipolarity is a new distribution of power. Second, the relative decline in US hegemony due to the US's tolerance of regionalism. Third, it can be shown as the erosion of the Westphalian nation-state system, while finally, interdependence, economic development in developing countries and former communist countries and changing attitudes towards the political system can be explained as the reasons for this transformation (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 460).

In contrast to hegemonic regionalism, collaborative regionalism can be said to be a part of the new wave of regionalism that developed in the post-Cold War era. In this approach, regional cooperation is not only an economic or security-focused structure; it also includes multifaceted goals such as democracy, sustainable development, social participation and cultural interaction (Fawn, 2009). Collaborative regionalism has emerged as an alternative to hegemonic or exclusionary structures. In particular, interdependence within the region, egalitarian relations and joint decision-making processes are among the basic principles of this approach (Acharya, 2007)

In the light of these definitions and discussions, the study has conducted a regionalism analysis that can be conceptually described as a process due to the lack of an institutionalized regionalism activity among the states that are only geographically bordering the Eastern Mediterranean.

MAHANIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND REGIONALISM

As discussed in the section on theoretical and conceptual definitions, Alfred Mahan's theory of sea power and regionalism, which emphasizes economic integration, emerge as distinct theoretical frameworks. First of all, the theory of sea power is a geopolitical theory theoretically and refers to the importance of sea power. As Hettne and Söderbaum also mentioned in their studies, the first theoretical approaches to regionalism were related to "peace" and tended to see the nation state as a problem rather than a solution. At this point, theories regarding regionalism appear as federalism, functionalism and neofunctionalism (Hettne, Björn & Söderbaum, Fredrik, 2008, p. 100).

Although there are some limited attempts towards regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean in the current conjuncture, it can be observed that it lacks a comprehensive regionalism. On the other hand, there are also policies aimed at maximizing the interests of the actors in the region. Within the framework of these two incompatible attitudes, the overlapping applicability of two very different theories in the region will be examined in the current section.

Why the Eastern Mediterranean?

The issues that make the Eastern Mediterranean important in terms of international political economy stem from the fact that it is a region where the importance of both politics and economy are equal. The Eastern Mediterranean is an area where regionalism practices are tested with the hydrocarbon reserves discovered in recent years, maritime transportation, which is one of the important issues of global trade, and its intertwined position with the Middle East, which is one of the active conflict zones in the world. On the other hand, when examined from a mahanist perspective, it is also an area of interest for hegemonic actors outside the region.

Energy Resources in the Eastern Mediterranean

According to a 2010 report published by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Levant Basin, located between Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, was estimated to contain 122 trillion cubic feet (3.45 trillion cubic meters) of natural gas and 1.7 billion barrels of oil. In the 2010s, these figures were estimated to be one of the largest natural gas reserves in the world in the Eastern Mediterranean (Yaycı, Cihat, 2021b, p. 40). In order to imagine the magnitude of this data, it is understood that the reserve in question in the Eastern Mediterranean is enough to meet Türkiye's needs for 572 years and Europe's needs for 30 years (Yaycı, Cihat, 2021a, p. 26).

In late 2010, a development that confirmed this report occurred. The US-based Noble Energy company announced that it had discovered 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in the Leviathan license area, 80 miles north of the Haifa port in Israel (Henderson, Simon, 2011).

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has published a study that has turned the Eastern Mediterranean region into a data set of discovered and estimated natural gas and oil reserves as of 2020. In the study, the Eastern Mediterranean is divided into eight regions (such as the Herodotus Region, the Levant Region, and the Nile Delta Region). These regions cover an area extending southeast of Cyprus, encompassing the entire Mediterranean offshore basins of Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, and stretching back to the southeast of Cyprus. According to the data obtained using a geology-based assessment methodology in the study, it has been suggested that there are an estimated recoverable reserve of 879 million barrels of oil and 286.2 cubic feet of natural gas (Schenk et al., 2021).

Even the latest data from the USGS has proven the high and increasing potential of the Eastern Mediterranean in the field of energy. This potential has gone beyond the needs of the countries in the region and has elevated them to the position of being suppliers of the countries deprived of energy in the world. For example, Egypt has a proven natural gas reserve of 223 trillion cubic feet in the Nile Basin (according to 2010 data). This situation makes Egypt a significant natural gas exporter. It exports gas to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon through a pipeline passing through Israel. It also exports liquefied natural gas (LNG) to North and South America, Europe and Asia through special port facilities and ships (Henderson, Simon, 2011).

On the other hand, the energy reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean can also be approached from a different perspective in statistical terms. While the discoveries in the region were 2.2 trillion cubic meters until September 2020, this amount constituted 1.10% of the world's natural gas reserves (198.8 trillion cubic meters) as of 2019. The fact that all European countries have an annual natural gas need of 554.1 billion cubic meters and Türkiye, Israel and Egypt have a total of 112.9 billion cubic meters indicates that the Eastern Mediterranean natural gas reserves are important for the region but less important in terms of the world's natural gas supply (Kökyay, 2021, pp. 218-219). Apart from this proposition, it can be determined from various statistical data that the weight of the Middle East in natural gas exports via the Eastern Mediterranean has increased, especially after 2020 (Energy Institute, 2023, pp. 30-35).

Type of Export/Year (billion m3)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
With Pipeline	9.0	8.9	9.3	8.1	8.0	11.0	8.8	8.0	7.7	13.9	15.5
Export of LNG	130.3	135.2	132.2	125.4	126.0	122.3	125.9	127.5	127.3	129.7	136.6
Total Export	139.3	144.2	141.5	133.5	133.9	133.2	134.8	135.6	135.0	143.6	152.1

Table 2: Natural Gas Exports in Interregional Trade (Middle East) Source: <https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review/home> (Access Date: 24.11.2024)

As can be seen in the table, total exports have increased by an average of 0.9% in 10 years, and by 5.9% in 2022 compared to the previous year. The natural gas reserves discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean can be summarized as follows: Israel holds approximately 1,050.9 billion cubic meters of natural gas across six offshore fields: Mari-B (1998), Tamar and Dalit (2009), Leviathan (2011), Tanin (2012), and Karish (2013). Palestine has about 39 billion cubic meters of reserves in the Gaza Marine 1-2 field, discovered in 2000., discovered in two thousand. Cyprus has an estimated reserve of 270 to 355 billion cubic meters in the Aphrodite (2011), Glaucus-1 (2019), Calipso-1 (2018) fields, and Egypt has a natural gas reserve of 850 billion cubic meters in the Zohr field discovered in 2015 (Kökyay, 2021, p. 219).

The Effect of the Eastern Mediterranean on Global Trade

The Eastern Mediterranean has historically been a prominent center for trade and ideological motivation since ancient times. Following the political unification of the Roman Empire across the Mediterranean and the subsequent adoption of Christianity in Rome, Jerusalem gained increased significance within the region. Situated in the Levant, part of the Eastern Mediterranean, the city came to represent not only a center of commerce but also a source of ideological and religious motivation (Ediz, İsmail, 2020, p. 61).

In ancient times, it was a region where civilizations such as the Hittite, Egyptian, Phoenician, Ancient Greek, and Roman had a say, but later it became a region where Byzantium, Islamic Civilization, Crusader Latins, and Ottomans spread their dominance. The trade route called the spice route in the region indicates the periods when the Eastern Mediterranean was important in terms of global trade. During the 19th century, the opening of the Suez Canal played a pivotal role in revitalizing the region's strategic commercial significance, which had waned for a period (Türkhan, 2022).

The Suez Canal, which was opened to maritime traffic in 1869, connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. In 1955, two-thirds of the oil going to Europe passed through the Suez Canal. According to data from 2005, approximately 7.5% of world trade was carried out through the Suez Canal (Reynolds, Paul, 2006).

Year	Piece (Vessel)	Gross Weight (Ton)	Net Weight (Ton)
2012	17224	928,5 M	739,9 M
2013	16596	915,5 M	754,5 M
2014	17148	962,7 M	822,3 M
2015	17483	998,7 M	822,9 M
2016	16833	974,2 M	819,2 M
2017	17550	1.041,6 M	908,6 M
2018	18174	1.139,6 M	983,4 M
2019	18880	1.207,1 M	1.031,2 M

Table 3: Global Trade Ship and Goods Transit Statistics in the Suez Canal, Source:

<https://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/English/Navigation/Pages/NavigationStatistics.aspx> (Access Date: 25.11.2024)

As can be seen in the table, the Suez Canal is a location with intense maritime traffic in terms of tonnage and ship statistics (Suez Canal Authority, 2024). The presence of the Suez Canal in the region is one of the prominent elements that emphasize the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, there are also different approaches on how the transfer process of natural gas reserves mentioned in the section above will proceed. These approaches focus on three possible scenarios; The first is the East Mediterranean Pipeline Project (EastMed), starting from the south of the Island of Cyprus and reaching Italy via Crete and Greece. The second is the scenario of transferring it from the reserve fields in the region to Türkiye and transferring it to Europe. The third scenario is the transfer to be made by producing liquefied natural gas, or LNG, through facilities to be established in Israel and Egypt (Kavaz, 2020, p. 278).

Apart from the increasing importance of the Eastern Mediterranean through the Suez Canal, the issue of transferring hydrocarbon resources from natural gas reserves in the region also attracts attention in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since the issue of transferring hydrocarbon resources will be analyzed in terms of the strategies of regional and non-regional actors, it is examined in more detail in the following sections.

Eastern Mediterranean Strategies of Regional and Non-Regional Actors

Energy relations usually emerge as a continuation of political relations, when the level of political relations is high, they strengthen the bond between them, and when the level of relations is low, they become a barrier between the relations (Tagliapietra, 2017, p. 116). Despite significant advancements in energy trade among regional states, there has been no "peace pipeline" project—a concept introduced by Shaffer—that leverages energy cooperation to resolve interstate conflicts (Shaffer, 2018, p. 96).

The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) agreement between the Cyprus Republic and Egypt on February 17, 2003, which delimits maritime jurisdiction areas, was met with a backlash by Türkiye and the UN expressed its reaction to the EEZ agreements in question (Güven, 2023, p. 114). The natural gas reserves discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean have further increased the geopolitical tensions in the region, and this

situation has manifested itself as an obstacle to a possible solution process for Cyprus (Tagliapietra, 2017, p. 115).

The hydrocarbon reserves discovered within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) areas (claimed by the Republic of Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, though their legal validity remains contested (Acer, 2020)) have escalated regional tensions. Investments in these reserves by external actors such as the United States, France, Italy, and Qatar have further internationalized the disputes, extending their implications beyond the immediate region. The ongoing maritime disagreements between Türkiye and Greece in the western part of the Eastern Mediterranean have taken on a multilateral character, drawing in additional actors such as the US, the EU, Germany, and France alongside the primary coastal states (“Doğu Akdeniz’de önemli aktörler kim, hangi stratejileri izliyorlar?”, 2020).

From a Mahanist perspective, the Eastern Mediterranean is an important point due to the existence of the Suez Canal, an important waterway for world trade, and the Aegean Sea, which controls the exit to the Black Sea (Kökyay, 2021, p. 217). While regionalism efforts during the bipolar Cold War era were primarily shaped by security concerns, they have since evolved into multi-layered regionalism dynamics in today’s multipolar system. Therefore, from a Mahanist perspective, the harmony and incompatibility of the idea of regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean also manifest themselves in the strategies of the regional actors.

The identification and sharing of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has brought with it a series of dialogues and problems. First of all, it would be right to mention the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Forum, an important regionalism initiative for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Eastern Mediterranean Forum gained official status with the agreement signed by Egypt, Greece, Cyprus Republic, Jordan and Italy in 2020. Additionally, the Palestinian Authority joined the forum, while the European Union (EU) and the United States applied for observer status, and France submitted an application for full membership. The forum is seen as an institutionalization where “rival” actors come together in terms of Türkiye’s approach in the Eastern Mediterranean from a strategic perspective. On the other hand, from Israel’s perspective, Israeli foreign affairs officials present it as an advantage both economically and politically by cooperating with Arab and European countries (“Doğu Akdeniz Gaz Forumu: Atılan imzalarla bölgesel kuruluşa dönüşü”, 2020).

The formalization of the Eastern Mediterranean Forum with an interstate agreement is not seen as a rational policy by Türkiye. In a statement made by the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson in 2020, he summarized how the forum is viewed by Türkiye. According to this statement, the Eastern Mediterranean Forum is nothing more than a dream of states acting with the motive of excluding Türkiye from the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The statement describes the forum as unrealistic and emphasizes that, for it to be seen as a step toward cooperation, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—one of the legal representatives of Türkiye and the island of Cyprus—should also be invited. The statement mentions that the countries in question have not responded to Türkiye’s calls for dialogue and states that the rights and interests of the TRNC and Türkiye in the region will be protected (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dış İşleri Bakanlığı, 2020).

As stated in the final declaration of the “5th Maritime and Maritime Security Forum” organized by TASAM (Turkish Asian Strategic Research Center) in November 2023, both regional and global actors in the 21st century can use gunboat diplomacy by understanding the strategic importance of naval power. According

to the final declaration, while the naval presence of global actors in the Eastern Mediterranean diminished in the decade following the Cold War, particularly with the withdrawal of the Soviet fleet, regional actors—whose roles had previously been shaped by the Cold War—have since prioritized naval expansion and increasingly engaged in gunboat diplomacy (TASAM, 2023).

The importance of maritime transportation in the region has continued, and the balance of power has been affected by the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves. While diplomacy and cooperation between the actors in the region have developed, they have also embarked on the path of developing their air and naval forces through modernization programs. This situation has the potential to affect regional competition in the context of energy. The final report predicts that initiatives regarding energy transportation, security and energy supply in the Eastern Mediterranean, in which Türkiye is not involved, are not possible. In addition, the Kardak (1996) and Eastern Mediterranean (2020) crises between Greece and Türkiye also emphasize the importance of maritime security (TASAM, 2023).

Based on these points, it is seen that there are problems in the determination, sharing and distribution of energy resources among the coastal states in the Eastern Mediterranean. As for the coastal states in the Eastern Mediterranean, it seems that the axis that includes Türkiye and the TRNC and the countries that are opposite to this axis, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus Republic and Israel, comes to the fore. While the countries in the region are attempting cooperation efforts, the increase in military and especially naval expenditures in the region, which is divided into two different axes, is also increasing significantly.

From a legal perspective, Greece and Cyprus have ongoing disputes with Türkiye regarding the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The aforementioned states have taken some steps in different approaches to these disagreements. The core argument put forth by Greece and Cyprus is that islands also possess continental shelves. The islands have territorial waters from a legal perspective and there are also EEZ areas except for the uninhabited islands. However, it has been foreseen in the delimitation law that the islands do not have the same status in terms of delimitation with the mainland. In delimitation law, islands close to their own mainland with similar coastlines have been given limited effect. However, islands near another state's mainland have been given even less effect, as they disrupt the delimitation between the two mainlands. In addition, the lack of social life on the islands has also been of a nature that reduces the effect of the islands in the delimitation law. Therefore, the place of the islands in the delimitation law has either been completely neglected or has been limited. In addition, it can be said that the islands are at a disadvantage compared to Türkiye, which has a long coastline, based on the "non-closure" principle in the delimitation law (Acer, 2020, pp. 399-401).

The Republic of Cyprus has pursued a strategy aimed at maximizing its EEZ claims through maritime delimitation agreements with Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this way, it is trying to force Türkiye, which does not recognize the Cyprus Republic, to be an interlocutor, to act as if it were the sole legal representative of the island and to gain legitimacy. Also to ensure that the EU and Greece are involved in the issue in favor of the Cyprus Republic. Greece also aims to maximize delimitation by claiming that the islands are its continental shelf and aims to surround Türkiye in a way that it will not have an exit from its southern shores. Türkiye, on the other hand, is implementing a policy of solving the delimitation problem based on the principles of equity and fair solution that have now become legal precedents (Acer, 2020).

From a legal perspective, Türkiye has taken one of the most strategic steps on the subject by signing the exclusive economic zone delimitation agreement with Libya. This agreement enabled Türkiye to officially declare to the United Nations (UN) that it has opposite coasts with Libya, thereby countering the encirclement strategies pursued by opposing regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, it has demonstrated its deterrent power in the region by engaging in some military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean both within NATO and within its own organization. It has implemented policies that prioritize naval forces with a mahanist perspective and has been able to increase the number of ships in the navy. In addition, it has directed its hydrocarbon exploration and drilling ships to the areas it claims rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, including the disputed areas, and has forced the opposing formation to cooperate with it.

From the Egyptian perspective, the targeted strategy is to become a distribution hub for discovered hydrocarbon resources. Egypt has been engaged in negotiations with Israel regarding the utilization of natural gas from the Leviathan and Tamar gas fields to meet its growing domestic energy demand and to function as a transit hub for regional energy exports. These talks are shifting towards the axis of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, Greece and Israel, due to the rupture of bilateral relations after the coup against Mohamed Morsi. This axis is supported by the EU, which is both dependent on Russian gas and is looking for an alternative route to Türkiye (E. Kurt & Tamçelik, 2015).

When examining external actors involved in the Eastern Mediterranean, key players such as Iran, the United States (US), the European Union (EU), China, Russia, and several Arab countries come to the forefront. The strategies pursued by these actors can be not only from an energy resources perspective but also politically.

The “axis of resistance” defined by Iran as state and non-state actors in the struggle against Israel constitutes the basis of Iran’s Eastern Mediterranean policies. Iran’s increasing activities in the region with proxy actors such as Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah are perceived as a significant threat to the system that is sought to be established under the leadership of Egypt and Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, Iran’s privileged position in the field of hydrocarbon energy is being tested through the significant energy potential identified in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Iran’s direct or indirect increase in its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean is important in terms of Iran’s role. Iran’s increasing its presence, especially in Lebanon and Syria, which are coastal countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, means getting closer to the Leviathan region. This situation worries Israel about a possible attack on the region (M. Kurt & Duman, 2020, pp. 175-176).

If we touch upon the strategies pursued by Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean, these strategies emerge in the form of reconnaissance, surveillance and increasing operational capabilities. Russia’s current presence in Syria increased in 2015 when it was officially called upon by the Syrian government. It has increased its operational capabilities by increasing its military capacity in Syria and supported Iran and Syria. It also participates in energy drilling and exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to manipulate energy prices. Its presence through gas companies in Egypt and Lebanon manifests itself as a military base in the Cyprus Republic and Syria. Moreover, Russia has secured the right to conduct drilling operations in Syria, positioning itself as a key actor in the regional balance of power by backing forces in Syria and Libya. The ultimate goal that Russia wants to achieve through these strategies is to emerge de facto in the Eastern Mediterranean, control the energy transmission lines in the region and become an

important actor in the region without being excluded from possible new economic unions that will emerge (Atlas, 2020).

In the Eastern Mediterranean, regardless of whether they are regional or non-regional actors, states with energy, political and military interests attach special importance to the island of Cyprus, the most obvious example of which is the United Kingdom's military bases in Cyprus. Although these bases occasionally cause discomfort for the Cyprus Republic, they maintain their importance in terms of the United Kingdom's operational capability in the Middle East. In the 2020s, the US lifting the arms embargo on the Cyprus Republic and signing a bilateral security agreement brought the Cyprus Republic closer to the US. The US, including the Cyprus Republic, is organizing a series of military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean with Greece, Italy, France, Israel and Egypt. However, the US withdrew its support from the EastMed project due to economic reasons, and Italy and France wanted to fill the gap at this point. From the UK's perspective, despite the US being involved in every strategic area it is present in, it has lagged behind other non-regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean. In order to close this gap, it has tried to increase its contacts with the Cyprus Republic and has been observed to try to create a balance by granting rights such as construction permits to Greek Cypriot citizens in military base areas (Balci, 2023). The United Kingdom's Brexit process and the subsequent Covid-19 pandemic, as well as its static policy process towards the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Libya, have helped some Middle Eastern countries and even Russia to develop their presence in the region. Another factor that has increased Russia's population in the region is the actions taken by France outside the NATO framework (Sakman, 2021).

With the discovery of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, France is pursuing a strategy to deprive Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriot of these resources by acting together with Greece, Cyprus Republic, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Lika, 2022). Several factors have been effective in France developing this strategy. As the far-right gained influence in domestic politics, France shifted its focus from Libya to the Eastern Mediterranean after Haftar forces, which it supported, failed against the Türkiye-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), aiming to ease internal tensions. In this context, France is trying to involve the EU in the issue of delimiting maritime jurisdictions, just like the strategy followed by the Cyprus Republic (İnat, 2020). France, which has adopted a policy of supporting the maximalist policies pursued by Greece and the Cyprus Republic against Türkiye regarding the delimitation issue in the Eastern Mediterranean, is causing tensions to increase by sending warships to the region. In 2020, France sent the aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle to the Cyprus Republic (Ambassade De France À Chypre, 2020). This is a development that proves that mahanist policies have an important role in the Eastern Mediterranean.

France's strategies in question have the potential to endanger institutions such as NATO and the EU. Because among the possible outcomes of these strategies, Russia's increasing influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa can be seen. In such a scenario, NATO's southern wing will be in danger, while the EU-type, an ideal regionalism example that has been achieved, may face the danger of division (Lika, 2022, pp. 15-16).

The United States (US) has maintained its hegemony in the Middle East since the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957), which was enacted to assert US strategic dominance over the region. Although the US hegemony has been subjected to many tests in the Middle East, it has maintained its success with the end of the Cold War. In the current conjuncture, it is seen that the US is facing new tests in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Developments such as Russia's support for Bashar Assad in the Syrian civil war, the Tartus

Naval Base, and the support of the Russian mercenary group Wagner to the Haftar government in Libya are challenging the US hegemony. In addition, Russia's say in the Limassol Port and the presence of Libya's most important ports under the Haftar administration have pushed the US to make some strategic moves. First of all, although it initially supported Haftar in Libya, it later began to support the GNA, which is supported by Türkiye and Italy. In order to turn the balance of power that has changed against it in the Eastern Mediterranean back to its own advantage, it is also pursuing a strategy to break Russian influence in Cyprus. It lifted the arms embargo on Cyprus as of 2020. It would also be useful to note that alternative natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are extracted by Noble Energy, also of US origin, in terms of controlling the energy market, where Russia is economically strong. This approach aligns with Washington's broader strategy to prevent Russia from consolidating its economic and geopolitical foothold in the region (Özgöker, 2023).

The Factors That Inhibiting or Motivating Regionalism

During the Cold War, the US established SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) in the Far East in order to implement its containment policy. The system it established in Europe through NATO was already the first link in terms of the functionality of the containment policy. To bridge the gap between Europe and the Far East, the US formed the Baghdad Pact, which was later renamed CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). Thus, by motivating regionalism in the context of US security, it was able to make the strategy of containing the USSR more applicable (Donduran, 2020b, p. 255).

The "Aron Paradigm" can be defined as the inevitability of small and medium-sized powers to take part in coalitions formed around a superpower in order to maintain their existence in a bipolar system (Babacan, 2020). Thus, the power policies shaped in the bipolar system have been one of the motivational sources of regionalism (Donduran, 2020b, p. 256).

The regionalist movements in the period between the two world wars, which manifested themselves in the form of blocs in trade, fed economic and political instability, led to the Great Depression, led to a contraction in global trade and paved the way for World War II (E. D. Mansfield & Milner, 1999, p. 597). Due to the harsh atmosphere brought about by the Cold War in the bipolar system, countries felt the need for a regionalist initiative due to security concerns (Donduran, 2020b, pp. 254-255).

The aggregation function at the international level is organized informally. Some of these can be transformed into institutional structures that can be carried out systematically. While some units within the groups brought together focus on ideological or economic goals, others act as mediators. While the first group determines the limits of aggregation, the other is expected to assume a leadership role. The aggregation function is carried out by the decision-makers of governments on behalf of their units. Like the autonomous managers of intergovernmental organizations, they can encourage aggregation between countries through behind-the-scenes negotiations. When the need for aggregation among close collaborators among allies reaches a certain point, an international mechanism is established to provide a regular framework for aggregation. The growth in regionalism thus arises from the desire for regular aggregation of targets within international subsystems (Haas, 1965, p. 505).

The picture seen in the Eastern Mediterranean today is that Türkiye and the TRNC are on one side, while other regional countries have taken steps to exclude the other side. As a result, the region is characterized

by a bilateral dispute. Although it has not yet reached the level of hot conflict, it can be said that the tendency of regional countries to increase their naval capacities has led to security concerns in the actors in the region, just like in the bipolar system. As it is useful to recall, Karl Deutsch's view that the EU emerged as a security community (Deutsch, K.W., et al., 2014) has also proven that security can be seen as a source of motivation in regionalism. Therefore, it can be said that these concerns are the motivation for regional countries that currently have security concerns to take steps towards regionalism activities.

Regional activities gained momentum with the decolonization period. Former colonies that emerged as sovereign states by gaining their independence engaged in regional activities in order to maintain the balance between them and the superpowers as well as to survive economically (Acharya, 2002). In today's international system, concepts such as sovereignty and borders are eroding, and traditional ideas in which the main actor is the state have begun to give way to ideas that also care about non-state actors. In this context, regional activities have become multidimensional and complicated, including non-state actors, when dimensions such as economic interests, in addition to the security dimension, are considered (Donduran, 2020b, p. 258).

According to Mearsheimer, the fear of aggression in international politics serves as a key motivating force for states. Political competition between states, unlike economic competition, is dangerous because it can lead to war. According to Mearsheimer, states do not rely on others for their own security due to the lack of a high authority in the international system and the potential hostility of different states towards each other. However, this does not prevent states from forming alliances. However, historical patterns of alliances and rivalries—particularly after World War II—demonstrate that today's adversary may become tomorrow's ally, and vice versa (Mearsheimer, 2015, pp. 17-18).

States that are concerned about the intentions of other states and are aware of alliances tend to cooperate with the most powerful state in the system. The stronger a state is relative to its potential rivals, the less likely these rivals are to attack it. Weaker states avoid attacking stronger states because of the possibility of military defeat. States try to increase their share of the world's power distribution. They strive to change the balance of power against their potential rivals. They use military, diplomatic, and economic tools to do this (Mearsheimer, 2015, p. 18).

Using Türkiye as an example, some scholars argue that two distinct strategies could be pursued in the Eastern Mediterranean. First, Türkiye may aim to become the dominant power in the region by using its increasing influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the risks this brings should be analyzed very well, and in this context, the view that Türkiye does not have the potential to meet the requirements of being a hegemonic power is not insignificant. On the other hand, if other important actors in the region such as Israel and Egypt question whether Türkiye's potential hegemonic power is stabilizing, this may put Türkiye in a more difficult situation. As a second strategy, Türkiye can adopt the extra-regional balancing strategy. The main goal of the extra-regional balancing strategy is to prevent the influence of a rival hegemon in the region in question from spreading to the region. Unlike direct intervention, this strategy is more flexible and cost-effective, allowing Türkiye to counterbalance external powers without direct confrontation. However, it means giving up the benefits of intra-regional hegemon to the region (Ediger et al., 2012, p. 89).

When we consider the definitions, hegemonic regionalism is seen as the management of the international system by regional groups formed by their own local dominant powers. Conversely, in traditional regionalism, hegemonic regionalism is shaped by external hegemonic powers that exert influence from above and beyond the region (Kolasi et al., 2023, pp. 591-592). By choosing Türkiye as the pivot country in its relations with Israel, the USA wants to place Türkiye-Israel relations at the center of its extra-regional balancing strategy (Ediger et al., 2012, p. 89). The example in question is also one of the most obvious steps taken towards the idea of hegemonic regionalism. When evaluated in this context, hegemonic regionalism, which was a dominant phenomenon in the old regionalism, can also be motivated by a dominant power with a strong navy “from outside” in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the context of energy, both policy makers and diplomats have argued that the discovery of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean will enhance regional stability, security, and peace, contribute to the EU's energy security, and facilitate the resolution of regional disputes. However, the effects of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean paradoxically show the opposite. Because there are currently a number of geopolitical issues such as the Cyprus Problem, the Palestinian Problem, Türkiye-Israel relations, and Egypt-Israel relations. On the other hand, it has been observed that natural gas discoveries have fueled these issues. The reaction of Türkiye to the Cyprus Republic's tender for granting a license for natural gas exploration is an example of this (Tagliapietra, 2017, pp. 113-115).

From a historical perspective, regional disputes have been perceived as a natural outcome of mutual distrust, whereas cooperation has been regarded as an exceptional and rare occurrence. In the relations between the actors in the region, military power has been the determining factor in security perceptions (Gök & Cavlak, 2022, p. 973). Therefore, regional actors feel the need to increase their military capacity, especially in terms of naval forces, in terms of semantic policies. This situation is contrary to regional cooperation and, of course, to the spirit of regionalism.

CONCLUSION

The Eastern Mediterranean has always been a strategically important region, both in terms of energy and in terms of important waterways for world trade. With the discovery of energy resources in the region, different strategies have begun to be developed among the coastal states of the Eastern Mediterranean. These strategies stand out as both cooperative and conflict-oriented strategies.

The energy-related strategies adopted by regional actors primarily focus on the extraction, transportation, and utilization of energy resources. However, these strategies have also intensified existing geopolitical disputes, reinforcing power-oriented policies. First of all, in terms of energy resources, the countries in the region appear to be divided into two poles. The first group is Türkiye, TRNC and Libya, and the other group is the group that includes Israel, Egypt, Greece and the Cyprus Republic supported by an actor such as the EU.

Within the scope of this study, key insights have been drawn regarding the possibility of regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly whether it could emerge through internal or external incentives. Additionally, the study explores the feasibility of a regionalism initiative in the Eastern Mediterranean within the framework of Mahanist naval strategy.

The energy factor appears to be one of the most important elements for a possible regionalism movement in the Eastern Mediterranean. The energy factor motivates states to a regionalism based on cooperation in extracting, transferring and sharing discovered hydrocarbon reserves. On the other hand, when evaluated in terms of hegemonic regionalism, the mahanist perspective can encourage regionalism steps in the Eastern Mediterranean by feeding “fears” or encouraging by a hegemonic power coming from “outside”.

However, paradoxically, the energy factor can also create a conflictual environment in the region by increasing competition between states. Again, paradoxically, what prevents the actors in the region from starting a regionalism initiative from an energy perspective is the actors' interest maximization and a possible mahanist conflict equation. In short, the economic resources in the region can push the actors to a mahanist policy in order to maximize their interests. Conversely, the presence of economic resources can also initiate a new regionalism activity by encouraging cooperation between the actors in the region.

Whether a regional actor like Türkiye or an external one like France or Russia, naval forces have become a key element in Eastern Mediterranean strategies through efforts such as securing naval bases, deploying fleets, and boosting naval capabilities. While the deterrence and capacity building of countries' naval forces provide advantages in terms of maximizing their interests on the one hand, on the other hand, it also hinders possible regionalism steps that can be taken in the region by contradicting the spirit of cooperation.

Given the region's troubled bilateral relations, historical rivalries, and conflicting interests, the Mahanist perspective stands as a major barrier to regionalism. At the same time, hegemonic regionalism remains unrealistic, as there is no single dominant actor within the region and multiple competing hegemons outside it. Instead of fostering regional cooperation, naval power projection and intimidation strategies have contributed to a cycle of conflict and militarization. In order to maximize their interests, states are more inclined to the mahanist theory by strengthening their naval forces. This situation creates a risk of conflict instead of regional cooperation.

Just like in the study, testing possible collaborations in regions where there are conflicts of interest, such as the Eastern Mediterranean, can be done in future studies based on quantitative data. In the Eastern Mediterranean, country-based studies can be conducted to analyze the opportunities that arise for states. An index can emerge regarding how close regionalism can be achieved through numerical data on the naval forces of the countries in the region and the criteria that emerge through this data. Additionally, considering the evolving geopolitical landscape, future studies could evaluate how regional actors such as Russia and Iran might engage in regionalism processes, particularly in light of their roles in the Syrian civil war and their anticipated policy transformations. By serving as a foundation for these future studies, this research could pave the way for deeper analytical inquiries into the prospects and limitations of regionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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