

Geopolitics and Geoeconomics of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Conflict: Analysis of Turkey's Policy

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Abstract

This study reviews the relationship between geopolitics and geo-economics of the Eastern Mediterranean gas resources and Turkey's perspective on it. The dispute over the region's resources has entered a dangerous phase in 2019, and the coastal countries are trying to discover new gas resources in areas that overlap with other countries' marine basins. This has caused a new conflict in the region at two levels. The first level is the dispute between Turkey and Greece over the Cyprus issue, which has also been drawn to this issue. The second one is the fierce geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and other coastal actors such as Egypt and Israel. For showing its decisiveness, Turkey signed a maritime border agreement with Libya in 2019 to neutralize its rivals on the gas issue. In this context, it may be asked, what does motivate the Turkish authorities in their strict policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean? According to the findings, Turkey is trying to take legal-political and military steps to faze the unity of rivals, and this has enabled the Turkish authorities to project and adapt their power in order to enhance their role and presence in the region.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, Geopolitics, Geo-Economics, Rivalry, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Today, deep-sea natural gas deposits have turned another fertile crescent into a treasure trove (Носков,2016). Following the major discovery of gas resources in 2009, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has gradually entered a period of geopolitical and geo-economic tension over its natural resources (Tapia,2019:3). These disputes show that the region is in a set of dangerous competitions among regional actors, and hence the new and dangerous developments will take place in the future. This is because, in the near future, the Eastern Mediterranean will become one of the world's main natural gas sources. As most coastal countries try to explore more resources, they each have a stake in maximizing instability in the region. Israel seeks to export a large portion of its share to the European countries. Likewise, in addition to domestic consumption, Lebanon is trying to play a role in exports to Europe. Similarly, Egypt is eager to become a regional energy center and the Republic of Cyprus is also calling for more excavations and the involvement of international companies in its maritime economic zone that conflicts with the interests of the Turkish side of Cyprus and Turkey itself.

Accordingly, the economic competition has become a geopolitical rivalry. In addition to the Israeli-Arab conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean region, there has previously been a conflict between the Turkish and Greek sides of Cyprus. The support of almost all actors to the Greek side in front of the Turkish side provoked the Turkish army to enter the northern part of Cyprus in 1974 and form a country (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) for the Turks of the island. Since then, the Cyprus conflict has been in the center of the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical competition. Energy as a factor has intensified the competitions which can take on a larger dimension. The line-up of the beneficiary states shows that economic interests have brought them all against each other in a way that could be examined on two fronts at the macro level. On one side, there is Turkey and the Turkish part of Cyprus, and on the opposite front the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Egypt, the European Union, Palestine, the United States, and recently the United Arab Emirate. Other countries including Lebanon and Syria have not been able or are not willing to be in one of these blocks due to their geopolitical weakness.

This research aims to evaluate the dimensions of the conflict and cooperation in the geopolitics of fossil resources in the region in the framework of the concept of power policy. The hypothesis of this research is that the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, which has become an international crisis in the regional dimension over time, will take on a wider dimension in the near and medium-term and will open the door for several actors to the region and therefore will become a new crisis in a larger dimension. Based on this, it could be argued that due to the wide imbalance of power in the second decade of the 21st century and the lack of a new world system, the East Mediterranean crisis will continue and if it would not be controlled, it will turn into a dangerous phase. As the sensitivity of the region is high, undoubtedly if a war occurs in the region, the world economic system would face a serious crisis. It is important to consider that all actors in the region, including Turkey, Greece, Israel, Egypt, France and Italy are equipped with destructive weapons which enable these powers to destroy easily each other's infrastructures. Therefore, consideration of the issue is essential for studying power variables in the region.

2.Method

In this research, the literature scanning technique was used as the method. Hence, in such studies, it is important to make the research a literature review in terms of contributing to the literature on the study field. The most commonly used data collection methods in scientific studies are interview, focus group interview and observation. In addition to these methods, various types of documents such as official records, reports, missives, correspondence and portraits could form the basis of data analysis in qualitative research. According to the nature of the research question, the researcher should determine one or more of these methods and explain the scope of use of them. Since the validity of the data obtained in scientific research and the accuracy of the results achieved are a sensitive issue, many researchers try to confirm the data they have obtained by using more than one data collection method and to prove their validity in a multidimensional way (Yıldırım and Şimşek,2006:88). The literature review about the study field is mostly used by researchers in inquiry studies, reports, estimations, acquiring a statistical result and directing big companies. The literature review method also has different branches in its sub-branches which include scanning historical data over documents, archive analysis and

electronic data scanning over the web (Padem and et al,2012:65). This research was carried out by scanning materials related to the subject such as books, journals and the web as well as institutional papers.

3.Research Background

3-1. Geopolitics of the Region

In the last ten years, the Eastern Mediterranean has come to the fore as it has taken new geostrategic and geoeconomic dimensions. Classically, the region connects Europe, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. For this reason, in recent years, regional and non-regional actors have tried to surpass each other by using economic and political tools and especially through military-based power projection. However, the trend is changing with other developments, such as increased EU interest, China's entry into the region, and the increase in the activities of rising Arabian actors such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Borchert,2017: 30).

Communications between the Middle East and Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean have shaped a special geopolitical space. Based on this argument, today the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics could be defined by four interconnected dynamics. The first one is energy, which has been intensified by recent discoveries. The second dynamic is geopolitical competition and the formation of a new balance of power in the region. The third case is the emergence of new developments (Wars in Syria and Iraq after 2011) in the region that have caused humanitarian crises. Finally, the growing interest of other actors, such as the United States, Russia, the EU, and major European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy have complicated the issue (Tziarras,2019:5-7; Zomorodi Anbaji and Haji-Yousefi,2021).

From a civilizational point of view, the Mediterranean is a place of friction between four contradictory and different worlds. The first sphere is the Hellenic-Western civilization, which has the support of the main Western powers. The second sphere is the Arab world which has been fragmented by internal divisions. This fragility is to the extent that most Arabian actors are trying to ally with Western powers. The third civilizational area is the Ottoman-Turkish sphere, which has fundamental differences with other areas, especially the Western and Israeli areas. The fourth center of power is the Hebrew axis, which overlaps with the Hellenic-Western sphere and is

fundamentally different from the spheres of Arab and Turkish civilization. Recently, however, there has been a wave of normalization of relations between the Arab and Hebrew spheres.

Turkey has the most powerful naval force in the Eastern Mediterranean (Shama,2017), while Israel has nuclear weapons. Greece and Turkey have a long-term dispute about their sea borders. Israel has had antagonistic relations with Arab countries, although they have solved the problem later, exception of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon. The diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel is on a limited level. However, the most sophisticated issue arose with the Arab Spring in 2011 which caused Iran (Rouhi Dehboneh,2018:135-136; Ahmadipour and et al.,2019) and Russia to show interest in the region (Balaghi and et al.,2016:2019; Irkhim and Moskalenko,2020). Therefore, Russia and recently Iran as Syrian supporters have strategic goals on the regional interactions.

3-2. Geo-economics of Eastern Mediterranean

The review of the Middle Eastern countries' economic situation shows they are at a turning point in the path of economic development. The completion of oil and gas exploration and the beginning of its industrial development in the first half of the 1960s were the basis for a new phase of economic development in some countries in the region. The main feature of the region's economic development is the centrality of oil and gas reserves. Almost all states in the region are producers or exporters of these raw materials or are associated with them in some way (Robutsova,2014). Today, the use of natural gas and the discovery of new deposits have become as important as seen at the peak of oil consumption during and after World War I.

The Eastern Mediterranean basin also follows the pattern of the Middle East, however, the main difference is that countries with gas reserves use gas for their strategic goals. Consequently, the Eastern Mediterranean natural reserves in the coming decades will lead to the formation of new arrangements both in the region and in the world. For instance, the efforts of countries with these reserves to form an international organization show they seek greater coherence for the use of natural gas in foreign policy and economic purposes.

As recent events have shown, the discovery of new gas deposits in the Mediterranean has not only brought prosperity to the region but has also

contributed to the escalating tensions. The main point is that the main contractors who wanted to explore and expand oil and gas reserves throughout the Eastern Mediterranean are Cyprus and Turkey. On that account, while the Republic of Cyprus started offshore oil and natural gas drilling in 2011, Ankara was absolutely opposed by arguing that the gas field belongs to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Thereby, the Turkish authorities not only sent the reconnaissance ships to the disputed areas but also prevented the Italian company ENI ships from entering the drilling area several times (Захаркин,2019).

The importance of the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to its geopolitical potential, is due to its vast reserves of oil and natural gas. In this regard, gas discoveries in recent years have clearly demonstrated the potential of the region which led to important geoeconomic activities, including gas export to Europe. Although geoeconomics links geopolitics and economic policy, it is more about pursuing geopolitical goals and economic policy in foreign relations, especially in a specific region. Consequently, geopolitical interests take precedence over economic geopolitical interests (Prontera and Ruszel,2017:145). Dispute over resources is one of the main types of conflicts in the past, today, and in the future and as a result, geoeconomic competition, like geopolitical competition over economic resources, causes conflict, and at the end, geoeconomic disputes lead to geopolitical competitions over economic resources (Kurecic,2015:523). It could even be claimed that geopolitical and geoeconomic factors have a reciprocal effect on each other and make similar results. The important issue is that the main actors are still the states.

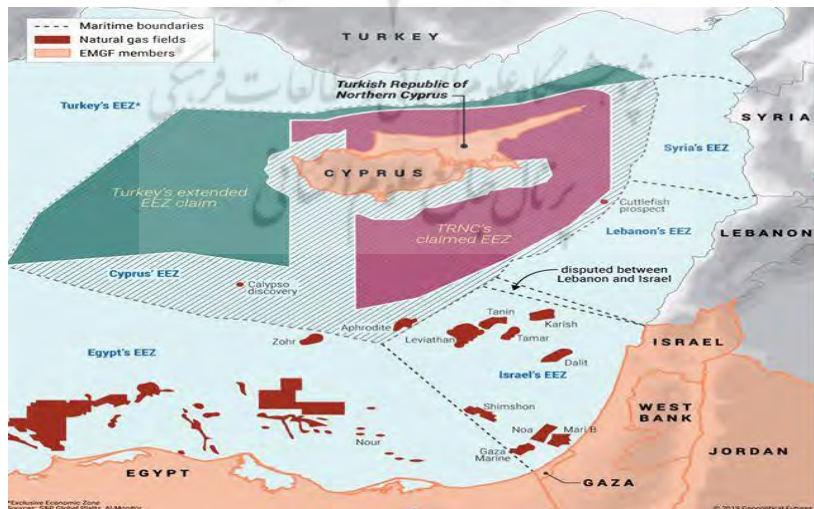
The analysis of the energy issue through the geopolitical rivalries suggests that energy is more in the shadow of international politics than international economics. In this respect, states would try to use energy trade to achieve their foreign and security policy goals, however, the geopolitics of natural gas is more complicated than oil trade. Unlike oil, natural gas has different dimensions in points of exploration, trade and policymaking. As it is mostly transported via pipelines or in liquid form by ships, its final price is also expensive. The cost of pipelines is a big part of the cost of delivering gas, which is an important feature of the gas trade. Besides, gas trade depends on political relations between countries, and fluctuations in intergovernmental relations affect it (Prontera and Ruszel,2017:145). Piping

and its routes also add to its sensitivity since, given its dangers, there is a need for a broad international compromise to build gas transmission networks, which is even more complex on sea routes.

Competition over resources throughout history has shown that they could be an excuse to escalate the conflict and wars (Kurecic,2015:523) as well as an excuse to resolve disputes. Decades of exploration of fossil fuels in the Eastern Mediterranean have been unsuccessful until significant excavations were discovered in the late 2000s. Israel discovered the Tamar field in 2009 and the Leviathan field in 2010. As competition intensified, the Republic of Cyprus discovered the Aphrodite field in 2011 (Sökmen and Lecha,2018: 171). In 2015, an Italian company discovered gas in an Egyptian sea field, and thereafter Egypt became an important actor in the regional rivalries over gas resources (Kesseba and Lagos,2019).

Although these explorations initially led to hopes for long-term cooperation between the Eastern Mediterranean actors through mutual economic interests, their geopolitical rivalries prevented these hopes from being realized (Sökmen and Lecha,2018:171). In September 2020, for retaliating Turkish power policy in the region, Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Jordan formed the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). However, the dimensions of the forum have yet to be clear until July 2021.

Figure (1): Map Regional Stakeholders



(Source: Chrysopoulos,2019)

3-3. Israel

Over the past sixty years, Israel has tried to explore energy resources in the territories it controls; however, until recently, these efforts have been unsuccessful. Israel's stored resources could not meet its needs, and thence, imports were the largest share of the energy sector. Additionally, until 2000 (the discovery of the Mari-B and Noah deposits), gas consumption in Israel was almost zero. This figure increased in 2003-2013, and thus natural gas accounted for 11% of Israel's total energy consumption. In 2013, half of Israel's energy (49%) complex relied on imported oil and about one third (35%) relied on coal (Рубцова,2013). Israel imports oil mainly from CIS countries (Commonwealth of Independent States) via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey) pipeline, as well as tankers from Black Sea ports. For gas imports, Israel also relies on Russia and other CIS countries, as well as Egypt (up to 40% of Israeli imports). The periodic interruptions in gas supply from Egypt were led to delays in payments by the Israeli side. Moreover, the unwillingness of the Egyptian authorities to maintain deliveries at the old prices (Israel bought Egyptian oil below market prices), and also, the Morsi government's policy towards its neighbors gave birth to some troubles for Israel's energy sector. The current situation has forced Israel to negotiate gas imports via the Russian Blue Stream pipeline, which runs from the bottom of the Black Sea to Turkey and Ankara. Thus, Israel is more dependent on Turkey in diversifying its other energy sources.

3-4. The Republic of Cyprus

The traditional dispute between Turkey, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus today is parallelized with another set of geopolitical tensions and energy disputes in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and a group of countries. France, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have become top supporters of Greece. Therefore, not only has the number of countries involved in the crisis grown, but the scope of these interventions has expanded due to the multiplicity of actors' goals and interests, and consequently, new issues such as recent energy discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean have changed the nature of the crisis (Dalay,2021). As the Greek writer, Tsakiris (2016:32) mentions, the recent geopolitical reshuffle in the region could increase Cyprus' ability to use energy cards, especially gas. However, in the authors' opinion, the increasing weight of Cyprus in the

geopolitical and geoeconomic sphere presents an obstacle to Turkey's increasing role and the recent Turkish proactive foreign policy is a response to this threat.

3-5. Lebanon

In a set of discoveries conducted in 2012, Lebanon's reserve gas in the No 1 region was determined as 700 billion m³. In 2018, French, Italian, and Russian companies were allowed oil exploration and extraction permits in some blocks located in Lebanon's waters. However, in this regard, an Israeli official declined Lebanon's rights for oil exploitation by claiming that the region belongs to Israel (Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü,2019). It is clear that Lebanon's turbulent domestic policy and its geopolitical weakness vis-à-vis Israel limit Lebanon's role in the negotiations, however, in any case, Lebanon tries to protect the rights guaranteed by international law. Given the Lebanese government's close ties to Saudi Arabia, it is not unlikely that the Lebanese government will cooperate with Greece and its allies, and indirectly with Israel.

3-6. Egypt

Egypt, which discovered the Zohr field with a reserve of 850 billion cubic meters in 2015, became one of the main exporters and a major player in the gas field in 2018. Among the projects that bring the natural resources of the Eastern Mediterranean to international markets, the Egyptian LNG facility stands out in terms of cost and ability to run in the short term. The use of the LNG option is more supported by Egypt as it serves Egypt's long-term goal of becoming a regional energy hub. The Greek Cypriot government and Egypt signed an agreement in 2018 to transport gas from the Aphrodite gas field in southern Cyprus via a submarine pipeline to the LNG facility in the Egyptian port of Idku. In addition, negotiations are underway to provide a direct flow of gas from Israel's Tamar and Leviathan fields to Egypt's LNG facilities (Kökyay,2021:220-221). Egypt has had various diplomatic troubles with Turkey in the last decade, and as a result of these differences, Egypt's positions have been aligned with those of Greece and Israel.

3-7. Turkey

By looking at the Turkish point of view, it could be argued Turkish policymakers have various intentions as by having the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, they consider this region much necessary for

their internal security and power projection throughout the region. Faced with a group of allied opponents such as Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and Israel, Turkey is under a marginalization process (Shama,2019). In 2011 Turkish ex-Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized Cyprus for its activities in the region by saying that “The Greek Cyprus Republic is sabotaging under the name of drilling. Despite this, there is no voice from the organizations whose duty is to protect the peace” (Haberler,2011). Before this, the Cyprus Republic divided the region unilaterally into 13 parcels as its claimed Exclusive Economic Zone (MEB) and signed agreements with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007, and Israel in 2010 (Esnek,2019). Thereafter, by internationalizing the issue, Cyprus has dissatisfied Turkey and the disputes intensified until today.

The most important factor in the dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean gas region is the failure of attempts regarding solving the Cyprus issue. Since 1974 and especially from the 2000s various endeavours have been done, nevertheless numerous factors have caused the negative energy to accumulate in the region. The EU has accepted the Cyprus Republic as a member state to the union in 2004 without solving the Cyprus issue. Subsequently, the discovery of underground resources has attracted more international attention to the region. Given that the block in front of Turkey is more capable, both in terms of numbers and power; they have tried to get Turkey out of the game by allying with each other. However, the diplomatic and security measures taken by the Turkish authorities show that they will not compromise easily.

Looking at Turkey’s strategic culture, it could be seen that the Turkish authorities are not overlooking their demands. They pursue their goals in any way that may lead them to achieve the result (Sadri Alibabalu,2020). In 2011 Turkish FM announced that “Nobody has the right to make any advantage on the island’s natural resources or on the sea regions before the Cyprus problem is resolved and a government representing the entire island is formed” (Hürriyet,2011 a). However, Turkey is increasingly looking to form local mechanisms in the region and has no plan to give up its rights to geopolitical games (Sadri Alibabalu and Sarkhanov, 2020). In 2004, Turkey registered its rights on regional waters at the United Nations and identified five areas (Olgun,2019:9). In 2011 Turkey signed a continental border agreement with the Turkish Republic of Cyprus on the Eastern

Mediterranean issue (Gürel and et al.,2013:24). Turkey's determination and its opposite front to pursuing its geopolitical and geo-economics goals have led to dangerous friction in the region.

In 2011, Turkish drilling ships started their exploratory operation (Hürriyet, 2011 b) the step which complicated the regional conjuncture. Given its dependence on energy resources, the EU has shown its support to the Republic of Cyprus which has both a geopolitical and geo-economic aspect. Geopolitically, the existence of gas resources makes the EU more cooperative with most stakeholders. In terms of geo-economics, the EU is also seeking to replace Russian gas with other sources, which seems welcomed by Cyprus. Turkey's strategy is to fight on two levels. At the first level, Turkey tries to enforce its rights based on international law. According to the second level, Turkey uses force and creates a controlled crisis if necessary. In the first case, Turkey has tried to work with international organizations to carry out its activities. As mentioned earlier, Turkey ratified its agreement with the Turkish part of Cypriot on the delimitation of the seas at the United Nations. In the second case, for example, Turkey wants to play its role by sending warships to the area under its control.

In 2018, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu warned the Cyprus Republic on the drilling issue in the disputed areas by announcing that "Turkey has never allowed and will never allow any foreign country, company or ship to conduct unauthorized research activities regarding natural resources within its maritime jurisdiction areas. Turkey will continue to take necessary measures and will maintain all initiatives and activities, including drilling exercises, with a view to protecting its rights and interests in its continental shelf. Indeed, some drilling activities are planned on Turkey's continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as in the areas licensed to Turkish Petroleum by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In this framework, we state that no hydrocarbon exploration activity can be conducted on the Turkish continental shelf, based on invalid licenses that the GCA may endeavour to issue" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs,2018).

In February 2019, Turkey prevented an Italian ship to enter the region (Maltezou,2018), again in December 2019, Turkish vessels expelled Israeli ships from the disputed areas (Energy Reporters,2019). In June 2019,

Turkish President Erdoğan warned that Turkey sends its military units to the disputed region if it was necessary: “if someone threatens us, we take our place with all our frigates, with our planes when necessary, and we continue our work” (CNN Türk,2019). Some days later, Turkey sent the second drilling vessel to the region (TRT Haber,2019). Therefore, as Turkey used hard power policy in other crises such as Syria (after 2016), the Qatar crisis (2017), Libya and the Karabakh War (2020), it is clear that Turkish authorities are pursuing the same policy to achieve their goals in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis.

In 2019, as it is shown below, Turkey signed a treaty to delimit of sea border with the Libyan government in Tripoli. Following the agreement, Turkey increased its military level with the Libyan central government by sending advanced engineering forces and military equipment, after which the central government defeated Russia and France’s backed General Khalifa Haftar’s rebel forces.

Figure (2): The Sea Border Agreement between Libya and Turkish



(Source: Geopolitical Futures,2019)

In retaliation, Egypt and Greece signed a “Maritime Delimitation Treaty” to counter any Turkish-Libyan axis in the region (Elhennawy,2020). Although Egypt, Israel, Greece and other countries have opposed the Turkish-Libyan

treaty, Egypt's treaty with Greece shows they are aware of the legitimacy of the agreement signed between Turkey and Libya, however, they tend to deal with Turkey and Libya in future talks. By signing these treaties, all stakeholders seek to negotiate in regional politics. Turkish authorities reject the treaty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs,2020); however, it comes clear that all sides are restraint in their steps towards the dispute. The diplomatic and legal war may spread and lead to other treaties like Israel-Cyprus, Turkey-Syria (future) and Turkey-Lebanon and cause complexity of the region. In 2021, it was announced that an agreement on the demarcation of the Turkish-Palestinian sea border would be signed, however, due to the legal status of the Palestinian government and the opposition of other neighbours, it has not yet been realized.

Figure (3): Egypt-Greece Maritime Delimitation Treaty



(Source: Greek City Times,2020)

Figure (4): Proposed Turkey-Palestine Maritime Delimitation



(Source: UWI,2021)

3-8. The Theory of “Mavi Vatan” (Blue Homeland)

Since 2006, the “Blue Homeland” doctrine has been conceptualized by a Turkish Admiral, Cem Gürdeniz. Its scope as a concept includes all declared or undeclared maritime jurisdictions of Turkey. The doctrine includes about totally 462,000 square kilometres of waters (internal waters, territorial waters, the continental shelf, the exclusive economic zone), as well as the rivers and lakes of Turkey. As Gürdeniz (2020) mentions, the Blue Homeland:

“... is an extension at sea and seabed of our homeland located between 26-45 East longitudes and 36-42 North latitudes. The Blue Homeland is the name of our zone of interest and jurisdiction over salty and fresh waters located between 25-45 East longitudes and 33-43 North latitudes.”

Although this doctrine is a new theory, it seems to be seriously embedded in Turkish foreign policy. In line with these conceptualizations, the Turkish Navy has conducted its exercises in the field of “maritime homeland”. Turkish seriousness is such that in March 2019, the Turkish Navy held the “Blue Homeland” maneuver. The Turkish government’s goal is to break its neighbors’ monopoly on the Black and Mediterranean seas. The concept of a maritime homeland, although is not a serious issue in the Black Sea, has been opposed by Greece due to the density of Greek islands in the Mediterranean.

Figure (5): “Mavi Vatan” (Blue Homeland) of Turkey

(Source: TRT World,2020)

4.Discussion

The energy factor significantly changes the distribution of power in the Eastern Mediterranean and affects the foreign policy orientations of states and the role of the region in world politics. Given its potential instability, the availability of energy resources could significantly worsen the situation and involve states in a regional war for resources. Another scenario may mean that shared economic resources and interests might be the key to forming a new platform for understanding in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. When the discovered gas fields will enter the production phase, the economies of the countries in the region would develop, the diversity of natural gas suppliers would increase, and consumers' energy security may increase. It is thought that the improvement of the unsustainable economies of the countries with natural gas reserves will have positive effects on the entire economy of the region. The tough policies of the involved countries alongside the policies of actors outside the region such as the US, France and Russia, and the continuation of these conflicts may enter the region into a dangerous phase.

The excavations of the Eastern Mediterranean states in the 2000s led to the discovery of huge gas reserves in the region. Given the needs of all the surrounding countries, these reserves have made a breathtaking competition; however, the point is that most countries cooperate with

Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, while Turkey, Syria and Lebanon are out of the game. The EU, the United States, Russia, Turkey, Israel, Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and Egypt are the main actors in the competition and have so far been able to prevent the dispute from escalating.

The tripartite alliance of Israel, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus is supported by most Western actors as well as Egypt. Although they disagree on various issues, due to interest in the region's gas reserves, they support Greece and the Greek part of Cyprus. The one-sided policy of the Western actors has caused severe dissatisfaction in Turkey. Also, due to the war in Syria, the Syrian government has not been able to conduct any exploration in the last decade, which has deprived Syria from gas resources in its territorial sea. In addition, Lebanon has so far been unable to find an important source of gas. Thus, the triangle cooperation of Israel-Greece-Republic of Cyprus shaped a gas game and geopolitics that is supported by a strong block. Furthermore, the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics has created a kind of geoeconomics in which the countries have chosen a zero-sum game that has dangerous dimensions, and if this trend continues, dangerous events in the future would be inevitable.

According to another scenario, if the United States continue its current policy of unilateral support for the Republic of Cyprus, Russia and China will intensify their activities in the near future under various pretexts. Given the strong presence of both countries, especially Russia in the Syrian crisis, it is not unlikely that Russia will create a new crisis to maintain its presence. Encouraging one side to escalate the conflict could provide the necessary excuse for the Russian officials to seize the opportunity. Therefore, it seems that without taking Turkey's interests into account, the Eastern Mediterranean will not experience peace. In this sense, the United States could play a balancing role and refrain from escalating the conflict. Importantly, most Eastern Mediterranean countries have powerful armies with modern weapons, and any conflict could give birth to catastrophe which in addition to its dangers for coastal states, its environmental dimensions will spread throughout the Mediterranean and Europe.

As the Syrian crisis unfolds, the issue of the Eastern Mediterranean has entered a new phase. The discoveries by the Greek Cyprus and Israel have stimulated Turkey to keep the issue on its agenda. Moreover, as a rising economy, Turkey is looking for its own energy resources. In the middle of

all this mess, Turkey feels isolated by other actors in the region, and this sense of loneliness pushed Turkey to pursue its interests and by sending ships to the disputed waters, tries to demonstrate its decisiveness about gaining the region's economic benefits.

5. Conclusion

Undoubtedly there is a need for the responsibility sense of regional countries, exporters and gas consumers to manage the rising conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields. Denying the rights of one country in the long term not only would not eliminate the conflict but also exacerbates and deepens it. One-sided and biased policies on the issue of Eastern Mediterranean gas over the past decade have clearly shown that such disputes could not be resolved without Collaborative Efforts and Good Office of the stakeholders as well as third party interventions as the dispute is rooted in geopolitical, geoeconomic and legal issues. Apparently, the parties could not yet have a consensus on understanding each other's interests. The prejudice support of Europe, especially France, for Greece and its encouragement to complicate the issue does not serve Greece's long-term interests; on the contrary, it turns Greece into a dangerous front. The geopolitical dimension of this conflict is greater than the economic and legal dimension and therefore requires the political consensus of all parties.

One of the peaceful ways of the issue is to form a consortium consisting of all the coastal states. Although the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum was established in Egypt in September 2020 without the participation of Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, this platform is more of a provocative mechanism upon forming a united front at odds with Turkey and Syria than an organization for regional collaboration. The role of Egypt and Greece in taking a stand against regional cooperation is more visible than other states. Regional diplomacy requires reciprocating respect for common interests, which will only be possible with the full association of all parties and under the supervision of neutral actors. Otherwise, possible conflicts will lead to the emergence of a dangerous zone in the near future, as is seen in the Middle East.

The consequences of any conflict would lead to a wide-ranging confrontation that is not in favour of either side. Turkey, dissatisfied with Greece and Europe on other issues, is trying to counter rival policies by proactive diplomacy. Turkey's power projection, along with other regional

crises such as the recent wars in Libya and Karabakh, shows that Turkish authorities are by no means willing to back down. In this regard, in 2021, there are signs of re-establish of relations between Turkey and Egypt, which seems to be able to expand to diplomatic relations with Syria. Turkey's new grand strategy is based on re-establishing diplomatic relations with conflicting countries, military power projection by sending ships to disputed waters, sending sensitive weapons to allies (Azerbaijan, Libya and Ukraine) and building aircraft carriers. As the Blue Homeland strategy is not limited to the Eastern Mediterranean and as it was not accepted by other states, the Turkish officials are following an extensive plan to implement this strategy. Therefore, it is not unlikely that in the near future similar conflicts will occur with other powers in the region, such as Italy, France and even Russia.



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