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A R A Ş T I R M A M A K A L E S İ / R E S E A R C H A R T I C L E

GREEN DIPLOMACY: A REGIONAL OVERVİEW OF POLICIES IN THE BLACK AND CASPIAN SEAS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the regional dynamics of "Green Diplomacy" within the Black and Caspian Sea basins, emphasizing its role as a strategic tool for multilateral cooperation. Following the EU's 2024 framework for an inclusive green transition, the paper analyzes how countries like Türkiye and Azerbaijan integrate environmental priorities into their foreign policies to address climate-related security risks. Key initiatives, such as Türkiye's "Zero Waste" project and the development of the "Middle Corridor," are examined alongside emerging trends in renewable energy and rare earth element diplomacy. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that decarbonization and sustainable infrastructure are becoming central to regional stability, energy security, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Keywords: Green Diplomacy, Energy Security, Decarbonization, Zero Waste, Green Energy Corridor, Disaster Resilience.

YEŞİL DİPLOMASİ: KARADENİZ VE HAZAR DENİZİ'NDEKİ POLİTİKALARIN BÖLGESEL BİR BAKIŞI

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Karadeniz ve Hazar Denizi havzalarındaki bölgesel iş birliğini geliştirmeyi hedefleyen "Yeşil Diplomasi" (Green Diplomacy) kavramını ve bu doğrultudaki güncel politikaları analiz etmektedir. Avrupa Birliği'nin 2024 stratejileri ışığında tanımlanan yeşil dönüşüm; iklim krizi, biyolojik çeşitlilik kaybı ve çevre kirliliği gibi küresel güvenlik tehditlerine karşı çok taraflı bir yaklaşım sunmaktadır. Makalede, Türkiye'nin "Sıfır Atık" projesi ve yenilenebilir enerji yatırımları başta olmak üzere, bölge ülkelerinin dekarbonizasyon çabaları ve nadir toprak elementleri diplomasisi incelenmektedir. Sonuç olarak, enerji güvenliği ve çevresel sürdürülebilirliğin, çatışma sonrası yeniden yapılanma ve bölgesel istikrar için temel bir diplomatik araç haline geldiği savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeşil Diplomasi, Enerji Güvenliği, Dekarbonizasyon, Sıfır Atık, Yeşil Koridor, Afet Dirençliliği.

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INTRODUCTION

The EU's move towards legislation on due diligence in supply chains, is an important step in creating sustainable international trade. It will take the active participation of producers, national regulators, international market regulators, and a broad range of civic society to fill in the blanks. But therein lies the problem: not all partners are on equal footing. In this context, the EU's broader external policy framework provides an important lens through which these inequalities can be understood.

Green Diplomacy is defined as "accelerating a global just and inclusive green transition," by the EU Consilium on March 18, 2024, (Council of the European Union, Brussels, 2024) which includes a multilateral approach with partner countries. However, the implementation of such a framework does not occur in a vacuum, and is increasingly shaped by global instability. The accelerating triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution aggravate existing security concerns from ongoing armed conflicts worldwide (PRIO, 2024), compounded by the harm to the climate and the environment, resulting in great human suffering. As we are seeing every day on our screens, this is evident in Russia's invasion in Ukraine since February 2022, or in the war between Israel and Gaza, after the horrific October 7, 2023 attacks and kidnapping undertaken by Hamas, or the most recent conflict in Iran, where things are quickly spiraling out of control towards a regional war.

Against this complex geopolitical and environmental backdrop, regional actors gain increasing strategic importance in advancing the EU's green diplomacy objectives. The EU has set its Green diplomacy as a political priority and so it should be for Türkiye, the Black Sea region and in Azerbaijan, strategically building the Middle Corridor. To better understand this regional dimension, the following section will examine key actors in sequence. We will first look at Türkiye, a primary and rising power on the Black Sea, then on to its neighbors, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Russia and finish in the Caspian Sea with a zoom on Azerbaijan.

1. Türkiye

1.1. Green Legislation/Policies

In Article 56 of the Constitution of 1982, the first and most important regulation regarding the environment, entitled "Social and Economic Rights and Duties" of the Environmental Rights Regulation, states: "Everyone has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment. It is the duty of the state and citizens to improve the environment, protect environmental health and prevent environmental pollution." (Çelik, Y., & Sofracı, İ. E., 2022)

The table below showcases some major milestones in Türkiye's environmental policies, which began in the 1970's and continue today, with the most recent development plan, the XII, now in progress, from 2024-2028.

1970s	Turkey begins to experience significant environmental problems
1980's	1982 : Environmental Rights Regulation
	1983 : Environmental Law #2872 : polluter pays principal
	1983 : Prime Ministry Undersecretariat of Environment established
	1983 : VI. 5-year Development Plan : Introduces the concept of sustainable development in Turkey, focusing on the management of natural resources and protection of human health.
1990's	1991 : Ministry of Environment is established , decree #443
	1993 : Environmental Cleaning Tax
2000's	2002 : Turkey participates in the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development
	2013 : X. 5-year plan (2014-2018) : focused on green growth," eco-efficiency, prevention of environmental pollution, and increasing competition and R&D.
	2018 : EU Commission notes Turkey's preparedness in environmental and climate change policies , but highlights weak implementation, particularly in waste management and industrial pollution .
	2019- present : XII. 5-year Plan : Emphasizes the protection of natural resources, improvement of environmental quality, and integration of environmentally friendly policies across sectors. - Targets include increasing environmental awareness and sensitivity among all segments of society.

Table 1: Timeline of Türkiye's Major Environmental Policies

The "Zero Waste" initiative (Wasylina, 2023), created by the First Lady Emine Erdoğan, encompasses waste prevention, more efficient use of resources, waste generation reduction, the establishment of an effective waste collection system, and recycling, all the while being a roadmap for a green future, reminding humanity that a waste-free and sustainable life is possible.

On December 14, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the "Zero Waste" resolution, presented by Türkiye, together with 105 other countries. March 30 was proclaimed "International Day of Zero Waste" per the resolution of the General Assembly. First Lady Emine Erdoğan spoke at the United Nations General Assembly and presented her Zero Waste project, which was presented to the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, on March 30, 2023 (UN Türkiye, 2023).

The high-level meeting was organised to raise awareness of the urgency to transition from a classical business model to a sustainable, green or circular business model, and rethink the way we manufacture and how we consume, saving billions of Turkish Lira and creating millions of jobs. Thanks to the Zero Waste Project, some 650 million tonnes of raw material have been conserved, and four million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions were avoided through recycling. The Sustainable Development Goals that Türkiye is supporting through this initiative are: SDG 3, 6, 11, 13, 15.

On June 13, 2022, the World Bank Group published a press release entitled "Climate action could provide nearly $150 billion in savings for Türkiye by 2040." (World Bank Group, 2022) The benefits of this initiative would primarily be reductions in fuel imports and improved health conditions thanks to reduced air pollution, and most importantly result in better energy security and lower energy expenditures.

How can Türkiye achieve these decarbonisation efforts? By investing in the following key sectors, as the world's 17th largest carbon emitter: power, through the decarbonisation of electricity and electrification of buildings, transport and industry; buildings and transportation, by improving supply chains and enhancing mobility, making cities more resilient, healthy, attractive and competitive; industry, through the use of new, more efficient technologies to increase its export market, particularly to the European Union; and forestry, by restoring and improving land management, reducing emissions, forest fires and deforestation.

Resiliency to natural disasters is key, which in 2021 accounted for 107 floods, 66 forest fires, 16 snowstorms and 39 landslides (World Bank Group, 2022). Let us now look at how Türkiye is invested in economic and sustainable development, and how it can engage bilaterally and multilaterally in Green Diplomacy, particularly with its immediate Mediterranean neighbors or riparian states.

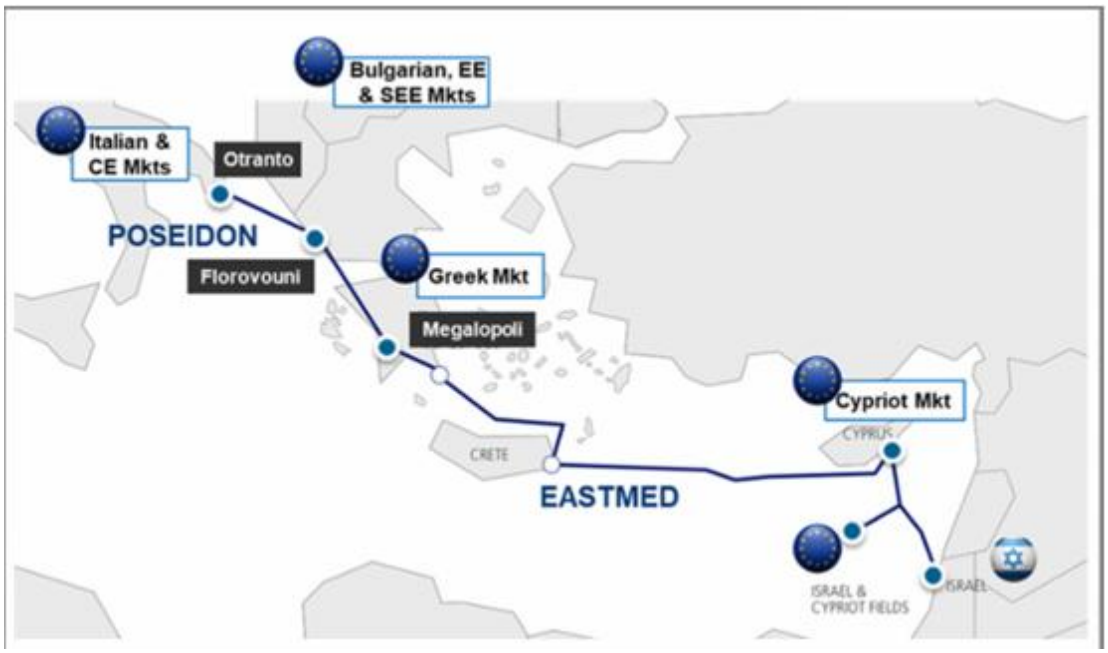
1.2. Bilaterally

Referencing the research paper directed by Valeria Giannotta, entitled "Turkey and Regional Normalization: Impact and Sustainability" (Giannotta, 2024), this study provides concrete examples of how Türkiye can construct its Green Diplomacy policy through security, renewable energies, pollution reduction, and biodiversity protection.

Turkish-Greek relations, for instance, flourished in 2023 when the two countries established "common ground." Following their respective re-elections, a pivotal one-on-one meeting took place between President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Mitsotakis in September. Building on this momentum, deputy ministers met in Athens on October 16, 2023, reaffirming their commitment to a Positive Agenda. This collaboration notably spans sectors such as business and economy, tourism, transportation, energy, science and technology, agriculture, environment, social security, health, youth, education, and sports.

1.3. Green Pipeline Diplomacy

What about the Eastmed pipeline? (European Commission EastMed Project, 2017)



The East Mediterranean Pipeline (DEPA International Projects, 2022) is a 2,000-kilometer project designed to deliver an initial capacity of 10 bcm per year. Recognized by the European Union as a priority for regional energy balance, it is officially designated as a Project of Common Interest (PCI).

The pipeline follows an offshore route starting from the Levantine Basin to Cyprus, continuing to the coast of Crete, and traversing the Peloponnese and Western Greece before reaching the coast of Thesprotia and Italy. At Florovouni, the EastMed pipeline connects to the Poseidon pipeline project, further integrating the EU energy market with new offshore discoveries.

Developed by Edison and DEPA, the Poseidon segment (Edison Spa, 2017) is also classified as a PCI and is a key component of the REPowerEU plan. With commercial operations slated to begin in 2027, the project is set to lead the way in offshore hydrogen transportation. Consequently, it can be framed as an instrument of Green Pipeline Diplomacy, fostering regular dialogue and regional cooperation through sustainable energy infrastructure.

1.3. Green Energy Diplomacy

Is consensus possible between Greece and Türkiye to cooperate particularly in energy security in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean?

Marinos Giannopoulos, the CEO of Enterprise Greece (Daily Sabah, 2024) recommended that “both countries step up energy discussions, organize bilateral business and energy forums, and promote joint investments in energy infrastructure and technology development,” this following Istanbul hosting the first Greek-Turkish Energy Forum in April, bringing together experts and officials from the energy sectors of the two countries.

On the top of the Green Energy Diplomacy agenda should be Türkiye’s renewable energy potential (increase from 11 GW in 2023 to 23,9 GW by 2030), LNG terminals and infrastructure, biomass, small hydro and geothermal projects, combined with a pledge to double bilateral economic affairs between Greece and Türkiye within the next five years.

With the objective of reaching $10 billion in bilateral trade, would more secure and sustainable electricity transmission be the opportunity to use renewable energy? Or for more sustainable freight and passenger transportation across the proposed Kipi-Ipsala bridge? What about green or eco-tourism as part of the Positive Agenda? A biodiversity protection treaty that both sides of Cyprus could agree on?

We can no longer work in isolation and only seek national or sovereign security objectives, but together, we can have more partners, more financial resources, and together create the optimal political, economic and social conditions for a more equitable, shared vision of the much needed energy transition.

1.4. Green Disaster Diplomacy

The horrific and destructive triple earthquakes on February 6, 2023 serve also as an opportunity for catastrophy resiliency, necessary to better manage and survive more frequent natural disasters.

In the annual World Economic Forum's Risk Report for 2024 (Heading, & Cavaciuti-Wishart, 2024), presented just before the Davos gathering in January, here are the top five major climate risks in the coming two years and 10 years.

In two years, here are the top five risks:

1) disinformation and misinformation (Wasylina, 2023a)
2) Extreme weather events
3) Social polarisation
4) Cybersecurity insecurity
5) Interstate armed conflict.

In the next ten years, the picture is rather depressing, and almost all the risks are climate or nature related:

1) extreme weather events
2) Critical changes to Earth's systems
3) Bio diversity loss and system collapse (Wasylina, 2023b)
4) Natural resource shortage.

It is imperative that we agree that decision makers can make decisions to improve resilience and engage in green diplomacy, to share best practices for preventing and foreseeing the next destructive national and regional disasters.

Lessons learned should be of prevention and early warning systems for natural disasters, as we saw in 2011 with the Fukushima earthquake and subsequent tsunami and nuclear disaster.

Following my meeting in Ankara with one of the founders of the AFFETEK platforms, cluster and foundation, listen to my conversation with Omür Kırzılaslan and Professor Güney Özcebe on my podcast published June 28, 2024, entitled "Disaster Resilience: an ecosystem responding to disasters and emergencies." (Wasylina, 2024)

It is worth noting that this platform brings together a vast area of expertise: information and communication technologies, disaster resilient, sustainably built environment technologies, life sciences/health technologies, climate agriculture and environment technologies, industrial technologies and social issues having economic, financial, sociological, psychological, educational and legislative dimensions.

The main objective of the is platform is to create public-private partnerships between universities, the private sector, the public sector and the NGO sector to best prevent and respond disasters, natural or manmade.

AFFTEK has the ambition to create international cooperation and future prospects with international stakeholders and institutions in disaster management technologies.

Technology is the key element of this eco-system, particularly in the communication and early warning systems and transportation, as well as visual or access technologies, such as drones or radio frequencies or walky talky devices, when digital communications are down.

Egypt: a reconciliation is underway following the October 7 attack, spearheaded by And getting their respective First Ladies.

Energy security and supply has been the focus, particularly since the Russian invasion and war in Ukraine which began in 2022, and the delimitation of maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Rebuilding Gaza, now that the hostages have been released, and a simile ceasefire seems to be holding, Israel and Palestine, Egypt and Türkiye could all work together to build Gaza into a sustainable eco-hub on the Mediterranean.

Türkiye's BOTAŞ and Egypt's EGAS have signed an LNG trading agreement, cooperation on natural gas infrastructure and underground storage, as well as sharing technical expertise.

Libya: in response to the flood in Eastern Libya in September 2023, thienevent provided the ideal opportunity to help Libya become more resilient to climate change and to build back greener. Hereafter are a few areas of Green Diplomacy: joint gas and oil exploration, education and training, agriculture and organic food, and renewable energies.

1.5. Green Finance Diplomacy

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Türkiye, the World Bank, France, Germany, the UN, IFC and the EBRD, which provides a framework for the World Bank and other signatories to provide technical assistance and additional development financing of $3.2 billion and to help mobilize private finance for projects helping Türkiye achieve its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and Long-Term Strategy (LTS). Even though Türkiye's historical contribution to global GHG emissions is less than 1%, Türkiye commits to reducing its GHG emissions by 41% through 2030, targeting Net Zero in 2053.

So how can Green Finance (World Bank, 2022) help Türkiye improve its carbon footprint?

Türkiye has taken several steps already to ensure sustainable management policies, increase public awareness, ratifying the Paris Climate Accords, creating more demand for green finance and private sector investment.

Which investments could be considered "green"? From Box 1 in the previously cited report, the types of investment deemed to be green are those that aim to tackle climate change, natural resource depletion, loss of biodiversity, and air, water and soil depletion.

As has been already said in this chapter, and was recently emphasized in the recent UNECE meeting which this author attended in March 2024 in Geneva, here is what Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations said:

> "We can not have peace with wars going on, financial debt, devastating floods. We need to have the necessary investments to unlock financial support of $50 billion a year, in energy transitions, digitalisation and education and social protection."

The COP28 Summit in Dubai, November 30-December 13 (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023) was very important in this regard, bringing together 150 Heads of State, 85,000 participants, signaling strongly the end of the fossil fuel era, new funding for loss and damage, strengthening resilience, linking climate change with nature conservation.

Looking at Türkiye's Green finance efforts, we can observe the challenges facing not only this country, but all of us: making the transition to a lower carbon economy will require $1 trillion to $3,8 trillion annually, all the while reducing fossil fuel investments, and in parallel being mindful of the climate risks discussed above and the costs and damage, not to mention insurance costs of such extreme weather events.

As most experts agree, we are going over the illusive target of 1,5°C towards a 3°C warming, unprepared to envision or sustain loss and damage of such phenomena. Adaptation costs are expected to be in the range of $280 billion to $500 billion a year.

Türkiye has initially invested $30 billion, 40% of which was invested primarily in renewable energy projects, but few banks have issued "green" products.

The education and training (Wasylina, 2023c) of Türkiye's young generation will be key to Türkiye's political, economic and social resilience to the aforementioned top 5 risks which will affect all of us.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how Türkiye, as one of the most populous regional powers can and has used Green Diplomacy at home, bilaterally and multilaterally to demonstrate its leadership and engagement in constructive Green Diplomacy in Mediterranean Sea basin.

2. Black Sea

The press conference (Youtube, 2025a) that took place on March 9, 2025 to mark 100 days of President Ursula von der Leyen's second mandate brings everything in to focus for this section, particularly when President von der Leyen was asked a question at the end of the presser about how decarbonisation and the Green Deal, the competitiveness pact and the Mario Draghi paper, and Arm Europe can all function and are not contradictory.

But with all the recent events, the dress down of President Zelenskyy in the Oval Office on February 28, 2025 by President Trump and Vice-President Vance, clearly have made the European Union rethink its posture and security, not only on rearming Europe, as the United States paused its defense and intelligence to Ukraine, but on energy and other national security parameters such as nuclear, rare earth and renewable energies and their supply chains.

This section is indeed very timely and a Green Diplomacy agenda is needed in the Black Sea, to not only stop the war, but at the same time to look beyond the war, and to push our economies to the next level, together, in tandem, to avoid a new Cold War, a chapter I recently published in a collective book, entitled "A New Cold War is Brewing: Equity and Vulnerability in a Warming World." (Açıkalın & Erçetin, 2024)

Compared to the risks of 2024 mentioned in the previous section, here are the updated list of risks from the Davos gathering in January 2025.

In two years, these are the top five risks:

1) disinformation and misinformation (Wasylina, 2023d).
2) Extreme weather events (Wasylina, 2024a)
3) Social polarisation (Wasylina, 2024b)
4) Cybersecurity insecurity (Wasylina, 2024c)
5) Interstate armed conflict (Wasylina, 2023e)
6) In the next ten years, the picture is rather bleak, and almost all the risks are climate or nature related:

1) extreme weather events
2) Critical changes to Earth's systems
3) Bio diversity loss and system collapse (Wasylina, 2023f)
4) Natural resource shortage

2.1. Green Energy Diplomacy: Hydrogen, Methane

As we have seen in the previous section, Energy is and always will be the key to security stability and prosperity and competitiveness. So how can infrastructure be modernized, upgraded for more effective transmission and distribution power grids, electricity interconnections and energy storage, for access to energy, competitiveness, affordable energy bills, energy security, in sum?

We all saw the European Energy Union in action when the synchronization of the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) took place on February 9, 2025 (Youtube, 2025b), when they were 28 finally disconnected from Russia's grid and hooked up to the EU's grid, which took 17 years to achieve.

What are the challenges to meet the requirement of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 43 percent by 2030 and 60 percent by 2035?

As discussed in our panel at the COP29 in Baku Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) deployment of CCS technologies is seen as essential for achieving net-zero targets. Currently, around 40 million tons of CO_2 are captured globally each year, but the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that 7.6 billion tons will need to be captured annually by 2050 to meet global climate goals (IEA, 2020).

The Black Sea Economic Council (BSEC) is an example how a multilateral organisation can facilitate Green energy diplomacy (BSEC, 2025): Azerbaijan was the chair for Green energy (July 30 2023-June 2025) in the Black Sea Economic Council and its main focus was to "develop a competitive regional energy market through supporting investments in energy infrastructure, with the view to increase energy security, interconnectivity and further diversify energy sources and routes." The Working Group also organized joint programs among the energy authorities in BSEC Member States and engages in the exchange of experience and best practices.

On 27 June 2018, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States held in Yerevan approved the BSEC Green Energy Strategy (BSEC, 2018). In this document, the Council 31 invited member states to conceptualise and adopt their Green energy policies, thus strengthening regional cooperation in the Black Sea.

As President von der Leyen mentioned, decarbonisation is directly linked to having access to rare earth and technologies which will improve competitiveness in Europe.

Rare earth diplomacy: we all know the race is on to capture supply and supply chains to access rare earth minerals, which are indispensable for the next stage of our economy, which will be highly dependent on these rare earth minerals from everything to Nvidia chips, to all modern rapid calculation or quantum computing, which is not only going to become part of our daily life, but will also make us more competitive and more efficient. These technologies should also help us get to net zero … but the United States has already stepped away from the Paris Climate accords and the CHIPS Act, not to mention the JCPOA. And the race is on to acquire, restart, install nuclear energy, which will be the key to providing a low carbon constant baseload energy particularly for heavy industries, that are the foundation of the reindustrial campaign sweeping across Europe.

Let's look first at Rare earth deposits and then at nuclear energy in the Black Sea.

All the Black Sea riparian countries have deposits of rare earth minerals (IEA, 2024), 32 and Russia is in the top eight countries, with its rare earth reserves estimated in 2024 to stand at 3.8 million metric tons (InvestingNews, 2025).

Türkiye has joined the Minerals Security Partnership, which was launched in 2024 to reduce dependency of supply on China, by a group of 14 countries which are mineral producing countries, such as Kazakhstan, Namibia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. Türkiye recently discovered the second largest deposit of rare earth after China in 2022 (AA, 2022).

The EU recently launched a two-year-long rare earth elements project in Türkiye worth 12 million ($13.4m) to strengthen the Turkish national rare earth minerals ecosystem, including enhancing Munzur University's Rare Earth Elements Application and Research Centre, and establishing a recycling facility at the General Directorate Mineral Research Exploration (MiddleEastye, 2024). Here is a link to a detailed account of the four types of deposits and 35 mineralization in Türkiye (Öztürk et al., 2019).

Which minerals are the focus in the Minerals Security Partnership Forum (MSPF)? And which minerals will be the focus of the MSPF? It is on lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, rare earth elements, as well as copper, germanium gallium (EC, 2024).

Here is a quote from the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen (EC, 2023):

> "This Act will bring us closer to our climate ambitions. It will significantly improve the refining, processing and recycling of critical raw materials here in Europe. Raw materials are vital for manufacturing key technologies for our twin transition – like wind power generation, hydrogen storage or batteries. And we're strengthening our cooperation with reliable trading partners globally to reduce the EU's current dependencies on just one or a few countries. It's in our mutual interest to ramp up production in a sustainable manner and at the same time ensure the highest level of diversification of supply chains for our European businesses."

It is clear that these deposits in Black Sea countries offer the opportunities for Rare Earth Diplomacy between Türkiye and Ukraine (CIRSD, 2025). There is a very good map provided by the Conflict and Environment Observatory, where the authors claim that:

> "Russia's calculated focus on resource-rich provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia, together with Crimea and the Black Sea, underscores the war's economic and strategic dimensions. These marine areas and border territories, abundant in hydrocarbons and critical minerals such as graphite, lithium and uranium, are not only pivotal to Ukraine's sovereignty but also to Europe's energy independence and the competition between the United States and China for technological dominance."

As detailed in this article, and known to experts of this country, Ukraine is blessed with large deposits of hydrocarbons, critical minerals, particularly in the occupied Dniepr Donetsk region, which alone account for 80% of oil, gas and coal reserves of the country. Following Russia's invasion of Crimea and the Donbas region, it now controls over $12,5 trillion of minerals and gas, including 55% of its coal reserves, 20% of its gas reserves, and a large part of its reserves of lithium, tantalum, cesium and strontium

Romania (Ion & Cosac, 2023; EnergyIndustryReview, 2023) has closed several mines that may be reopened, such as the Lonea and Lupeni coal mines, whose clean up will be necessary. However, Romania also has rare earth, and tailing ponds and waste heaps where they can recuperate precious metals, which is a circular way of repurposing mineral/metals waste.

Bulgaria (Dekov et al., 2020) has the second largest Manganese deposit in the world, known as the Varna deposit, after the Kalahari Manganese field in South Africa. It also has Rare Earth elements in the Pirin coal deposits (Eskenazy, 1987).

2.2. Nuclear Diplomacy: Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, Romania (IEA, 2025; IEA, n.d.)

We all know the imperative of decarbonising in our economies, as underlined in this timely report published in June 2022 by the International Energy Agency (IEA), entitled "Nuclear Power and secure energy transitions," (IEA, 2022) just after the war broke out in Ukraine (February 2022), brings into focus the double challenges of decoupling from Russia energy and the the real risks of climate change, as listed in the World Economic Forum's annual Risk Report (Weforum, 2024) above.

The IEA report clearly states that "achieving Net zero globally will be harder without nuclear."

As we take a look across the Black Sea, let's see how nuclear diplomacy could work. As the war continues to rage on in Ukraine and discussions are ongoing between Presidents Trump and Putin, the strategic nuclear plant of Zaporizhzhia, one of the biggest in Europe, and one of five nuclear plants in Ukraine. It used to supply 20% of Ukraine's electricity, had 11,000 employees before Russia took control of this massive installation with its six reactors (WSJ, 2025).

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Secretary General, Rafael Grossi, has made great efforts to preserve the plant, and prevent another nuclear disaster like Chernobyl in 1986 or in Fukushima, Japan in 2011.

It is well known that most of the nuclear plants are either Russian or Chinese designed and made: Russia's subsidiary Rosatom TVEL supplies nuclear fuel to 73 Russian designed reactors VVER, notably to Bulgaria with most of the enriched uranium being sourced from Kazakhstan.

Many countries are racing to build nuclear power plants, like Turkiye's Akkuyu nuclear power plant, in close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy agency (IAEA). Nuclear power plants are considered to be carbon neutral…but they take at least 15 years to build.

But in case of "nuclear fade," the International Energy Agency (IEA) (IEA, 2019) states that the clean energy transition will become more difficult and more costly, requiring $1.6 trillion of additional investment in advanced economies over the next two decades.

2.3. Blue-Green Diplomacy: Blue Economy

In 2024, the ninth edition of the two-day Our Ocean Conference (OurOcean, 2024) welcomed 120 countries and 20 international and regional organizations, which addressed four focus areas: Sustainable Tourism in coastal areas and islands; Green Shipping; Plastic and Microplastic Pollution; and the Green transition in the Mediterranean Sea.

Can Greece and Türkiye agree to commit to four focus areas in a Green-Blue Diplomacy effort and put to good use the $11.3 billion in pledges to more than 460 commitments for marine-related environmental protection?

The Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) (EC, 2023a) was launched in 2019 under the auspices of the European Union and will set the foundational work for protecting unique habitats and the health of the Black Sea, while supporting the development of sea based sectors, boosting the local blue economy.

There are some good examples of blue diplomacy through various initiatives, such as Mission Restore our Waters, the Danube-Black Sea Lighthouse, which are both examples of science diplomacy and regional cooperation. Just looking at the amount of funding available in 2024 through Horizon unallocated monies to the tune of 7,3 billion, here are a few examples of tender calls open and where riparian countries can join hands and cooperate: responsible fish consumption, support for waterfront cities, reconcile offshore renewables with ocean protection.

Finally, a specific case study one of my colleagues is leading called DALIA: Danube region Lighthouse action, which is blue diplomacy in action (DALIA, 2023), with 22 partners and 39,000 km of waterways, which now has 10 pilot initiatives and implementation forseen in Romania, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in the Black Sea, driven by the Bulgaria-Romanian chambers of commerce, with a budget of 8 million. Happy World Water Day on March 22!

Green environmental diplomacy through the Black Sea Economic Council (BSEC, 2023): Bulgaria is currently chairing this action (July 2024- June 2026): "The key priorities concerning the BSEC activities in the field of environmental protection are defined by Goal 5 "Environment and Climate Action" of the "BSEC Economic Agenda: Towards a sustainable future of the wider Black Sea area," adopted in 2023.

The main activities, concerning mainly the promotion of cooperation in the field of environmental protection, are carried out by the BSEC Working Group on Environmental Protection which meets regularly every second year or whenever necessary. The BSEC Ministers in charge of Environment met three times (2006, 2011 and 2012) and adopted important Declarations which serve as guidance for the activities in this domain.

2.4. Green Defense Diplomacy: Reduce Carbon Footprint

Ten years ago, in February 2014, the NATO Defence Policy and Planning Committee agreed to the NATO Framework for Green Defense. Back in 1991, in its Strategic Concept, NATO had

already addressed the link between security and the environment, but has not taken specific initiatives aimed at environmental or climate challenge since (JSTOR, 2015).

So what is the concept of Green Defense? "Green Defense is defined in the framework as 'a multifaceted endeavour cutting across a wide range of activities, including operational effectiveness, environmental protection and energy efficiency."

According to Deloitte's Department of Defense study in 2004, a number of different fuel reducing means were suggested: "new conservation techniques, renewable resources (particularly solar and wind), renewable carbon-based resources (algae and biomass), nuclear fission, hot/cold fusion, fuel cells, and more advanced electrical systems."

The war in Ukraine has put a highlight on the damage to, or the poor state of, the Black Sea, which is the end point of five major rivers, including the Danube, the Dnipro, and the Dniester. There are fertilizer runoffs and other toxic materials that are dumped into the sea, damaging the marine ecosystem. It must be noted that because the Bosporus Strait limits circulation with the Mediterranean Sea, 90% of the waters in the Black Sea are oxygen poor which directly impacts biodiversity in these waters (CARNEGIE, 2025).

One recent incident in the Black Sea put the focus on Russia using the shadow fleets to get around the oil price cap set at $60/barrel, when two tankers were hit hard by strong winds in the Kerch Strait in December 2024 and the Volgoneft-212 sank, releasing some 4,300 metric tons of mazut oil.

There was also the breach of the Kakhova dam on the Dnipro River in June 2023, which resulted in chemical pollutions and damages estimated at $14 billion.

The breadbasket of Europe is being polluted by fuel spills, shells, land mines and human remains.

Loose navy mines have been found floating near the shores of Bulgaria and Romania and Türkiye. And multilateral action is required to deal with these environmental challenges once the war is over. The three countries' defense ministers established a naval task force and a committee composed of their naval chiefs to oversee the operation and the European Union is taking the lead in these multilateral stakeholder actions, which should also include Russia and Georgia, to continue the work started under the auspices of the Bucharest Convention, signed by the six coastal countries in 1992 (UNEP, 1992).

2.5. Green technology/industry diplomacy

Two very important figures on how much it will cost to achieve net zero emissions and investments in clean energy and efficiency.

According to McKinsey & Company (McKinsey & Company, 2022), achieving net-zero emissions globally by 2050 will require around $9.2 trillion in annual investment. A significant portion of this cost will go toward decarbonizing high-emission industries such as energy, heavy manufacturing (e.g., steel and cement), and transportation. As for the International Energy Agency (IEA) (IEA, 2021), they estimate that they will need to reach $4 trillion annually to attain clean energy energy efficiency goals, focusing on electrification and carbon capture.

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recently spoke at the European Industry Summit in Antwerpen on February 26, 2025 (Youtube, 2025), where she laid out the main tenets of the Clean industrial Deal (EC, 2025), which will mobilize over 100 billion,

create over 500,000 jobs, growing Europe's manufacturing sector by 100 billion by 2030, consists of six main chapters, underlining the importance of closing the innovation gap:

1) Affordable Energy, notably completing the internal energy market with physical interconnections

2) Boosting demand for clean products, introducing sustainability, resilience in "Made in Europe."

3) Financing the clean transition

4) Circularity and access to materials, notably creating a EU Critical Raw Materials Center

5) Acting on a global scale to create a clean Trade and Investment Partnerships

6) Skills and quality jobs.

One of the aspects she spoke about concerned Carbon removal.

In my conversation with David Zorn, Vice-President of Strategic Partnerships at Climeworks on my podcast, we spoke about the growth of this industry to 1 Trillion by 2030 (Wasylina, 2024).

It's not easy to close this section on a positive note, with two wars raging in our immediate neighborhood, and as we prepare to Rearm Europe and prepare for an imminent war.

As the current U.S. President seems to be pulling the country away from its preponderant role in NATO for the last 80 years as a major security provider, protector of peace and prosperity in Europe, the United States, an Atlantic and Pacific power, may meet new challenges in its pivot to Asia.

When watching a recent interview with Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov on March 12, 2025 (Youtube, 2025c), he said that Vladimir Putin was thinking of creating a Eurasian block, to counter the NATO/EU/Western European block, which he sees going outside, beyond its geographic borders into Asia.

3. Azerbaijan

Without any doubt, along this general frame, a Green Diplomacy agenda is needed also for the Caspian Sea region – particularly when looking beyond the Russia-Ukrainian war, and to push the economies of the countries in the region to the next level, while also avoiding a new Cold War.

The EU has set its Green diplomacy as a political priority and so it should be for Azerbaijan.

Let's take a look at how Azerbaijan is actively engaging with the European Union and European countries bilaterally in its Green Diplomacy approach. The European Union welcomed the signing of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty in Washington, D.C. under the auspices of President Donald Trump.

In terms of Trade, the European Union was Azerbaijan's principal trading partner, weighing in at 41,2% in 2024, and is its largest export destination, boasting 63,3% of its exports and 13,2% of its imports.

The EU is the most important foreign investor and is supporting Azerbaijan in its economic diversification efforts, assisting in the green and digital transition, notably investing in the Port of Baku, the digitalisation of transport corridors, the competitiveness of 25,000 startups, in rural and economic development, and in sustainable infrastructure for smarter, greener cities.

Multilaterally, hosting the COP29 was a great success, as I can personally attest, having moderated a panel in the Blue zone in the Bulgaria Pavilion, invited by the Bulgarian delegation, to moderate a panel on the "Decarbonisation of Industries, ESG and the future of Cleantech."

The COP29 brought together 198 countries and 76,000 participants, including 80 heads of state, presidents, vice-presidents, and prime ministers and tripled the previous climate finance goal, raising it to USD 300 billion per year for developing countries by 2035 (CAREC, 2025).

The Green Energy Corridor Alliance was signed there on November 13 between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, to develop the transmission of green electricity. And we will come back to this a bit later.

3.1. Bilateral Green Diplomacy in the Baltics, Italy, Hungary

But Azerbaijan did not make its début at the COP, it has been actively practicing, pursuing bilateral green diplomacy with many countries, and for our purposes today, in Europe, with the Baltic countries, Hungary and Italy, just to name a few.

In October 15-20 this year, Latvia, Estonia and Finland sent education and green tech companies to visit Azerbaijan (CentralBaltic, 2025), the goal being to establish trade missions, consultations and training, and above all, strengthening cooperation with the European Union, in the framework of the LEF Network Azerbaijan, by establishing mutual trust and friendship, and also with the Caspian Energy Club (AZERTAC, 2025).

As concerns Hungary and Italy, and for our purpose today, the focus is primarily energy related, but it is useful to note that Hungary was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, and that the two countries share historical, cultural and linguistic ties.

As a landlocked country, Hungary has become Azerbaijan's gateway to Central Europe, by establishing a Green Energy Corridor, which will export renewable energy from the Caspian Sea through the South Caucasus and the Black Sea to Europe, thus strengthening energy diplomacy in the European Union (AZEMEDIA, 2025) .

Budapest is investing heavily in Baku, first in hydrocarbons, and secondly, in the pharmaceutical sector, with trade standing at 1 billion in 2024, up from 63,9 million ten years ago (NewEasternEurope, 2025):

1) MVM Group acquired 5% in the Shah Deniz gas field, and 4% in its export pipelines

2) MOL Group has a 9,57% share in the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil field and 8,9% in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline

3) MOL and MVM will then transport and refine Azeri crude oil.

And Baku and Budapest are moving beyond fossil fuels to renewables, which aligns nicely with the European Union's wider Green Deal agenda, working on hydrogen, wind and solar energies as well as connecting electricity grids.

As far as Italy is concerned, Italy recognized Azerbaijan's independence in 1992 and opened an embassy there in 1997 (APA, 2025).

Italy has been one of Azerbaijan's important trading partners with exports reaching $11,4 billion in 2023, with the main export being crude petroleum at $6,55 billion and imports from Italy topping $455 million in 2023, with the top product being gas turbines at $40,1 million (OEC, n.d.).

On November 27, Foreign minister Jeyhun Bayramov met with his Italian counterpart, Antonio Tajani (APA, 2025a), strengthening the political dialogue, opening an Italy-Azerbaijan university campus, and reviewing expanding cooperation in energy, innovation and trade, as well as transport and culture, as well as exploring reconstruction opportunities in the previously occupied territories.

As far as energy is concerned, Azerbaijan gas arrives in Brindisi via the Trans Adriatic pipeline (TAP), in which SNAM is a shareholder. Other Italian companies are active in Azerbaijan, such as Ansaldo Energia, Danieli, Leonardo, and finally Italiana Petroli which SOCAR will acquire (Modernaz, 2025).

3.2. Green Energy Corridor

Let's now come back to the Green Energy Corridor, which is going to gain in importance, particularly if the war in Ukraine does not end …or even if it does, it will be vital to keep Europe peaceful and prosperous, particularly as everyone, like France, has ambitions for AI. But where are we going to get the energy necessary to power all those data centers?

Many fossil fuel producing countries in OPEC have already started to diversify their economies, even before the EU Green Deal came into the picture, because, at the time, it was not so much about the green transition, but about diversifying their economies and at some point, eventually running out of oil or gas, as it becomes more expensive to extract.

Azerbaijan has made that shift, from being a hydrocarbon exporter to a source and conduit for renewable energies, deploying an active Green Energy diplomacy across its neighborhood and beyond, exporting oil to 25 countries and natural gas to 12 countries.

Which fits perfectly into the European Union's energy diversification agenda since the war began in Ukraine in 2022, and a law that was passed in May 2021, entitled "On the use of Renewable Energy sources in the production of electricity." (BakuDialogues, 2025)

In order to make the transition to a more sustainable, green energy security producer, Azerbaijan concluded some strategic partnerships from pioneers in this domain, such as Masdar in the UAE and ACWA Power in Saudi Arabia.

The country is also looking to expand its grid infrastructure and is exploring new technologies in hydrogen and carbon capture, with the ambition of becoming the key architect of cross-regional green connectivity via the Black-Caspian Sea Green Energy Corridor, whose submarine cables will carry 1,300-1,500 megawatts, for a total investment of 3,5 billion.

The GECO or Green Energy Corridor Power Company, was incorporated in Bucharest in September 2024, as a joint venture between Azerbaijan, Romania, Hungary, Georgia and perhaps Bulgaria, and the European Commission has expressed strong interest in integrating it into the Global Gateway, which would open up EU funding and investment.

Finally, in a recent interview in Brussels by EU Today, Hikmat Hajiyev (EUToday, 2025) said 74 that Azerbaijan could not only provide clean green energy to the EU, but has the potential to produce renewable energy to the tune of 135 GWh onshore and 157 GWh offshore, and could position itself as a data hub or a "new Digital Silk Road."

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