

# The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security

Edited by:  
Zenonas Tziarras

RE-IMAGINING THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SERIES: PCC REPORT 3/2019

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# **THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIPS AND REGIONAL SECURITY**

*Zenonas Tziarras*

**Report 3/2019**

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2019

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978-82-7288-966-0 (print)  
978-82-7288-967-7 (online)

**Production and Cover design:** Crystal Graphics

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## FOREWORD

**T**he Report Series aims to explore the Eastern Mediterranean as a distinct geopolitical space in the context of global and regional transitions. It conceptualizes the Eastern Mediterranean's new geopolitical identity both historically and theoretically and looks at its security and politico-economic prospects. At the same time, it tracks the main challenges that regional states face, and attempts to re-imagine the patterns of conflict and cooperation by examining the potential of regionalism and inter-state cooperation in various sectors. In doing so, the series makes recommendations about the way forward in addressing important obstacles to further regional cooperation and with regard to the strategy that could be followed towards designing a viable and sustainable regionalism project in the Eastern Mediterranean. The series begins with the conceptualization of the Eastern Mediterranean as a region and the specific sector of the environment as an entry point to discussing a more expanded regional cooperation. It then moves to other policy sectors and matters pertaining to the Eastern Mediterranean state policies and interests as well as to the role of greater powers.

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## CHAPTER 1:

# THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN - AN INTRODUCTION

*Zenonas Tziarras*

The broader area of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean (MEEM) has undergone significant geopolitical changes throughout the last decade. The developments taking place within the two spaces (the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean) have become increasingly interconnected and their impact has extended far beyond their borders, especially to Europe. It could be argued that MEEM was ushered in a new era with the Arab Uprisings that spread throughout the Arab World and in many places are still ongoing. Moreover, the American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) have contributed to regional insecurity and instability. In parallel, new hydrocarbons findings off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, Greece's rediscovery of its southeastern neighbourhood, developments in the Cyprus Problem, and Turkey's new foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have created unprecedented (in)security linkages and connections among the 'Middle Eastern' and 'European' states of the Eastern Mediterranean, giving rise to a geopolitical space with distinct significance (Tziarras 2018; Tziampiris 2019).

As such, the Eastern Mediterranean security environment today is defined by at least four interconnected dynamics: 1) energy discoveries, 2) geopolitical antagonisms and new (im)balances of power, 3) new (human) security imperatives, and 4) increased interest in the area from external powers. These are briefly elaborated below.

### *Energy Discoveries*

It has been repeatedly argued that the recent and continuing discoveries of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean have been among the main drivers of the changing geopolitical and security dynamics in the region. These gas reserves have resulted in new interests, costs and

benefits for the region, encouraging states of the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond to reconfigure their strategic calculations and international outlook (Proedrou 2012; Adamides and Christou 2015; Tziarras 2016, 2018; Gürel, Mullen, and Tzimitras 2013). It is certainly true that these new energy findings have afforded both geopolitical as well as geo-economic significance/advantages to the area, as natural gas is gradually becoming the 'oil' of the Eastern Mediterranean. This is important for the energy security of the regional states and other areas as well, primarily Europe. At the same time it creates energy-related insecurities that extend to and affect inter-state relations both positively and negatively.

### ***Geopolitical Antagonisms and new (Im)balances of Power***

Energy has therefore become another point of contention among both traditional and more contemporary geopolitical rivals in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly between Turkey and states such as Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt. Thus, energy (in)security considerations in conjunction with Turkey's deteriorating relations with other states of the area have exacerbated already existing geopolitical antagonisms. For example, the strong Turkish-Israeli relationship that ran from 1996 until the late 2000s worsened radically after 2010, and despite efforts towards normalisation it remains cold today. The Turkey-Egypt relationship shares a similar fate: their political ties were severed after the 2013 coup in Egypt that overthrew President Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, close partners of Turkey, from power. And of course, there are also the traditionally problematic relations between Turkey and Cyprus, Turkey and Greece.

As a result, the patterns of inter-state enmity and amity in the Eastern Mediterranean shifted significantly during the 2010s, as did the regional balances of power. Against this backdrop, and taking into account the 'connecting glue' of energy discoveries, it was only natural for Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt to come closer together. The trilateral partnerships that they formed (Cyprus-Greece-Israel and Cyprus-Egypt-Greece) have become central to the newly emerging security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean, which can be seen—at least in part—as a balancing act in the face of Turkey's regional power projection. The extent to which this strategy is coherent or effective in relation to the individual and collective interests of participating states is yet to be determined; after all, apart from being excluded thus far from the energy planning of the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey has not been deterred from pursuing its own goals and claims either in terms of sovereignty or natural resources – including with the use of military means.

### ***Increased Interest in the Area from External Powers***

The importance that the Eastern Mediterranean has acquired over the past decade has also attracted the growing interest of external powers, including the United States (US) and Russia—but also others. The European Union (EU) is highly interested in Eastern Mediterranean developments particularly regarding the energy domain (EC 2014), while individual European states such as Britain, Germany, France and Italy have also been trying to get more involved in the region's affairs. China, too, has recently developed a keen interest in the Eastern Mediterranean

within the framework of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Lin 2015). With regard to the US and Russia, they are the main external geopolitical rivals in the area; this is most obvious in Syria but applies to many other places and issue areas as well. Their spheres of influence have been clashing, which is evident, for example, in tensions that arose between the two powers over Turkey, Cyprus and Greece. The antagonism among those rivals and the resulting geopolitical bargaining will have a significant impact on national foreign policies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the networks of commercial, energy and security cooperation.

### ***New (Human) Security Imperatives***

Beyond the above-mentioned traditional security concerns over the geopolitics and power balances of the region, more contemporary (human) security imperatives have also come to the fore. The Arab Uprisings and the devastation caused by the rise of IS have led to massive economic, social, security and humanitarian problems in many Arab countries, especially Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria. In many warzones the availability and/or supply of food and water have been scarce—if existent at all—forcing millions of people, particularly from Iraq and Syria, to flee their countries and become refugees. Furthermore, thousands of properties have been destroyed, thousands of people have died or been affected by famine and/or deadly diseases (e.g., cholera in Yemen), while innocent people have suffered chemical attacks in Syria, and others have experienced forced displacement, terrorist attacks, their use as human shields by terrorist groups, and many more indignities.

These problems have naturally also affected neighbouring areas. On the one hand, the refugee crisis became, and still is, a major concern for Europe and the EU more specifically (EC 2016). Southern European countries such as Greece and Italy have been among the most affected, while in 2018 Cyprus also became recipient of growing refugee numbers (Smith 2018). On the other hand, instability in the Middle East has been associated with a global wave of Islamist terrorist attacks that manifested especially in Europe and North America, among other places. The jihadist groups operating in the Middle East, including IS and the notion of an Islamic Caliphate, are the main drivers behind this reality that first and foremost disturbs stability and security in the region which is then exported in various ways abroad (Tziarras 2017). From this perspective, since the mid-2010s, these human security problems – which are nonetheless linked to national security as well – have become central to international discussions and efforts for collaboration. This is also the case with the trilateral partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean, where all participating states, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Israel, care very much about such security concerns, not least because of their proximity to the Middle Eastern cradle of instability.

### **Purpose of the Report**

Against this background, the purpose of this collective volume is to examine in depth the new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean with particular focus on the various aspects of the emergent trilateral partnerships of Greece-Cyprus-Israel and Greece-Cyprus-Egypt. We are

particularly interested in the individual and collective drivers and motivations that brought these countries together, as well as the strengths, weaknesses and prospects of the partnerships. Moreover, the volume aims to shed light on how regional and global powers shape the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean, and how they view the trilateral partnerships. At the same time, the prospects and pre-conditions of their success will also be examined in light of their common interests, areas of cooperation and third party inclusion or reaction.

### **The Logic and Structure of the Report**

The book is comprised of eight chapters in total, including five chapters on Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Turkey, respectively. All chapters are written by expert academics coming from the case-study countries to the end of providing a better and more rounded understanding of the trilateral partnerships, regional geopolitics and their impact on Eastern Mediterranean affairs. Among other things, the authors examine the international and regional geopolitical dynamics that affect the partnerships in question, and consider specific aspects such as the economy, hard/human security, energy security, trade and domestic politics while providing insight on the perspectives of the different East Mediterranean states. The book is not based on a specific theory or analytical approach; each author has chosen their own way of approaching and addressing the subject matter. There is thus theoretical and methodological diversity.

Setting the geopolitical framework, especially in terms of energy security, Andreas Stergiou in Chapter 2 looks at the inter-state network of (energy) cooperation that has developed in the Eastern Mediterranean. He argues that, although the gradual institutionalisation (namely, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum) of this cooperation reflects, among other things, the regional states' shared perceptions regarding the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean to their national security and their political resolve to further expand their collaboration, their activity is driven from politically motivated rather than fact-based estimations as they overlook certain geo-economic realities. Furthermore, Stergiou asserts that the expected economic and geopolitical profit from these energy collaborations might be rather limited in the short to medium term, as the gas of the Eastern Mediterranean remains for the most part so far undeveloped and further exploration remains largely frozen because there is no available export route for the large volumes of gas that could be produced.

In the Chapter 3, Amikam Nachmani, positions the Israeli view on the new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean into a broader historical and geopolitical context, touching upon the various inter-state and inter-people relations of the region. Moreover, Nachmani focuses on the common denominators, similarities and shared interests that underpin the partnerships, and argues that Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean since the 2000s has had an instrumental role in bringing the neighbouring states together. Lastly, he argues that the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean along with other kinds of economic cooperation could solidify a healthy Cypriot-Greek-Israeli relationship noting, however, that the three countries need to move on to more concrete and tangible steps to reap the benefits of their partnership.

In Chapter 4, Zenonas Tziarras focuses on the factors that drive the foreign policy of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) in the Eastern Mediterranean generally, and with regard to the trilateral partnerships more specifically. Tziarras analyses the factors that led to the RoC's more energetic foreign policy during the 2010s and its goals in the Eastern Mediterranean. He does so by employing a neoclassical realist theoretical framework in order to account for both the systemic and domestic foreign policy drivers. Among other things, Tziarras argues that the systemic environment of Cyprus has had a primary role in enabling the RoC to abandon a mostly inactive/reactive (sub-optimal) foreign policy in favour of a more proactive one by capitalizing on a number of geopolitical and geo-economic developments. And yet, the argument goes, the RoC's new external pro-activity might end up consuming the government's energy at the expense of other national imperatives, most notably the negotiations for the Cyprus Problem.

The Report proceeds with Charalambos Tsardanidis' chapter (Chapter 5) that critically looks at contemporary Greek foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, arguing that the drivers behind the more active Greek approach in recent years, despite the country's economic difficulties, are not only found in the external environment, but in how policy-makers perceive the external environment. The chapter adopts a Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) approach that looks at the cognitive processes in which new information is incorporated into existing belief systems. Thus, Tsardanidis explains how the relationship between geopolitical and geo-economic needs can change old belief systems at the foreign policy executive level, thereby enabling the rise of a resilience discourse in terms of Greece's role in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Chapter 6, by Nael Shama, focuses on Egypt and its view regarding the partnership with Greece and Cyprus. Shama explores motivations underlying the cultivation of Egypt's closer ties with Cyprus and Greece; the nature, the potential and the limitations of the partnership; as well as to what extent this partnership can alter the balance of power and the security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East. Among other conclusions, Shama notes that the partnership in question has a huge economic potential, especially in the fields of energy and tourism. He goes on to argue, however, that its security/ military component has a limited deterrent effect on the actions of other regional parties, particularly Turkey. According to Shama, the partnerships' litmus test would be to be capable of rolling back Turkish attempts at jeopardizing or encroaching upon Cyprus's economic interests.

In the seventh chapter, Emre İşeri and Ahmet Çağrı Bartan examine what they see as the tensions that arise between Turkey and other Eastern Mediterranean states because of the emergence of the trilateral partnerships and in light of hydrocarbon discoveries in the area. They moreover focus on Turkey's energy security strategies and Turkish anxieties produced by the trilateral partnerships. Among other things, Emre İşeri and Ahmet Çağrı Bartan argue that if Cyprus, Israel, Greece, and Egypt would like to effectively cooperate, especially in the domain of energy, they should somehow engage Turkey and get it involved in their planning; otherwise, according to the authors, any joint projects for natural gas exploitation will likely exacerbate the political tensions.

The volume ends with Chapter 8, namely the editor's conclusions on the future prospects of the 'diplomacy of trilateral partnerships,' the partnerships themselves, and the geopolitics of the broader Eastern Mediterranean. Emphasis is placed on whether the international partnerships of the Eastern Mediterranean can be sustainable and facilitate regional integration thus furthering cooperation and contributing to the alleviation of inter-state tensions.

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## CHAPTER 2:

# **GEOPOLITICS AND ENERGY SECURITY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: THE FORMATION OF NEW 'ENERGY ALLIANCES'**

*Andreas Stergiou*

### **Introduction**

The discovery of gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean has been met with enthusiastic response owing to their potential impact on the economic, geopolitical and political balances in the region. It is widely accepted that the new reserves could have a major, positive effect on Europe's gas-diversification strategy, enabling European Union (EU) countries to realize a long-pursued goal, namely, to significantly reduce their dependence on Russian gas imports. In mid-January 2019, the Energy Ministers of Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority met in Cairo to discuss the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, which will serve as the umbrella for cooperation and dialogue regarding the development of gas resources in the region. While the subject of energy is the basis for the forum, there are also broader geostrategic processes that led to its establishment, and they reflect the regional states' shared perceptions regarding the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean to their national security (Winter and Lindenstrauss 2019).

With this move the regional actors did demonstrate political resolve to transform the issue of gas resources into additional partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, this political will runs counter serious geopolitical and economic calamities. It is argued that these (positive) perceptions emanate from politically motivated rather than fact-based estimations, and that they overlook certain geo-economic realities.

### **The role of natural gas in EU energy policy**

Natural gas is an intrinsic part of the European Commission's 'Clean Energy for all Europeans' strategy. Specifically, natural gas is considered a bridge fuel that can aid in the transition to renewable energy; unlike other types of plants, gas plants can be easily fired up and down and emit 50 percent less carbon dioxide than coal when burned (European Commission 2016). Europe's overall annual gas consumption is still satisfied primarily by Russia (over one-third of its natural gas supply), secondly by Norway and other countries including Algeria, although gas production in Norway is gradually declining as its fields mature (Coote 2016). In the lowest of demand projections, import needs could be slightly lower (by some 10 bcm) in 2020, but would then be about 20 bcm higher than 2015 levels by 2025. As such, EU gas imports will continue to play a significant role in the future EU gas market in the context of the EU diversification-policy of gas supplies. It is estimated that Russia will remain the biggest source of supply through 2025 and Russia's share of EU gas consumption will rise to 40 percent (Pisca 2016, 7, 25-27).

Furthermore, the EU imports more than half of the energy it consumes, while several member states are heavily reliant on a single supplier for key energy sources. This is mainly true for gas, but to a lesser extent it is also true for oil and coal. As a result, the EU remains vulnerable to supply disruptions, whether caused by geopolitical conflicts, political or commercial disputes, infrastructure failure or other reasons. This heavy dependence on so few suppliers has been recognized since the 1990s, and the European Commission has made various attempts to reduce its reliance on imports and make the concept of energy supply diversification a cornerstone of EU energy policy (Grätz 2011, 61-86).

The prospect of a new gas export hub opening up in the Eastern Mediterranean is particularly attractive for Europe, which, as explained above, is worried about declining production in the North Sea and its growing dependence on Russia. The new resources could provide an additional energy supply for the energy-suffocated European markets and increase the diversification opportunities for countries dependent on a single supplier (EU Commission, 2017). Currently, the Eastern Mediterranean is a significant route for the EU's natural gas and oil imports, as approximately 35% of its natural gas and 50% of its oil consumption are trafficked through the region (Szoke 2016).

In fact, in March 2010 the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), using a geology-based assessment methodology, estimated that the entire Levantine basin—a geological formation encompassing the offshore sections of Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus— could hold as much as 120 trillion cubic feet or 3.4 billion cubic metres (bcm) of recoverable gas and 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil (USGS 2010). The USGS also estimated that the Mediterranean area, including its existing and assumed oil and gas reserves (the Aegean Sea, for example), could contain more than 340 trillion cubic feet of gas – more than the U.S. proven reserve, which is the fourth largest in the world after Russia, Iran and Qatar (USGS 2010; BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2018, 27-28).

**The current state of play in the East Med offshore exploration and development of gas**

Gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean gained momentum in 2009, when a consortium headed by U.S.-based Noble Energy discovered huge gas resources in the Tamar field off Israel's coast, transforming Israel's economy and international stature overnight.<sup>1</sup> It was the biggest natural gas field ever found in the area at the time, containing roughly 9 to 11 trillion cubic feet (280 bcm) (there are different estimations) of proven and probable reserves. In 2010, the American company discovered an even bigger reservoir (Leviathan) that contains roughly 16 trillion cubic feet or 620 bcm (Hafner 2016, 50-51). In January 2014, the *Oil & Gas Journal* estimated Israel's proven oil reserves at 11.5 million barrels, and in July 2017 an independent reviewer, Netherland, Sewell & Associates, Inc., estimated the volume of natural gas in the Tamar field at 11.2 trillion cubic feet, with an additional 14.6 million barrels of condensate (an ultra-light mixture of hydrocarbon liquids), a 13 percent increase from the previous estimate (Graeber 2017).

Encouraged by the Tamar and Leviathan discoveries, the Republic of Cyprus sped up its exploration efforts along the southeastern boundaries of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which runs close to the location of these Israeli fields. The Cypriot gas bonanza dates back to 2007, when the country announced the first offshore licensing round in its Exclusive Economic Zone, enabling the same foreign energy company operating in Israel waters, Texas-based Noble Energy, to look for gas in Cypriot waters. Four years later, Noble Energy announced a breakthrough: the discovery of the Aphrodite gas field in Cyprus's southern Exclusive Economic Zone, containing an estimated relatively small natural gas find of 4.5 trillion cubic feet (140 bcm) (Oikonomopoulos and Stambolis 2012; Tagliapetra 2013).

This gave Cypriot authorities the necessary confidence to grant licenses to other energy companies, which rushed into the region hoping to profit from the looming gas bonanza. As a result, all of Cyprus's 13 offshore blocks in its EEZ have been allocated to heavyweight oil and gas companies from the Netherlands, France, Italy, the United States and Israel, all of which have made major investments based on the promise of existing resources beneath the water.

In December 2016 Cyprus successfully completed an international bidding process and awarded the rights to explore Blocks 6, 8, and 10 to four international firms: Eni and Total; Eni; and ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum International, respectively. After a series of repeated disappointments, in February 2018, Eni finally announced the discovery of a gas-bearing structure in the Calypso 1 well it had drilled in Block 6. The promising reserve lies just to the north of the maritime border with Egypt, within the Egyptian EEZ, where in 2015 the same company had discovered a giant gas field. Calypso is expected to hold somewhere between 6 to 8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas— in other words, much more than the Aphrodite's 4.5 tcf found in 2011 (Republic of Cyprus 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, Arab countries' oil resources affected Israel's international standing since its birth. In 1947, the American oil industry lobbied against the partition of Palestine out of fear of alienating Saudi Arabia and in 1973, after the Yom Kippur War followed by the OPEC embargo, many Western countries demanded the full and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all the territories conquered in 1967 in order to appease the Arabs.

The Cyprus Republic also granted license to Exxon Mobil and state-owned Qatar Petroleum to drill in Block 10 (Delfini area) in close proximity to the Egyptian field Zohr and Cypriot field Calypso, indicating similar reservoirs and raising hopes for making Vassilikos through a potential LNG terminal the spot centre for processing and exporting its natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> At the end of February 2019, Exxon Mobil announced the first exploration results that need to be confirmed by a second drilling most likely within 2020. According to a preliminary interpretation of the well data, the discovery could represent a natural gas resource of approximately 5 to 8 trillion cubic feet (142 to 227 billion cubic meters) (ExxonMobil 2019). Despite its giant significance for the East Med gas collection, the new discovery does not seem to be as big as to justify the construction of an LNG plant in Cyprus. Thus, exportation to Egypt still remains the most realistic scenario for the monetisation of the Cypriot gas.

### **Challenges and obstacles to the exploitation of the East Med natural gas reserves**

Taking into account that neither Cyprus nor Israel has a large enough domestic gas market to accelerate the development of gas fields, and that they both rely on export markets, the monetisation of their gas has become a very thorny issue: the existing energy resources need to attract several billion dollars of new investment in order to be commercialized (a process in the energy sector called monetisation). Israel and Cyprus have no pipelines to large consumers, nor the facilities to liquefy gas in order to export it by ship (Thrassou et al. 2016, 115-141).

As these gas fields are located in close proximity to each other, cooperation on their monetisation is almost mandatory and, in fact, several monetisation options have already been considered for delivering gas from the Israeli and Cypriot gas fields to developed European markets. The most well-known projects that have been proposed involve the construction, individually or combined, of pipelines— from Israel and Cyprus to Greece and then to Europe; from Israel to Turkey and then to Europe; from Israel to Egypt or to Jordan. These pipelines would supply gas to those countries or, using current or future facilities, liquefied natural gas (LNG), to export gas to more distant markets both east and westward. Each option carries its own economic and geopolitical advantages and constraints.

Natural gas markets based on pipeline transportation are not the same as markets based on oil and LNG. Natural gas is an inherently protean material that throughout its circulation will undergo a series of dramatic alterations. Depending on the location and the time, it can become denser or less dense, expand or contract. It can also wildly fluctuate in temperature and change state from gas to liquid, and liquid to gas. Therefore, pipeline transportation is preferred over shorter, albeit increasingly longer, distances, which makes most natural gas markets regional in nature. LNG affords trading over much longer distances. For pipelines,

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Dr. Charles Ellinas at the 3rd symposium on hydrocarbons development organized by the Institute for Energy in Southeast Europe. Athens 30-31/10/2018.

operating costs are relatively low as compared to capital costs. The more expensive the infrastructure, the larger the initial contracts must be to cover costs; as a result, solid and long-term business-to-business, business-to-government and government-to-government contracts and agreements are necessary (Forman 2017, 225-230; IGEM 1993, 1995; Thomas 2006).

A report released by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Cyprus Technological Institute judged a plant in Cyprus (Vasilikos), where there are already some energy facilities, the best option for Cyprus. Although it would be more expensive than a pipeline, it would offer greater flexibility in adjusting production to changing natural gas prices and market supplies. Nevertheless, that proposition faces some very serious challenges. First, the combined cost for the liquefaction plant and the offshore pipeline varies between 8 and 10 billion US dollars, of which the Republic Cyprus should finance at least 51 percent. Second, the proven gas reserves south of Cyprus are probably insufficient to justify construction of a single onshore liquefaction terminal, and the project would require large amounts of Israeli gas before it can be considered economically viable. Such an option, however, seems not to have been taken into account by the Israelis for several reasons (Indeo 2016), which will be explained below.

Despite the above concerns, in October 2018, Cyprus's natural gas public company (DEFA) published tender documents for the design, construction, and operation of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) import terminal that will be located at Vasilikos. The LNG Terminal is expected to be completed in 2020 and 40% of its cost will be funded by the EU.<sup>3</sup> This option has some advantages and energy experts believe that it can provide infrastructure and important export outlet for the markets for the entire area and the overall East Med field development and natural gas production.

Regarding Israeli plans for their gas reserves, for some time both the Israeli government and energy companies operating in the East Med waters were considering construction of an undersea pipeline to Turkey and from there to European markets. This seemed to be the most economical route for several reasons. This project was given some impetus in the wake of a short-lived Israeli-Turkish rapprochement after a reconciliation agreement was struck in 2016 to resume the countries' ruptured relations since the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010.<sup>4</sup> This scenario, once also backed by the U.S., provided for undersea oil and gas pipelines connecting Israel with Turkey. From there Israeli gas would feed into Turkey's national grid, reaching the giant domestic Turkish market, and join the Trans-Anatolia Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP). Despite serious considerations about whether Erdoğan's Islamist regime should be a linchpin in Israel's natural gas export strategy (Solomon 2016), this option looked very appealing.

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<sup>3</sup> Republic of Cyprus, Treasury, Public Procurement Directorate: <https://www.eprocurement.gov.cy/epps/cft/prepareViewCFTWS.do?resourceId=3370883>

<sup>4</sup> In 2010, Israeli soldiers killed nine activists aboard the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara who were trying to break the Israeli blockade to Gaza and deliver aid to the Palestinians. Turkey broke ties with Israel, while demanding reparations for the victims' families and a formal apology. Political relations between the two countries remained cold for years. Although Israel conceded to Turkish demands for the most part, relations never fully normalised, as Erdogan has repeatedly blasted Israeli policy in Gaza and Middle East.

Ankara's continued support for Hamas, however, led to a breakdown in those negotiations. The relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018, and the killing of 62 demonstrators by Israeli soldiers in Gaza, heavily condemned by Turkey, multiplied tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations. In a sector with a long return period on investments, long-term stability is a high priority, and at the moment there is no political dialogue on high levels, nor any bilateral meetings even at international fora. This tension has also spread to the public arena. The opposition parties in Turkey have often described Erdogan's rhetoric against Israel as "theatre," alleging that the President's sons benefit directly from strong economic ties between the two countries (since he is involved in shipping businesses that trade with Israel), and that Erdogan harshly criticised AKP's decision in 2018 to vote down a bill in Parliament that proposed to cancel all previous agreements with the Jewish state and severing economic ties (Lerner 2018).

On the other side, Erdogan is, as some experienced insiders estimate,<sup>5</sup> perhaps the most hated politician in Israel today. Also, in Turkey there is a deep-seated hatred for Israel, as well as suspicion; the only cooperation between the two countries is related to homeland security, while there are some commercial ties because 20,000 Jews live and are active in business in Turkey. There is little chance that Israel would export gas to Turkey: the Israeli government will not allow it and the public will not support it, even if it is the most economic option.

The second problem with this option is the political ramifications for Cypriot-Israeli bilateral relations. Any undersea gas pipeline from Israel's Leviathan natural gas field to Turkey would have to cross Cyprus's EEZ at a point where the 'TRNC' has de-facto control. According to international law, the Republic Cyprus cannot forbid Israel to lay a pipeline in its own Exclusive Economic Zone, as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) states that the EEZ is subject to a specific legal regime. An EEZ is not an inherited marine area like the territorial sea, but effectively an ambivalent area in which other States benefit from certain freedoms applicable to the high sea. Article 58 defining the rights and duties of other States in the Exclusive Economic Zone states (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, article 58):

...all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy, subject to the relevant provisions of this Convention, the freedoms referred to in article 87 of navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea related to these freedoms, such as those associated with the operation of ships, aircraft and submarine cables and pipelines, and compatible with the other provisions of this Convention...

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Aaron Liel.

However, Article 56 – defining the rights, jurisdiction and duties of the coastal State in the Exclusive Economic Zone – gives the coastal State (among others) jurisdiction over the protection and preservation of the marine environment (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, article 56). This clause gives coastal States the right to prohibit construction of pipelines on the ground of ecological concerns. It is evident that the Republic Cyprus will utilise all available legal means to prevent such an option. Besides the legal arguments, politically such a move by the Israeli government would mean the end of the Israel-Cyprus relationship.

There is also, theoretically, the option of laying a pipeline from Israel to Turkey by constructing a route through Lebanese waters and bypassing Cyprus. Considering relations between Israel and Lebanon (the two states are officially at war), however, this possibility also appears extremely unrealistic. Against this background, Israel began to change its hitherto theoretical interest in a pipeline that would run through Greece and Cyprus circumventing Turkey to a strategic goal, proving the fact that political and security consideration outweigh economic imperatives. An international gas pipeline project involves enormous risk, as it presupposes an expensive and long-term commitment for both buyer and seller, who have to spend billions on building the pipeline infrastructure. Furthermore, they have to maintain working relations for at least 20 years. Cyprus and Greece, however, are politically more reliable than Turkey, and without the guarantee of long-term contracts, the energy companies collaborating with the Israeli government would find it difficult to invest the 2 billion US dollars (this is of course much less than other monetisation options) required to construct a pipeline to deliver the gas to Turkey from Israel's Leviathan field.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as member states of the European Union, Cyprus and Greece are particularly fond of this option, which could increase their influence and bargaining leverage in EU decision-making bodies, while Israel has a long tradition of bilateral or multilateral relations with the EU and its member states.<sup>7</sup>

In that respect, the fact that the new Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbon resources could be an alternative energy provider for the ever-increasing EU energy needs has rendered very attractive the option of constructing a pipeline that, if ever realised, would be the world's longest undersea pipeline. The approximately 1900 km-long pipeline (700 km on-shore, 1200 off-shore) to Greece, with a capacity to deliver up to 20 bcm/y (initially 10 bcm/y), comprises compressor stations located in Cyprus and Crete and three main sections: 1) a pipeline from the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields to Cyprus; 2) a pipeline connecting Cyprus to Crete; 3) a pipeline from Crete crossing mainland Greece up to the Ionian coast (Thesprotia region). From there the East Med is to link up with the offshore Poseidon pipeline<sup>8</sup> that is designed to deliver additional diversified sources from other places.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Dr. Aaron Liel and Colonel Eran Lerman.

<sup>8</sup> Since the end of July 2014, the Project has been developed by Greece's state-run DEPA's subsidiary company IGI Poseidon S.A in which the Italian Company Edison holds a 50% share.



Theoretically, the pipeline scheme could be extended to connect with the Trans-Adriatic pipeline—designed to deliver Azeri gas to Western markets within Greek Territory—and ultimately reach European markets through Albania and Italy. As many have argued, the entire project could sufficiently elevate the EU's status as a reliable buyer to encourage the development of resources that would otherwise remain stranded. If the EU were to sign a long-term gas sales agreement, it could instil confidence in the project and facilitate securing the initial capital investment needed for the pipeline to become operational (Baconi 2017, 9-10). However, given the fact that the Poseidon pipeline has been designed to bring Russian gas to Europe, some see this option as contrary to the EU energy diversification policy.

### ***The East Med Pipeline***

In December 2017, Cyprus, Israel, Italy and Greece signed a memorandum of understanding "to explore the possibility of the construction of a natural gas pipeline linking Leviathan to European markets." In the same year, the European Commission (EC) labelled the project technically feasible and economically viable. The Commission stated that it "strongly supports" the project and that it is an "important option among other existing and possible future evacuation routes for the export of gas from the region to the EU" (European Parliament, 2017). Therefore, the East Med pipeline has been designated as a project of common interest (PCI) between the EU and the region, meaning that the project can receive a host of benefits, including "accelerated planning and permit granting" and "lower administrative costs."<sup>9</sup>

In December 2018, at a meeting in Be'er Sheva (Israel), the leaders of Greece, Cyprus and Israel officially stated that they were ready to sign an intergovernmental agreement on the East Med pipeline project. The materialisation of the agreement will be contingent on a EU-funded (100 US dollar million) a feasibility study (the EU does not finance construction of pipelines). The presence of the U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman at the meeting expressing unambiguous support for the pipeline, labelling it as a project "*of great importance for the stability and prosperity of the Middle East and Europe*" and urging all countries in the region to ensure its success (Stamouli 2018), confirmed what analysts have suspected in the previous years: the United States have been attaching great importance to the region and are a driving force behind the project.

However, while opinions differ, some question the practicality of the proposed sub-sea pipeline connecting Israel's Leviathan and Aphrodite gas fields to Europe via Greece, as there appear to be both technical difficulties as well as unfavourable financial and topographic realities. An East Med pipeline is a very expensive export option, as its construction would necessitate what is considered a very high selling price of 8 US dollars/ British Thermal Unit (BTU) now and for the foreseeable future. The need for several compression stations significantly

<sup>9</sup> "Projects of common interest", *European Commission*, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest>.



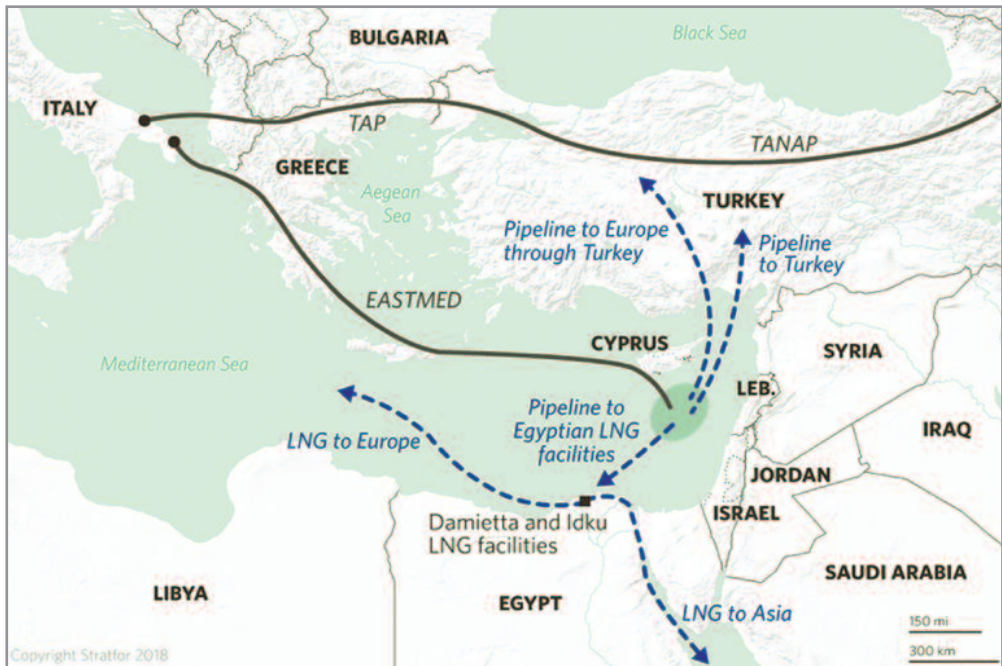
raises construction costs, and it is estimated that it would take at least 10 years to recover the cost of the pipeline. Furthermore, Israel and Cyprus would need to sign purchase contracts with each buying company in Europe, a complex and difficult process. The engineering technology required for such a pipeline would be tested first in real-life conditions, and the seismic and volcanic activity in Greek waters presents major construction and transportation risks—as its undersea route reaches a depth of 3.3 kilometres between Cyprus and Greece and any damage to the pipeline would be very difficult to repair.

In economic terms, it is doubtful that the respective gas deliveries would be competitive with existing supplies from Russia and various LNG producers around the world, given that they come from offshore fields that regularly produce more expensive gas than onshore fields. It is estimated that transporting gas over such distances would increase the price by 3-4 US dollars per heat unit. The average price of natural gas in Europe in recent years was around 5.40-6 US dollars per BTU, and not much less than that in Israel – 5.30 US dollars per BTU. It can become commercially viable if the price of gas in Europe exceeds 8 US dollars/ BTU and stays high for the longer term, or if it receives a huge EU grant. Even though average gas prices in Europe were high in 2018, they are not expected to stay high for long, a prediction the biggest energy companies have emphasized in their annual outlooks. The political support is not enough. Even 'politically desired' US LNG, at prices just above the EU market price range, is struggling to make inroads in Europe, as importers make decisions based on price, not on what may be politically desirable.<sup>10</sup>

The East Med pipeline's impact on EU's energy security is also questionable. The proposed pipeline's annual gas deliveries would constitute about 4% of the overall European market demand. The annual natural gas demand in the EU reached 548 bcm in 2017 and there is an upward trend predicted for short-term needs (Honoré 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> Remarks by Gina Cohen, 3rd symposium on hydrocarbons research and development, organized by Institute for Energy for South East Europe, Athens 30-31.10.2018. Interview with Amit Mor and Charles Ellinas.

**Table I: Potential Export Routes for Eastern Mediterranean Gas**

Source: Stratfor

Furthermore, the exploration costs in the Eastern Mediterranean are quite high, the competition with other international companies (mainly Gazprom) is big and the export and transportation costs are also very high. Although it is very difficult for Gazprom to dump or to lower international gas prices in order to compete with East Med gas or to halt LNG exports or imports from the USA, it is not impossible. This is due to the world gas delivery structure. There are more short-term gas contracts indexed in the spot market and less contracts indexed in long term contracts with take-or-pay clauses. Gazprom's policy, however, is based on long term contracts with take-or-pay clauses.<sup>11</sup>

The rapid increase, however, of US LNG exports<sup>12</sup> (along with the increased capacities in Qatar, Australia, Russia, Canada and other countries) have the potential to disrupt global gas trade patterns and dramatically transform the European market over the next two decades. They could also reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas, even as Moscow increases subsidies for gas exports to Europe. The slash in Russia's gas export revenues has already forced its gas companies to renegotiate contracts with much shorter and more flexible terms. Energy experts estimate that, if the US increases exports to Europe, Russia might be forced to raise subsidies and lower prices even further (Umbach 2019). Thus gas prices in Europe could come under downward pressure.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Amit Mor.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the shale gas revolution the US is poised to become the largest LNG exporter by 2025.

### **The Triangular Gas Export Strategy**

There is another monetising option that Nicosia and Tel Aviv have been exploring in recent years, the so-called triangular gas export strategy, which involves sending Israeli/Cypriot gas to Egypt through offshore or onshore gas-pipelines. This scenario takes advantage of the new opportunities that opened up in the region with the discovery in August 2015 of Egypt's huge Zohr gas field.<sup>13</sup> Zohr's deposits are estimated at 30 trillion cubic feet (850 bcm) and have been heralded as the solution to the country's energy problems (ENI 2015). Combining the gas resources of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt would theoretically create a much bigger pool, which could be more attractive to Europe.

Additionally, Egypt's natural gas infrastructure is the most developed in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Suez Canal offers one of the easiest, if not the cheapest, trade routes for oil and gas. Furthermore, the partially state-owned Egyptian company Sumed is building a new large-scale LNG wharf on the Gulf of Suez. However, Egypt, which had previously supplied natural gas to Israel via pipeline, in 2015 went from a net gas exporter to a gas importer (Karbuz 2017, 187-212). In the previous decade the low regulated gas prices in Egypt had made new developments unviable, while after the 2011 revolution investment dried up and production plummeted. The pipelines through Sinai to Israel and Jordan were repeatedly bombed by insurgents and the lack of gas ultimately forced Egypt to suspend deliveries, while the two liquefied natural gas facilities, built by Shell at Idku near Alexandria, and by Eni at Damietta in the eastern Delta, also had to suspend exports (Karbuz 2017).

In the new environment, and despite the fast-track development of Zohr, a private Egyptian company, Dolphinus Holdings, agreed in February 2018 to buy gas from Noble Energy and its partners from Israel's two largest offshore fields, Leviathan and Tamar. The deal serves multiple purposes. Foremost, it aims to cover future demand, as growing population, rising household incomes and a growing economy as well as improved living standards and human development indicators have driven energy demand in Egypt higher over the past decades (Ghafar 2016, 53-54). Israel's Energy Ministry's strategic plan for the country's economy through 2030 is essentially dependent on the deal (Coren 2018b).

To supply European Markets or other international markets through Egypt's LNG terminals in Idku and Damietta (with huge LNG facilities, able to accept natural gas from different sources and Egypt itself) seems profitable for all parties.<sup>14</sup> Adding Cyprus's and Israel's new finds to the mix could keep these plants running even as Egypt's own demand rises. Sharing costs for infrastructure could also create an 'economies of scale' effect that would benefit all the parties

<sup>13</sup> The first gas from the Zohr field came online in December 2017. For the years 2019-2020, gas production is expected to reach the levels of 80.6 bcm/y, meaning that there will be +10.3 bcm/y surplus available for exports. Remarks by Dr. Charles Ellinas at the 3rd symposium on hydrocarbons development organized by Institute for Energy in the Southeast Europe. Athens 30-31.10.2018.

<sup>14</sup> Remarks by Gina Cohen at the 3rd symposium on hydrocarbons development organized by Institute for Energy in the Southeast Europe. Athens 30-31.10.2018.

involved. However, because the end-buyer will have to pay for the processed gas coming from the pipelines that have to be constructed, the end price might be higher than the current gas price in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Egypt has been pursuing cooperative energy diplomacy towards an optimum utilization of the overall East Med energy resources. These efforts have been fruitful and have led to close ties with Cyprus and Greece as reflected in various tripartite summits, official visits at the highest level, and many cooperation agreements. The cooperation has been facilitated by the fact that Shell is both the operator of the Idku facility and co-owner of the Aphrodite field (Eiran and Mitchell 2018, 36-37).

In November 2017 Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades, Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras officially endorsed the option, and in September 2018 the press announced that Cairo and Nicosia had signed a deal for the construction of an underwater pipeline to export natural gas to Egypt with the terms of the commercial agreement to be discussed at later stage between the companies involved in the project (the Noble Energy consortium and the operators of the liquefaction plant at Idku). The agreement will necessarily have to secure approval from the European Union. This deal is very clearly part of a tripartite strategy, as, at the same time, the U.S.-Israeli consortium heading the development of Israel's offshore gas reserves announced a deal that would enable the export of natural gas to Egypt. Noble Energy and its Israeli partner Delek, along with Egyptian East Gas Company, bought 39 percent of a disused pipeline connecting the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon with north Sinai. The consortium will pay 518 million US dollars for their interest in the East Mediterranean Gas Company pipeline (Haaretz 2018).

The partners can count on a 10-year and 15 billion US dollar-deal to sell gas to the Egyptian company Dolphinus Holdings for use by big Egyptian users, such as factories, while hoping to win more contracts from foreign companies that operate now-idle liquefied natural gas plants in Egypt (Coren 2018a). Delivering Israeli gas to Egypt through a new or an old pipeline (the pan-Arab pipeline)<sup>16</sup> is, however, a risky business from the security point of view, due to potential terrorist attacks. The Egyptian Army has a stronghold in the area, but the security risk is still quite high for such an investment.<sup>17</sup> Actually, if this ever materializes, it will mark both a reversal of the former equilibrium in the energy supply market, in which Israel imported gas from its Arab neighbour, and a historical and fundamental change in relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Egypt will be the second Arab country, following Jordan in 2016, to import gas from Israel, breaking a tradition dating back to the birth of the Israeli state.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Charles Ellinas.

<sup>16</sup> The Arab Gas Pipeline originating near Arish in the Sinai Peninsula was built to export Egyptian natural gas to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, with an underwater pipeline to Israel and a total length of 1,200 kilometers. It has been out of order for years due to sabotage to its feeder pipeline in Sinai.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Amit Mor.

For Egypt, this tripartite strategy serves the strategic goal to transform the country into a 'gas hub'—a concept that allows a country to import, produce, consume and export gas, thereby benefiting from shifting between multiple suppliers and customers depending on the best price. Ideally located between western and eastern markets, Egypt is a key country in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin. It has attracted, on a solid basis, major investments from the biggest European energy companies, ENI, Shell and BP, which announced plans to expand their existing investments in various parts of the Egyptian territory (Red Sea, etc.). With the support of the global energy companies and the financing programs of the World Bank, the Egyptian economy is growing fast. Egypt has already succeeded in becoming a net exporter of natural gas, securely leaving behind its status of net importer of natural gas. In 2025, the gas surplus is expected to reach 20-25 bcm/y, thus offering the option to export significant amounts of natural gas in liquid form through the existing LNG infrastructure in Idku and Damietta. These two LNG terminals have the ability to reach full utilization by 2020.<sup>18</sup>

The scenario of exporting gas to Egypt through a pipeline is, however, also a complicated issue. The formation of a regional gas hub in Egypt would have to face the price barrier. Current shifts in global energy production and consumption indicate low prices for energy commodities in the coming years. 'Lower for longer' is the new mantra. Egypt, Israel and Cyprus will have to compete with these low gas prices, on the order of 6-7 US dollars per mm BTU, at least to the end of this decade, but very likely beyond 2020, if the various export projects currently being considered are to become commercially viable (Ellinas 2016, 51-52).

Furthermore, in late June 2018 Egyptian and European media sources indicated—substantiated by Egypt's former Minister of Petroleum Osama Kamal but obviously solely based on seismic surveys—that Italian oil and gas company ENI will be developing the offshore Noor gas field from August onwards. This field is supposed to hold possible reserves of around 90 tcf, which is three times the size of the Zohr field. Should the Egyptian announcements materialize, the commercial viability of several projects in the East Mediterranean will need to be reassessed. With the new, not yet announced offshore Noor discovery, there may no longer be a need for Cairo to cooperate with Israel and Greece, as enough reserves will be in place for Egypt to develop its own viable and commercially attractive LNG export strategy (Widdershoven 2018; Gorodeisky 2018).

Experts believe that, lacking exploratory drilling, these estimations of the Noor capacity are still premature. Drilling is expected to begin in 2019, at which time it will become possible to assess the size of the field. Given the current circumstances, probably in the next decades, the two LNG terminals in Idku and Damietta will be able to process gas either from Israel or Cyprus in order to cover Egypt's entire domestic consumption and then will be able to export gas as well.<sup>19</sup> However, economic viability is not the only problem in the trilateral energy

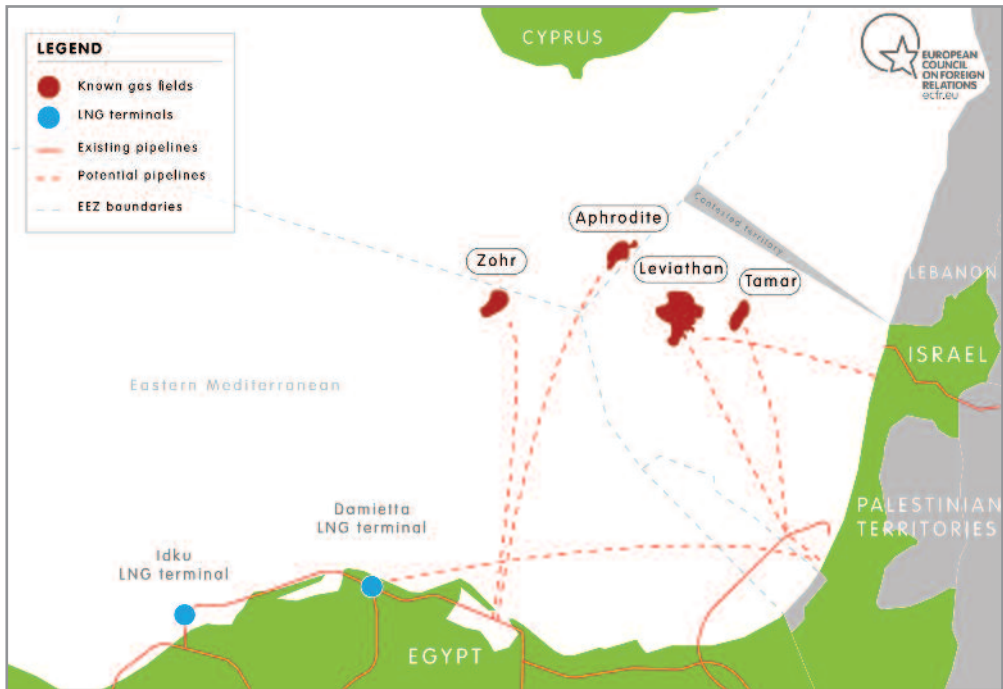
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<sup>18</sup> Remarks by Dr. Charles Ellinas at the Conference at the 3rd symposium on hydrocarbons development organized by Institute for Energy in the Southeast Europe. Athens 30-31.10.2018.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Amit Mor.

cooperation: it is well known that the general public in Egypt is not very supportive of the deal with Israel. Opponents of the project are unhappy about buying gas from Israel when their country is supposed to have achieved self-sufficiency.

**Table II: Gas Fields and (Potential) Export Routes in the Eastern Mediterranean**



Source: European Council on Foreign Relations

### Obstacles in the Greece-Cyprus-Israel energy cooperation

In spring 2018, the latent Israel-Cyprus disagreement over a part of the Aphrodite gas field at the edge of Cyprus's territorial economic waters escalated into serious dispute. The Aphrodite reservoir, discovered in Block 12 of Cyprus's EEZ, extends partially into Israeli territorial waters. At stake there are perhaps 10 billion cubic meters of gas, that is, less than 10% of Aphrodite's total reserves and a just a small fraction of the overall Israeli gas. This, however, was reason enough to delay the signing of a unitization agreement between the two countries, which since 2010 have been disputing the quantity of gas in Israeli territory and Israel's level of involvement in the reservoir's development. In March 2018 the owners of the rights for the Ishai license,<sup>20</sup> a continuation of the Cypriot Aphrodite gas reservoir on the Israeli side of the boundary between the two countries' economic zones, complained to the Israeli government

<sup>20</sup> The current partners in the Ishai license are Israel Opportunity Energy Resources LP, Nammax Oil and Gas Ltd., Eden Energy Discoveries Ltd., and AGR Petroleum Services Holdings AS.

that the extraction of gas on the Cypriot side would necessarily lead to the extraction of gas from Ishai as well. Ishai is one of five maritime drillings known as the 'Pelagic Licenses', which extend about 170 kilometres west of Haifa bordering the Gal and Ratio Sea licenses, in which the Leviathan structure and the Noble Energy Block 12 structure in Cyprus are situated (Gorodeisky 2018).

Cyprus and Israel are currently engaged in a "transparent and productive dialogue" regarding the division of the Aphrodite reservoir, but the issue is not expected to be easily solved. It has leaked into the press that if Israel and Cyprus do not reach an understanding within a few months they will go to international arbitration, i.e., hire an international expert to propose a solution based on the two reservoirs' estimated reserves. In the absence of a distribution agreement, Israel is refusing to allow Cyprus to develop Aphrodite, because pumping gas from it will also cause a reduction in the gas to be pumped from the Ishai prospect. Israeli experts estimate that this is not a serious but solely a technical problem, and that it is only a matter of time before it is solved.<sup>21</sup> Commenting on the new gas discovery in Cyprus announced in February 2019, in the Globes business arena, Israel Opportunity Energy Resources and Nammax Oil and Gas, called on the Israeli government to insist that it receives its rights, and to prevent the development of the Aphrodite reservoir (that will now be developed faster) without a commitment by the Cypriot government and its partners guaranteeing that Israel will receive its share of the jointly owned reservoir (Simon 2019).

Energy has been a significant, but not the primary, factor in improving bilateral relations between Israel and Greece as well, though the latter has no proven gas reserves as yet. Nonetheless, Greece has been seeking to upgrade its energy profile as a transit state for gas coming from Israel and Cyprus to the European market, primarily through the East Med pipeline. Furthermore, the country is a significant consumer of natural gas, and its demand is expected to reach approximately 6–7 BCM (billion cubic meters) by 2020. Gas imports from Israel and Cyprus would allow Greece to either completely replace its more expensive Algerian liquefied natural gas imports or decrease its dependence on gas imports from Russia (Stergiou, 2015, 423).

However, as it has been already discussed, the East Med pipeline is still a pipe dream, still in the prospective stage, and not likely to materialize before the 2030s. There are no big geopolitical concerns here but obstacles of a more technical nature. It is feasible, albeit very difficult and expensive, and there is no market or consumer commitment yet or enough gas to justify construction.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, as it has been argued, the geopolitical benefits of Greece's energy strategy have been overplayed and overstated. Historical experience has shown that transit countries can expect some economic gains (transit fees, support services, etc.) but no political ones, and this is linked to reliability. That means that if the transit countries are unreliable, and if they try to

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Amit Mor and Eran Lehrman.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Amit Mor.



abuse their position, their partners will look for alternatives. Greece has been importing gas from Turkey since 2007, and while this trade relationship is important, it has made no real impact on the bilateral political relationship more broadly (Tsafos 2017, 155).

On the same trajectory, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum launched in 2019 in Cairo should be seen as a development of political rather economic importance. In mid-January 2019, the Energy Ministers of Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority met in Cairo to discuss the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, which should serve as the umbrella for cooperation and dialogue regarding the development of gas resources in the region. While energy lies at the heart of the forum, there are also broader geostrategic procedures that led to its establishment, reflecting the common perceptions of the countries involved regarding the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean to their national security. Although officially the Gas Forum is open to other countries, the meeting in Cairo did not include delegates from Turkey, Lebanon, or Syria.

The same applies to the 6th trilateral summit between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus that took place in March 2019 hosting as special guest the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo aiming, among other things, to promote the East Med pipeline. In our opinion, this project is more of a political enterprise than a realistic export option. For the project to become a reality it needs to be both commercially and technically feasible. Italy appears to be having second thoughts. The EU, currently investigating the feasibility of the project, is supportive but does not have the capacity to construct the pipeline by itself. And as of today, there is no international oil company or investor that has expressed interest in the task.

These meetings could indeed facilitate the exploitation of the resources. Eventually, however, it is up to the markets and the companies to decide if they will engage a country, and they do that primarily on the basis of commercial assessments, resulting from extractive and marketing processes. If the companies, after the completion of such a process, decide not to invest in the exploration and development of natural resources in a country, no political alliance, directive or axis can force them to do so. Commercial viability and bankability of a project is what really matters for a foreign investing company. At a second stage, and provided that this condition is met, they then seek the political acquiescence of all the actors involved.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the key to regional energy cooperation does not lie outside the Eastern Mediterranean. Efforts should be made to craft a more localized and sustainable energy policy, one that understands the limitations of the energy market and the capabilities of the involved parties.

## Conclusions

The paper critically discusses the recent developments in the energy architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean. Though, the gas discoveries have entailed a quasi-institutionalisation of the energy partnership between Greece-Cyprus-Israel-Egypt with the extension of Italy, Jordan,

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<sup>23</sup> Personal Communication with Amit Mor and Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli, Vice President of BP Azerbaijan (Baku, 8 August 2017).



and the Palestinian Authority, the expected economic and geopolitical profit might be rather limited in the short to medium term. The gas of the eastern Mediterranean remains for the most part so far undeveloped and further exploration remains largely frozen because there is no available export route for the large volumes of gas that could be produced — volumes that far exceed domestic need in any of the countries involved. Until today the attempts to find a viable route have been confronted with strong competitors in a world full of gas supplies. It is argued that despite the enthusiastic reception of the new gas discovery off the coast of Cyprus by the media, the gas-bearing reservoir will not radically change the existing power equilibrium in the Eastern Mediterranean and will have a rather limited impact on the EU-energy diversification strategy.

### Interviews

*Amit Mor:* Energy expert and professor of energy economics and geopolitics (September 2018, Hertzliya-Israel).

*Arion Liel:* Former Israeli diplomat, lecturer at Tel Aviv University (Jerusalem, September 2018)

*Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli:* Vice President of BP Azerbaijan (Baku, August 2017)

*Charles Ellinas:* former CEO of Cyprus National Hydrocarbons Company (Nicosia, July 2018).

*Eran Lerman:* Netanyahu's former deputy national security adviser for foreign policy and international affairs in Israel's National Security Council, and current vice-director of Jerusalem's institute for strategy and security (Jerusalem, September 2018)

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## CHAPTER 3:

# A THREATENING SEA, A BRIDGING SEA: IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN – A VIEW FROM ISRAEL

*Amikam Nachmani*

### Introduction

“The sea greatly scares me, the people around it scare me even more,” observed a traveller in the late 1890s who sent his impressions of the Mediterranean Sea to his family in Palestine (Nachmani family archive, n.d.). The Mediterranean was for many travellers either a barrier or a bridge to the Levant. Likewise, the word Levantine carried paradoxical connotations, mainly derogative, to wit, sentimental, superficial, crowded, vulgar, slow, phlegmatic, lagging behind and always decadent and vociferous. Its negative traits are seen to diminish and weaken Europe as a whole; as the backyard of Europe, the Levant is considered inferior in the Western World’s superior view.

A 1914 American book—an example of Western contempt, haughtiness and arrogance—exemplifies the author’s perception of the Ottoman Empire. Here the vibrant West’s knowledge, achievements, findings and profits are compared to the phlegmatic and decadent Levant where human beings should eschew all science and development. No changes, inventions or improvements are permitted to happen in the Orient, unless ordained by Heaven:

Our modern methods of criticism are foreign to the East. It is our liberation from dogmatism, our freedom to criticize, to disagree, to find fault, which produces the wonderful fruits of European civilization. [...] the East never investigates. It has no understanding of the relation between cause and effect.

A scholar [...] once wrote to a Mohammedan merchant in an interior Turkish town, asking him [...] about] the town, the number of caravans entering it, etc. The Mohammedan wrote back in indignation, saying that it was blasphemous to inquire into such things. If Allah had wanted these facts to be known he would have informed his people (Cobb 1914, 35).

Despite these derogative descriptions, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and its littoral countries were described as touristic must-sees, not to be missed. This dualism is the focus of our work. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, in a 1950 speech before naval cadets, referred to "conquering of the sea," a common expression in Israel given the relative dearth of Israelis who earned their living from the sea and the minor impact of the Israeli navy on military matters at that time. Ben-Gurion negated the perception of the sea as something marginal, no more than another wilderness:

The sea is not a desert of water: the same as we must cause the Negev [Israel's southern desert] to bloom, so we are bound to conquer the high seas. [...] The seashore is not a partition or border, but a bridge [...] By conquering the sea the State of Israel will come closer to other nations [...] and by this guarantee the life and wealth of tens of thousands of immigrants who come to Israel; and will buttress Israel's economic and political independence (Gish 2004; Ben-Gurion 1955, 186).

But before discussing Israel's mission of "conquering the sea," European and Western as well as Israeli (including the Jewish *Yishuv* community from the 19th to the mid-twentieth century living in Palestine) images of the Mediterranean Sea Basin need to be examined in the light of cultural, social and geo-political histories and events in the region. This means a fairly lengthy review of modern Turkish history is called for in order to fully understand the current and future international and regional situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, which encompasses several different peoples, languages and three religions.

### **Reshuffling in the Eastern Mediterranean: An Alternative Turkish Identity**

The nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were perceived as disastrous for the Muslim peoples around the Mediterranean Basin, and certainly for the Ottoman Empire. Napoleon conquered Egypt; Serbia and Greece liberated themselves from the Ottomans and became independent; and Russia and its proxies continuously encroached on Ottoman territories. At the end of World War I (WWI) only Turkey with its 15 million people (with a mere 182 factories and 14,000 industrial workers), remained of the great Ottoman Empire—that huge entity that once spanned from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted for this section: Cobb 1914; White 2003, 145–159; Singer 2009; Kadioglu, 1996, 177–193; Poulton 1997; Kinross 1964, Mango 1999; Louis 1953, 218–227 and 2000; Millas 1991, 21–33; Landau 1993, 271–292; Volkan and Itzkowitz 1994; Lewis 1974 and 1984, 195–213; Guzel, Oguz and Karatay 2002; Zurcher 2004; Canpolat 2006; Ahmad 1993.

Contemptuously, the name 'Turk' was said to be synonymous with a person who was ignorant, vicious, wild, cruel, untameable, incorrigible, and beyond comprehending mathematics and other sciences[!]. A Turk belonged to a people still in the Middle Ages, whose standards were barbaric. The multinational and multiethnic Ottoman Empire diluted and erased Turkish culture and ethnicity. The Turkish language in particular was a victim of Ottomanism, which introduced foreign words from Farsi, Arabic, etc. In 1900 the Turkish language consisted of a mere 80,000 words. What remained of the people left in Anatolia were Muslims and Ottomans; their Turkish identity and language were not at all recognizable.

The mood of *kef* meaning happy, merry, carefree' was said to be the culture most characteristic of the Orient. People grow up without worries or anxiety, they do not bother to improve or change their lives. They take drugs, smoke, drink, dream and meditate. Passivity—both mentally and physically—is the constant state of people of the Eastern Mediterranean. There is no urge to maximize profits or increase production. The passing of time (considered a waste in the West) is of no concern; the attitude is always 'tomorrow,' *boukra* (Arabic for tomorrow, the Spanish *mañana*).

Only religious fanaticism impacts the passive Oriental mood. The Muslim religion aggressively draws the native believer out of his degenerative and phlegmatic apathy. He becomes wild, vicious and bloodthirsty—a cruel villain who defiles women and girls and desecrates the holy places of other religions. He throws his enemies into a pit full of rodents and snakes, or tortures him by sticking boiled eggs under his armpits.

Yet the same Islam is perceived as harbouring grains of hope and change. Though the Western Christian powers launched violent, bloody Crusades and unleashed the fanatic Mediaeval Inquisition, they eventually became benign and tolerant of other religious entities with the advent of science and the industrial revolution. Islam, which did not resort to Inquisition, eventually forwent its jihadism, and permitted "peoples of the Book" to live and practice their own faiths in Muslim nations, albeit as second-class citizens. Islam was therefore *perceived* as the agent that eventually would introduce a more peaceful atmosphere into Muslim societies and cultures.

The defeat and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in WWI and the emergence of the Turkish Republic in 1923 did not substantially alter preconceived perceptions. Republican Turkey's pursuance of its Hittite legacy, which regarded Turks as inheritors of the Hittite Empire—the greatest of all Near Eastern empires—and the prevalence in Turkey (until Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died in 1938) that the Turkish language is the mother of all languages and of all Western civilization only accentuated the gap between the enlightened and scientific West and the Eastern Mediterranean peoples. The Modern Greek and Egyptian parallels—that present-day Greeks and Egyptians are the direct descendants of ancient Hellenic Greece and of the Pharaohs, respectively—were equal to the invented 'Hittite Turks.' These three mythologies were never fully accepted in the West, and indeed, these reservations contributed to Western haughtiness and sense of superiority vis-à-vis the Eastern Mediterranean peoples.

In particular, European and American writers and scholars did not fail to note the power, glory and aesthetics of the three great ancient empires (Hittites, Egyptians and Hellenic Greeks) as compared to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' weak, destitute and poor Egyptians, Turks and Greeks. The defeats inflicted on Egypt by Napoleon and Great Britain; the military humiliations suffered by the Ottomans at the hands of European powers, culminating in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, all brought about expressions like 'Not even one drop of Hellenic, Hittite or Pharaonic blood is to be found in present day Greeks, Turks and Egyptians.'

Simultaneously, a comprehensive attempt was made in Turkey to create a different Turkish nationalism out of the multinational, multi-ethnic and pan-Islamic Ottoman Empire; the pride taken in the new Turkish identity was meant to be something unique in comparison to Ottoman or Muslim identities. As from the early 1920s, Republican Turkey boasted that it overcame the cosmopolitan character of the Ottoman Empire and the engulfing cross-border Muslim identity. It called for the consumption of Turkish goods only; it dropped irredentist dreams of re-creating contacts with the Central Asian Turkic peoples or with Middle Eastern Arab Muslims; it focused on Latinization of the Turkish language, in comparison to the Arabic letters of Middle Eastern peoples or the Cyrillic letters of Central Asia. The new Turkish national identity was built on the legacies of the Turkish nation, language and history, not on Ottoman or Muslim traditions and customs. Above all this identity practiced the Western mode of nationalism, specifically linkage and the loyalty to a territory—Anatolia.

The rise of Turkish nationalism roughly coincided with the rise of nationalism in Europe, beginning with the 1848 Spring of Nations and continuing for the next 170 violent years of wars and conflicts, some remaining inconclusive to this day. Turkish nationalism rose in reply to the threat of Pan-Slavism to Turks and Muslims from the Russian Empire as well as being the product of Arab uprisings against Ottoman rule. Following WWI Anatolia had practically been cleared of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks. When the day of the empires was over; when the principle of self-determination was widely accepted; when the United States (US) President Woodrow Wilson launched his global anti-empire Crusade; and when Pan-Islam stopped being a unifying element among the peoples of the Ottoman Empire—these and other events were milestones on the road to Turkish nationalism.

Thus, a Turkish alternative to Ottomanism and to Islam from the 1920s onward gave the Turks great pride and a sense of continuity by seeing themselves as descendants of the Hittite Empire, that unique and greatest of all Near Eastern empires, mother of the Fertile Crescent civilizations. The Hittite civilization appeared in the Near East some 5,000 years ago, between the third and the first millennium BC. In one way or another Hittite legacies shaped the Near East until about 800 years before Christ, and more than 1,500 years before the first Muslim and first Arab set foot on the Middle Eastern stage. As descended from the Hittites, Kemalist Turkey perceived itself as the origin of early Eastern and later Western civilizations.

The 1906 excavation of Hatussas (c. 160 km east of Ankara), the gigantic capital of the Hittites, brought to light amazing and rare ancient achievements. (Ankara, proclaimed the new



capital of Turkey in 1923, lies in the heart of Anatolia then populated solely by Turks. Thus, cosmopolitan Istanbul remains the erstwhile capital of the Ottoman Empire). The unique legacies of the Hittites, argued the Turks, survived in Anatolia and among the people living there for millennia. Turks point to their unique architecture and the shape of their mosques and minarets, which are different from those anywhere else in the Muslim world. Republican Turks maintained that Ottoman and Islamic eras are only part of Turkish history; the Hittite heritage is equally important if not superior to them. Western cultures and peoples, in Turkish eyes, are viewed as upstarts compared to the seniority of the Hittites and their posterity, the Turks.

Turkish nationalism and identity in the early stages did not enthrall the Anatolians. Living in 'Turkey' and identifying as 'Turks' felt strange and uncomfortable to people who, at the end of the nineteenth century, had always identified themselves as Muslims or Ottomans. Nor having lived in a huge empire was it easy to accept the gentile name of Anatolians and their small geographic area.

The new nationalism separated or 'divorced' the Turks from their cultural and geo-political neighbours. The aim was to break with the past, with Muslim and Ottoman links, and to create a chasm to be filled with a new Turkish pride. The Latinization of the written Turkish language left Ottoman history behind and theoretically also Islam, with its rites and attire so heavily prevalent in the Ottoman public sphere. Also cut off was the Arab Middle East that had revolted against the Ottomans and connived with Western powers, England and France, against the Ottomans.

Istanbul with its many languages, cultures, religions and ethnicities at the far western edge facing Europe, to a great degree had to be severed from the ideal that was the new Turkey that preferred the homogenous Ankara with its native Anatolian peasants speaking only Turkish. The Turkish spirit of Ankara at the centre of a vast land mass could easily be defended against invaders and polluting influences, whereas Istanbul facing the Mediterranean Sea and Europe would always be vulnerable.

### **Turkey's Peasantry**

Mustafa Kemal's reforms were practiced mostly in urban Turkey. As for the peasantry in the countryside, who constituted the majority, reformism hardly touched them. The Anatolian peasants were passive and even indifferent towards the reforms. Traditionally, they suspected any new ruler. For generations they had witnessed rulers come and go, but all were injurious: they imposed taxes on their crops and launched press-gang campaigns that kidnapped their sons into the military, often never to be seen again. In one night on 1 January 1929, the newly Latinized Turkish language became illegible. But Latinization hardly benefitted the peasants as most were illiterate. The prohibition on men wearing the tasselled Ottoman fez or on women veiling themselves had no relevance for the peasants: men hardly wore a fez and peasant women did not veil themselves. The prohibition on bigamy, however, was not enforced in rural Anatolia where it was prevalent. Similarly, the peasants simply ignored the demand that they adopt family names; Turkish peasants continued to be identified by their first names.

The Turkification of Islam applied in Kemalist Turkey is worth noting. The muezzin's call to prayer was done in Turkish, the Kor'an was translated into Turkish and Imams' Friday's sermons were vetted—they had to support the Kemalist reforms by praising them. From then on Islam's advent was taught as just another event within all other events that contributed to Turkish history. The aim was to make it clear that Turkey was a great nation long before its acceptance of Islam and later, of Ottomanism. In fact, Islam and Ottomanism were perceived as the chief reasons for Turkic backwardness and for burying pride in being Turkish and desiring Turkish nationalism. The reforms, with their restrictions on practicing Islam in the public sphere, sought to render Islam into a private matter among believers. The reformers reiterated that Islam and Ottomanism diluted Turkey's unique national identity and reduced its history and culture to a minimum. The Anatolian Muslim was just another believer among the Muslim millions. Similarly, the Anatolian Turk had been just another Ottoman subject to living in an empire full of Ottomans. This person was ignorant of his pre-Ottoman history and a pre-Muslim past.

Incidentally, the Kemalist Turkic emphasis on pre-Muslim and pre-Ottoman times, that is, Turkey's illustrious Hittite origins and their direct impact on twentieth-century Republican Turkey, was paralleled by Israeli PM David Ben-Gurion who directly linked the Jewish people's Biblical history in the Holy Land to Israel's modern re-establishment in 1948. The exilic interim of 2,000 years and the Jewish Diaspora was for Ben-Gurion a historical hiccup, a mere marginal footnote in Jewish history.

### **The Turkish Language**

The accent on the Turkish language played a major role in the new nation-building pursued in Kemalist Turkey. (Intensive Hebrew-language revival and usage was Israel's parallel). All Turks were encouraged to communicate only in Turkish and members of minority communities (Greeks, Kurds, Jews and Armenians) had to adopt Turkish names. Ottoman Turkish, known as the 'haughty' language, was suppressed because fewer than ten percent of the population spoke it fluently, and more so, because it was contaminated with foreign words, idioms and terminology mainly from Arabic and Farsi. Therefore, from 1923 onwards Turkish became the state's official language. Historians and philologists were called upon to prove that the Anatolian peasant had preserved the pure and original Turkish language that was to become the only legal medium of communication.

Symbolically, the Ottoman Historical Society ceased to exist in 1930 and was replaced by the Turkish Historical Society. From now on, 'Turkey' and 'Turks' would be the main research subjects, not Islam or Ottomanism. Turkish historians who clung to the Ottoman and Muslim pasts 'sinned' and were condemned unless (like in the later Stalin era) they confessed, repented and professed to be wrong and misleading. Ridding the Turkish language of foreign words was not easy, because for more than 1,000 years Anatolians had been exposed to Middle Eastern influences and languages. Later on, when the Kemalists proudly declared that Turkish was the ancient proto-language ('Sun Language,' *Gunes Dil Teorisi*) that gave life to all words, idioms and validity to other languages, some foreign words entering the Turkish language

became acceptable again. If the Turkish language is the mother language then other languages are its descendants and offspring; therefore, it is permissible to use words from them.

University historical and archaeological research was also harnessed to the Turkish nationalism 'wagon.' Studies proved that modern Turks descended from the ancient empires and kingdoms that ruled the Near East—the Hittites, Sumerians, and Phoenicians—and by no means were they related to the Arab Middle Eastern peoples surrounding Turkey. Turkic origins traced to the rich civilizations of the Fertile Crescent were proudly adopted to arouse patriotism among the new Anatolian Turks. (The Israeli parallel is obvious, with Israeli and foreign university archaeology departments busily digging up the Holy Land's Biblical past—the very roots of modern-day Israel).

Despite Mustafa Kemal's massive personal involvement in the creation (if not invention) of the new Turkish nationalism and the "discovery" of Anatolian Turkishness based on traces of powerful ancient civilizations, outside Turkey his efforts and findings were not perceived as convincing or genuine. Whatever past traces may have survived, hundreds of years of Islam had virtually erased them all. In a region where literacy hardly existed, only a small number of popular stories and poetry had survived from the pre-Islamic past. Also, no concrete evidence supported Kemal's theory of Turks and Turkish language being the origins of other cultures. This notwithstanding, with the construction of modern communication and media (electrical grids, radio broadcasting, new roads and bridges, etc.), the theories of the superior status of Turkey, the Turks and their ancestors reached the remotest villages and far corners of Turkey. The school system, operas, films and theatres, staged and filmed by the Turkish Republic, often with the involvement and presence of Mustafa Kemal in them, spread the word. Scores of 'experts,' including several Europeans, supported the pre-historical Hittite origins of modern Turkey and of the great Turkish language and its substantive contribution to world civilizations and cultures. But alas, without scientific findings to sustain the legends, the 1938 death of Mustafa Kemal essentially ended all attempts to prove the theories. Turkey's leadership had to deal with more urgent issues: the catastrophes that were to befall Europe and World War II (WWII). These hammered in the last nails of a Turkish – Hittite revival.

Occasionally, since the end of the Cold War and the resumption and intensification of contacts with Arabs, Muslims, other Turkic peoples and East Europeans, some Turks continue to maintain that Turkish culture is superior to others. Also, Kemalism's Western, secular and non-Muslim orientations have been questioned and become subject to heated discussions. It is worth mentioning that in the early 1950s Turkish Islam, being a religious element opposed to communist atheism, was called upon to support the state's anti-communist agenda. Since the early 2000s, owing to Islamic governments led by practicing Muslim politicians as well as domestic reforms that allow Muslim education, rites and attire in public plus the decrease in the powers of the military, Turkey has experienced the rise of Islam.

Turks speak with pride when comparing their qualities as a unique nation unparalleled in Europe, the U.S. or the Arab world. Family and children come first, elders are cherished and not abandoned, money and profits are secondary to mutual respect and healthy personal

relations, and so on. The following stresses the view that places Turkey and Turkish values and virtues above those in the West and the Arab world:

Turkish culture [...] treasures] strong family ties, respect for elders [...] and commitment to children [...] Relationships are not based on manipulation [...] no[r] greed. [...] R]acism [...] is] distant from everyone's mind, even though the West tries to portray Turks as ogres. [...] On the political side, Turkey could [...] let Europe stand on the sidelines while the republic looks to itself, [...] and to the Turkic nations of Asia. We are culturally more akin to them than to the West [...] or to the Arabs, with their strange views of women and their theocratic political systems. Turkish culture, since its origins on the steppes, has always put women on the same horse as men (Iskenderoglu 1999, 140).

Notwithstanding the above, with a rare frankness and sincerity Turkey's President Süleyman Demirel spoke in 1999 about the identity of the Turks at the *fin de siècle* and of intimate issues rarely mentioned in public. Much work, effort and education are needed to change culture and identity:

Twenty-nine percent of the women in my country are still unable to read and write by the time they are 15 years of age. [...] The great majority of women in Turkey are unaware of the concept of gynecological health. [...] 43 children out of every 10,000 die during birth. There are 21 cases of polio in my country. [...] In my country only one out of every four people brush their teeth. This has nothing to do with money or wealth (Demirel 1999).

It is clear today that a paradigmatic change in Turkey's policies vis-à-vis the Arab Middle East and concerning Turkish readiness to intervene politically and militarily have taken place, and in fact Turkey has become an active player in the Palestine–Israel conflict, Syria and Iraq. This is quite a change. Quincy Wright found that between 1450 and 1900 the Ottoman Empire spent an average of 61 years per century fighting (Wright 1965, 653)! Apparently, from its inception in 1923 the Turkish Republic has changed this pattern. If one excludes the armed conflict with the Kurds (an internal conflict according to Turkey) and the short 1974 armed invasion into Cyprus, Turkish sources report no involvement in any international war since the end of WWI—quite a change from the Ottoman era. (The 1950s participation in the Korean War was a show of good faith in order to acquire Turkey's entrance into NATO). Against this unique background one can understand the stormy reactions in Turkey following Israel's June 2010 commandeering of the *Mavi Marmara*, a Turkish protest ship en route to Gaza, in which ten Turkish citizens were killed. Turkey claimed that these were the first fatalities she suffered in an international armed confrontation since the end of WWII!

### **Israel, Greece, Cyprus: Common Denominators, Similarities, Shared Interests**

Our analysis of the Eastern Mediterranean arena now turns to the history, culture, politics and society in Greece, Cyprus and Israel. These three countries share several mutual aims and interests that are likely to help intensify their joint future and overcome disagreements.

It is fair to say that in the twentieth century no other two peoples in the world were victimized more cruelly and suffered more profoundly, caught up in the grip of rising nationalism and the resurgent nation-state, to wit, one state for one nation, as were the Greeks and Israelis. One and a half million Greeks who had lived for thousands of years in Asia Minor (Western Turkey today) were forced to leave *Mikri Assia* (Asia Minor) in the early 1920s to the last one of them in the well-known Greek-Turkish Population Transfer Agreement. Add to this the plight of the Armenians during WWI when, theoretically, Turkey became a state for Turks only, otherwise the embodiment of the nation-state idea. Following the 1956 Suez War, Greeks who lived for millennia in Egypt were expelled by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Egypt became a country for Egyptians only. The 1974 expulsion of 250,000 Greek Cypriots from Turkish northern Cyprus is seen in Greece as another painful example of the inability of the modern nation-state to accommodate non-native ethnicities. The extermination of the Jewish people in Europe between 1933 and 1945 turned many of the European states into countries of one nationality, yet another embodiment of the pure nation-state concept. The elimination of many of the Jewish and Greek Diasporas throughout the entire Middle East and North Africa is another reminder of the intolerance of the modern nation-state to accept the 'other.' Greece and Israel share this common denominator and occasionally relive its frequent painful reminders.

Greece, Cyprus and Israel push back attempts of external coercion to resolve the conflicts in which the three are involved. Such is the position of Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians, and that of the Greek side in the Cypriot conflict. Naturally, Greece, Cyprus and Israel reject attempts of foreign intervention in their affairs, for example, Europe's attempt in the 2010s to impose an economic recession and financial restrictions on Greece in return for loans and credits. The resulting rift between Greece and the European Union's (EU) wealthiest members (Germany and France) seemed to encourage Greece to forge new relationships with neighbouring countries of its own size, like Israel. This foreign coercion reiterated the fact that Greece, Israel and Cyprus—the only non-Muslim countries on the Eastern and Southern (North Africa) Mediterranean shores—are small states surrounded by larger nations with stronger economies. Often the three realize their weaknesses and limitations vis-à-vis stronger and bigger actors who patronize and inferiorize them.

### **Christians in the Middle East: the Demand for Arabization of the Clergy**

Another element that could yield cooperation is the fate of Christians in the Middle East. To its chagrin, Middle Eastern Greek Orthodox Christianity is facing a growing demand to replace Greek clergy with Arab clergy; Arabization of the clergy is an oft-heard mantra nowadays among Middle Eastern Christians. One of the results of this controversy is continued cooperation—discretely, indirectly, and occasionally openly—between the Middle Eastern Orthodox Church and Israel. This brings us to a discussion on the contemporary precarious situation of Christians in the Middle East. We are talking, literally, about a crisis of cataclysmic magnitude. Enhanced cooperation between Israel and Greece is likely in the face of this dangerous situation.

In fact, such a rapprochement had begun in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Vatican's intention then to achieve dominance in Jerusalem and hegemony over the holy places in the Holy Land through the internationalization of Jerusalem was perceived by Orthodox Christianity as an attempt to curtail its influence. As a result, a surprising accord developed between the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates in the Holy Land and the newly established State of Israel, both of whom vehemently objected to the Vatican's policy to internationalize Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Holy Places.

Alas, Arabization of the clergy is the least problem nowadays that should bother Christianity in the Middle East. As noted above, the few Christians remaining throughout the Middle East are poised on the edge of flight, or worse, extinction. Recent surveys show that Christian communities amount to less than five percent of the entire Middle Eastern population—less than one percent of the world's Christians—and their numbers are expected to drop even further. If current demographic developments continue, the Middle East's population of 12 million Christians will be halved by 2050. Over all, about 16 million Christians currently live in the Arab Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and Iran—a small minority, whose numbers are continuously decreasing within a total population that is nearing 300 million.

### **Christians and Nationalism in the Middle East**

While much of the decline is attributed to job-search emigration and falling birth rates, political turmoil in the wake of the ill-fated Arab Spring has accelerated the trend, notably in three Eastern Mediterranean states: in Syria (at least one in four Syrian Christians have left since the Syrian civil war began in 2011); Iraq; and Egypt (an estimated 93,000 Copts have left Egypt in the years following the 2011 toppling of President Mubarak).

Middle Eastern Christians suffer from intermittent repression and persecution in particular since the rise of the Arab nation-states and post-WWII decolonization. The rise of radical nationalism and rampant Islam; the recent Arab Spring repercussions; the decline in economic security; and the political and ethnic strife across the Middle East and North Africa are all factors that drive Christian mass emigration. The growth in Arab nationalism raised the perception of Middle Eastern Christians as unpatriotic. Christians living in Arab lands for centuries were suddenly branded as foreigners, disloyal to the Arab cause and religious infidels whose affiliations are seen as external if not downright inimical. This is a gross distortion of reality; some of the greatest pundits of Arab nationalism were Middle Eastern Christians, like George Antonius and Albert Hourani.

Apart from 'regular' or 'softer' blows like verbal and physical violence, Middle Eastern Christians have endured violation of basic human rights, inequality before the law; the destruction, desecration and burning of their churches, schools and cemeteries; property expropriations and compulsion to sell their homes and land; and coercion to wear 'proper' (Muslim) attire and abstinence from alcohol. Christian community leaders, clergy and political leaders—the Maronite Christian Gemayel family in Lebanon, for example—were assassinated and kidnapped; Christian women and young girls raped, forced into unwanted marriages,

enslaved and trafficked; and adults and children compelled to convert. In various Middle Eastern locales Christians may stay only if they pay poll tax. Churches are rapidly decreasing in number. Bell ringing, evangelizing and prayer within earshot of Muslims are all forbidden. YouTube is full of horrific videos showing Christians being beheaded, and in really gruesome cases even crucified or skewered alive. The dilemma of Eastern Christianity after two thousand years in the Middle East has not garnered any substantial global outrage, or anything like the protest against the Palestinians' plight (Meotti 2015).

### ***Christians in Israel***

As of December 2018, 175,000 Christians reside in Israel, about two percent of the population. About 78 percent of Israeli Christians are Arabs. In 2017, the Christian population grew by 2.2 percent, compared to 1.4 percent in the previous year. The increase resulted mostly from the immigration of 597 Falash Mura Christians from Ethiopia (Central Bureau of Statistics 2018). "We have no better friends in the world than the Evangelical community, and the Evangelical community has no better friend in the world than the State of Israel," declared Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel Foreign Ministry 2019). Indeed, the only place in the Middle East in which Christian community grows is Israel.

### ***Egyptian Copts***

Acute lack of security in Egypt enables radical Muslim groups to attack Copts, burn their churches and property, kidnap Coptic girls and force their conversion and marriage to non-Copts. Since early August 2013 mobs have attacked 63 churches and ransacked Christian orphanages and businesses across the nation. Allegedly, supporters of the ousted Muslim Brothers Party of ex-President Mohammad Morsi, seeking to avenge Christian support of the July 2013 military coup that toppled the Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers), perpetrated these hate crimes. In many cases the Egyptian police did not intervene (Bohn 2013, 8; Baker 2014, 26).

Closing churches in the wake of riots and violent Muslim protests is a tactic the Egyptian authorities use to appease Muslim fundamentalists, to the detriment of the Copts. 'Appeasing them is the easy way out of problems.' Coptic Solidarity, the strongest Coptic organization in North America, recently reported the closure of twelve Coptic churches following attacks by Muslim villagers (Ibrahim 2019). Also, according to published reports, female Christian students are asked to veil themselves on some Egyptian university campuses (Baker 2014, 27). The Copts' situation further deteriorated when the 2012 new Egyptian constitution, article 219, gave Sunni Muslim law priority in any future legal enactments. Another article reaffirms the inferior *dhimmi* status applied to Christians and Jews in Egypt. These conditions and Egypt's deteriorating economy have caused half a million Copts to leave in the last decade (Israel Foreign Ministry 2013).

Despite their dire situation, vehement controversies erupted recently between Egyptian Copts and their U.S. co-religionists in Coptic Solidarity. The disagreement revolved around the proposed U.S. Congress Resolution 673 in December 2017 pertaining to discrimination against



Egyptian Copts and violation of their rights (Meital 2018). The Resolution sharply criticized the apathy of Egyptian authorities and called for widespread reforms that would guarantee protection and equality for Egyptian Copts.

The Resolution aroused strong criticism in Egypt, particularly and unexpectedly among the Egyptian Copts themselves. The latter vehemently protested against this foreign intervention in Egyptian internal affairs. They reiterated that, historically, the Coptic Church has always seen itself as a patriotic Egyptian institution. They stressed that Copts “rely only on Allah and being helped solely by their Egyptian brothers [...] We and our Muslim Egyptian brothers, for better or worse are one bloc; we enjoy our rights and fulfil our obligations, and the Egyptian leadership properly deals with the Copts’ problems and needs” (Meital 2018).

The U.S. Congress Law for giving protection to the Copts is a brutal intervention in Egyptian internal affairs [...] Nobody denies that Copts in Egypt suffer from certain problems, whose origins are to be found within various Muslim religious circles that introduce erroneous ideas into the heads of ordinary people. [...] President al-Sisi emphasizes that Egypt belongs to all its citizens (Meital 2018).

Dr. Lila Takla, a Coptic politician and a Cairo University professor of law, who often writes for the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*, states in an open letter to American legislators that Egyptian Copts are not a foreign minority: “Christianity came to Egypt already during its early stages [...] Only later on Islam came to Egypt. All Muslims and Christian Egyptians live together for hundreds of years and the Copts are not a separate group or a community of foreign immigrants” (Meital 2018). Takla added that “Some people do not understand this situation, because it [the Egyptian Copts’ situation] is different from that of other countries to which immigrants come, looking for freedom or money.” Hamdi Rizk, who writes for the Egyptian *Al-Masri al-Yaum* newspaper, attacked the US Copts for betraying their Coptic brothers and selling out their Egyptian motherland for monetary gain like Judas Iscariot in his betrayal of Christ:

Jesus always knew that one of his disciples would betray him, but none of the Egyptian [Coptic] disciples of Jesus has ever guessed that an American Judas would betray his homeland and sell it for such a poor price. It occurred in nobody’s mind that an American Judas would connive with the [U.S. Congress] Jewish legislators for 30 silver coins (Meital 2018).

### **The 2000s: An Ottoman Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean?**

Turkey’s policies and intentions in the region are another common issue that occupies Israeli, Greek and Cypriot minds. Consequently, frequent three-way meetings and increased military and intelligence sharing have become commonplace in order to better understand, analyse and decipher the Turkish regional agenda.

However, warmer Greek–Israeli relations should not be seen as an anti-Turkey alliance. There is no intention, neither in Athens nor in Jerusalem, to alienate Turkey or build an anti-Turkish



axis in the Eastern Mediterranean. What concerns Athens, for example, are various moves that are perceived as Neo-Ottomanism or Pax-Ottomanism, both in the Middle East and the Balkans.

Turkey's relations with the US are close. The US needs a partner in Turkey on almost every Middle East issue, namely, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in Central Asia and the Caucasus. "OK, it [Syria] is all yours. We are done with the presence of American troops in Syria," President Donald Trump said recently to his Turkish counterpart, Recep Erdogan (TOI Staff 2018). Yet, the American President threatened to "devastate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds [in Syria]... Likewise, [we] do not want the Kurds to provoke Turkey" (Sullivan and Stark 2019). Matthew Bryza, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, stepped in and defined the change in Turkey's status and its implications for the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey, he said, has become a regional superpower and the US cannot ignore or pressure Turkey. Bryza addresses his words to Cyprus, but the relevance applies to the entire Near East: "When Greek Cypriot administration Parliament Speaker Marios Karoyan asked Bryza to put pressure on Turkey on the issue [of Cyprus], Bryza replied, 'The U.S. can't do it... If this were the '70s, '80s or '90s, it could, but the US putting pressure on Turkey now is out of the question'" (Bryza 2017, 178).

The deteriorating relations between Turkey and Israel and the current crisis in Turkish-Syrian ties against the backdrop of the latter's smouldering civil war are two subjects of intensive systemic implications. Relations between Israel and Turkey first began to deteriorate in 2004/2005 following reservations among American Jewish lobbies to 'explain' the Turkish policy vis-à-vis the Armenian genocide. The Turkish reactions to the lobbies' reluctance to support Ankara on this issue should be considered the crossroads in Turkey-Israel relations. Apparently a sigh of relief was heard then in Turkey: at long last Turkey could get rid of this lobbying. No need any more to rely on these lobbies' support; no need to have good relations with Israel (that in return 'explains' Turkey's policies vis-à-vis Washington); no need for Israeli lobbying on behalf of Turkey because the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement has at long last started (and quickly stopped); no need to pursue a policy of good relations with Israel that is clearly *not* in Turkey's best interest; no need to be blackmailed anymore by these lobbies. These and others were the rationales given in Ankara pertaining to the crisis in Turkey-Israel relations. That is to say, for years Turkish interests called for anti-Israeli policies, but Israel's backing in Washington—pure blackmail in Turkish eyes—forced Turkey to restrict and curtail its anti-Israeli policies:

We were blackmailed to have good relations with Israel. We were repeatedly told that Israel would help us in Washington to thwart attempts to define WWI killings of Armenians as genocide. True, the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement is only in its early stages but it finally has the potential to reduce the importance of Israeli lobbying in the US on behalf of Turkey. Finally we might be independent of the need of Israeli lobbying on our behalf in Washington. It is so good to get rid of this blackmailing! (Zenturk 2009)

Despite the June 2010 *Mavi Marmara* crisis and the Jewish lobbies' reservations pertaining to Turkey and the Armenian genocide, Turkey and Israel share important similarities. Following the *Mavi Marmara* event, *Haaretz* newspaper editor Aluf Benn specified these similarities in his article "What a Loss!" However, Benn's list of similarities probably confirms the existence of a genuine platform that in future may yield stronger Turkish–Israeli ties. Despite the *Mavi Marmara*, 440,000 Israeli tourists visited Turkey in 2018, an increase of 16 percent over 2017 (the majority are Israeli Arabs and the statistics do not include Israelis on transit flights via Turkey) (Rosenberg-Kandel 2019, 14).

### **What a Loss!**

*Aluf Benn (2010)*

- Both Ben-Gurion and Atatürk established secular states that aspired to become Western countries.
- Both countries are criticized for the way they treat their minorities.
- Both countries have suffered from the intervention and over-influence of the military on civilian life.
- In both countries the influence of religion has greatly increased.
- In both Turkey and Israel the present governments are actively doing away with Kemalism (also called Atatürkism) and Ben-Gurion's heritage and ideology, respectively.
- In both countries the executive branches work to weaken the courts and legal systems.
- One of the results of Erdogan's policies [vis-à-vis Israel] is greater [Israeli] cooperation on the military and intelligence levels with several countries in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Greece, Cyprus, Israel: Aerial and Naval Cooperation**

The Israeli army regularly trains with NATO and intensive cooperation has developed in the Eastern Mediterranean between the Greek, Italian and Israeli navies and air forces. The importance that the Israeli Air Force (IAF) attaches to this cooperation is of the highest level (Arkin 2018). Cyprus has no combat air force but Greece operates sophisticated Russian-made S-300 anti-aircraft missiles (that were meant for Cyprus) with which Syria and other Middle Eastern countries are equipped. Training against these missiles is crucial for the IAF combat and bomber jets, helicopters, transport aircraft and in-flight tankers, which regularly participate in these international exercises. By training first in Greece the IAF improves its capabilities on how to neutralize S-300 missiles and attack Iranian bases in Syria.

Over the years IAF planes have also landed at various air bases from Cyprus to Alaska, promoting three main aims: 1) to promote IAF exercise opportunities for its equipment and manpower, 2) to build constructive and positive 'military diplomacy' and 3) to create military cooperation (Arkin 2018). A 'behind the scenes' look sheds light on the backgrounds and procedures of these international aerial and naval exercises. The IAF sees cooperation with Cyprus and Greece as "a leap forward in becoming professional," hence:

In the IAF we refer to Cyprus as a close-to-home-training-range. IAF pilots trained there how to attack anti-aircraft missiles [on the ground]... The Greek Air Force [GAF] enables us to train in a topography that is different from the one at home: high mountains. We are allowed to fly at low altitudes [...] and] to fly together in various combat formations. The most important experience [is flying] at night at 10,000 feet in a mountainous area. Not easy, [...] even dangerous (Arkin 2018).

The basic IAF formation is four to eight aircraft; in international exercises many more aircraft and larger formations take part. With more aircraft in the air and frequent landings and take-offs, the margins are shorter and separations between aircraft are smaller. So to prevent accidents (e.g., mid-air collisions), IAF air-controllers also practice in these exercises. Because Israel is much smaller than Greece, Israeli pilots in training abroad have the opportunity to fly far longer distances than is possible at home.

The IAF also flies abroad for combat missions. In the 1999 Kosovo war, IAF air-tankers refuelled American jets on their combat missions. Training abroad often exposes the IAF command, technology and air-controlling echelons to new military and aerial procedures and profiles. In short, "You have to broaden your horizons," meaning that you learn how to fight in Lebanon by training first in Greece: "When you fly above the mountains of Greece, you remember that in Lebanon there are similar mountains, and they are different from the ones that you find at home. You have to remember that the aim of the IDF is not to have the war at home, but in a foreign area, something unknown to you" (Arkin 2018).

### **'The Same Olive Tree': Jewish and Israeli Images of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea**

Historically speaking, Jews and Israelis viewed Greece as an extension of their perception of the Mediterranean Sea. Alas, the Mediterranean has long been seen as a menace, a natural adversary that modern Israel—and certainly the pre-1948 Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine—have treated with caution and awe. Greece was perceived as part of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin—that is to say of the Levant, and not of Europe. Incidentally, up to a generation or two ago, Greece and Europe were not seen as one, even by Greeks: middle-aged Greeks, when boarding a plane from Athens to London, Paris or Berlin would say, '*Tha pao styn Evropi*'—I go to Europe.

Ruth Almog, a regular contributor to *Haaretz's* cultural and literary weekend supplement *Tarboot VeSifroot*, described Israeli intellectuals who wished to be connected to the Mediterranean world and who perceived Greece to be part and parcel of Mediterranean culture, exclusive of Europe. In her seminal article, 'Who Will Stand in the Shadow of the Olive Tree and in the Company of the Cricket?' Almog reviewed the Hebrew anthology of the renowned Greek poet Yannis Ritsos which clearly distinguished between Europe and Greece: the Mediterranean and Greek ideas were ideal substitutes to the geographically distant Europe (Almog 2014). The Continent is culturally different, it is threatening and deterring, likewise are its values. This is Europe that nearly exterminated all its Jews in the Holocaust. This is Europe

that only recently humiliated and inferiorized Greece in return for loans. Unlike Europe, the Mediterranean was not estranged from Israeli intellectuals: its flora and fauna were known to Palestinian Jews and to Israelis. The same olive tree, the same food, climate, sun, scenery and landscape are to be found in Israel as in Greece:

[We focused on the Mediterranean and Greece because] Western Europe was far away and not easily reachable as it is today.

Retrospectively, we [Israelis] looked for a Mediterranean identity. It expressed the connection that we had towards the olive tree—that symbol of a sunny entity that we can find in the Greek islands and in the area between us and Greece.

The Mediterranean Sea offered us the option to belong to a [larger] geographic culture [...]. When we considered ourselves as part of the Mediterranean Sea, our past and present worlds became wider and larger. True, we yearned for Greece [...] The entire Western philosophy is no more than footnotes to Plato.

[...] The yearning for Greece expressed longing for something primordial, more naïve, less urban, less spoiled. (Almog 2014)

Haaretz's essayist Aviram Golan is clearer describing the Greek culture that so attracts Israelis. Israelis imagine that 'good things are Greek things': it is the Greek scenery and human nature, it is Greek simplicity, the pleasure embodied in Greek singing and dancing, the healthy Greek food, the easy-going mood, the live-and-let-live atmosphere, and so on. Seemingly, Greece is a mirror image of the too modernized, computerized, and Westernized Israel:

It is interesting to examine the image of Greece in Israel. Part of it is based on the idealization Hollywood does to the noble savage: the Greeks live in picturesque houses on magnificent islands, they drink *ouzo*, they eat simple but healthy food, they live and let live, they grow moustaches, they sing in the *tavernas*, they do plate-smashing, they dance the *sirtaki* [...] and they joyfully shout *yasu!* (Golan 2011)

### **Alienating the Sea**

From the Jewish and Israeli historical perspective, the impression is that bad things come from the Mediterranean; the Biblical 'Great Sea' (*ha-yam ha-gadol* לְיָם הַגָּדוֹל) is vast, empty, forbidding. This negative perception of the Mediterranean pervaded Israeli urban culture, architecture and even the placement of railway lines.

Tel-Aviv, a relatively modern city established in 1909, turned its back on the Mediterranean Sea. A chain of high-rise hotels along Tel-Aviv's shoreline form a barrier between the city and the sea. Tel Aviv's main streets and boulevards run *parallel* to the sea, that is, north to south rather than perpendicular or east to west, which would have inserted and introduced the sea into the city. Barcelona is the opposite: the 1.2-kilometer Ramblas Promenade connects the city's centre Plaça de Catalunya to the Christopher Columbus monument at the port directly,

thus bringing the Mediterranean Sea deep into the heart of the city. Even the Promenade's paving-stone design is wave-shaped. Tel Aviv was different, because it "discovered quite late in the day that it is a coastal town—see the sharp turn that Allenby Road makes towards its end: suddenly those who paved the road discovered the [Mediterranean] Sea; and *suddenly they were haunted and attacked by the strongest of passions: to come closer to the sea*" (Balaban 2014, *italics added*).

Turning away from the sea and the havoc it causes to urban architecture is the gist of the protest of Ami Shinar, an Israeli architect hired to reconnect Israel's northern city of Haifa to its eponymous port on the Mediterranean Sea (Kril 2014, 52). Haifa was also physically separated from the seafront but neither by hotels nor north–south boulevards as in Tel Aviv. In Haifa the culprit was the north–south running railway line that bars the city from its port and the beach. Israeli media spared no words to criticize this anomaly (or abnormality):

It is so easy to point at the most wasted urban asset in Israel: it is Haifa Bay. Haifa is a city that is adjacent to the sea. It has a commercial port and seashore that could contribute enormously to the city's economic development and to the welfare of the people who live in Haifa. Alas, the city has been separated from the sea by fences, industrial zones [...] and [by ...] railroad tracks that create a barrier, an obstacle impossible to cross. At the end of 2017 [the municipal authorities] approved a plan [...] to lay sunken railway tracks instead of the ground-level tracks. [...] Thus the way has been cleared for the development of a new part of Haifa: a piece of land that is a natural continuation of the city joining it to the sea [...] This will be like in many other urban places in the world that meet the sea: from Brooklyn in New York to Nice in France (Moran 2019, 14).

Shinar's cry amounts to a complaint about the incomprehensible separation of Israelis from the Mediterranean Sea: "This is an unbelievable phenomenon. I really fail to comprehend it. Why? Why run away from the sea when you could stick to it like in every other normal Mediterranean town?" (Kril 2014). The following is an interview with Shinar—parts of it sound incredible—that describes the poor connection between Israeli towns and the Mediterranean:

[T]he last thing that you could say about these towns is that they are Mediterranean towns. Haifa, really, does not look like Piraeus, or at least for the moment doesn't resemble it. Where are we and where is the Mediterranean Sea? We are so separated from the Mediterranean atmosphere, and it is particularly so in our towns. Apart from Tel Aviv that somehow only just reaches the sea, none of our towns reaches the sea. [...] Why? Why run away from the sea? [...] Towns were planned and designed here [in Israel] that are [...] separated from the sea (Kril 2014).

### **Tel Aviv: Turning its Back on the Sea**

In 1919 when Tel Aviv was ten years old, its first Lord Mayor Meir Dizengoff declared that "Jews do not like to bathe in the sea," and instructed the people of Tel Aviv not to bathe in the

Mediterranean (Haaretz 2010). The first municipal beach where people were allowed to bathe and the first lifeguard services opened in Tel Aviv in 1928. The same Lord Mayor had plans to separate Tel Aviv from the sea by laying railroad tracks (*à la* Haifa) along Tel Aviv's seashore. He also planned to build the city's industrial quarter by the sea as a buffer separating Tel Aviv from the Mediterranean. Fortunately, people protested, frustrating the Lord Mayor's plans. Unlike in Haifa, tracks were not laid along Tel Aviv's seashore, permitting the city to gradually nuzzle up to the waterfront. That, however, did not stop the smelly hides and leather industry locating its premises by the shore, or the construction of the polluting Reading Electric Power Plant (now a public monument) at the mouth of the Yarkon River. Also, for years the city's sewage emptied directly into the sea.

The founders of Tel Aviv, described in a 2018 Haaretz feature article, initially proposed European-style architecture for the newest conurbation on the Eastern Mediterranean shore in a semi-arid climate. For example, it was to have steep, red-tiled roofs that suited the snow-covered buildings "built along the seashore of the North Sea"—to facilitate the sliding snow to fall off (Laor 2018). (Only once, in 1950, did a short snowstorm hit Tel Aviv). And to handle the Mediterranean gales [!] from the west, Tel Aviv's boulevards ran north–south to block high winds (Laor 2018).

### **Epilogue: The Arab World's Images of the Mediterranean Sea**

Perceiving the sea waters as a threat is not confined only to Jews. The building of mosques and tall minarets near shorelines serves as a good example demonstrating the Arab world's perception of the sea. With obligatory prayer services five times a day mosques are kept active day and night, around the clock. Mosques built by the sea thus serve a secondary purpose as guard stations, so the alarm could be raised whenever worshippers perceived invasion forces coming from the sea to attack harbours and their adjacent cities. To name but a few, from Acre in the north, via Sidna-Ali, Jaffa, Nebi, Isdud, Majdal Askalan to Gaza in the south—mosques lined the Palestinian Mediterranean seashore.

Having strategically placed mosques as guard posts was not the only Arab example pertaining to Mediterranean threats and reservations. For the Arab world, in fact for all Middle Easterners save perhaps the Maronite Christians in Lebanon who consider themselves to be descendants of the ancient Phoenicians, the sea is a constant disaster waiting to happen. Eyal Zisser described the way Middle Eastern Arabs view the Mediterranean:

Pan-Arabism [...] viewed the Mediterranean as hostile, even as a frontier to be converted into a fortified wall separating "them" from "us." Everything coming from beyond this sea was considered a threat. After all, it was from there—in the distant as well as the recent past—that the invader had come. Moreover, the Mediterranean Sea, and all that it symbolized, contained an ideological threat as well. The Mediterranean idea was considered cosmopolitan, an epithet in the Arab lexicon [...]. Thus, the sea was meant not to connect but to separate the Arabs on one side from the West and Europe on the other (Zisser 2003, 85).

Indeed, Napoleon, France, Great Britain, the British-French 1956 Suez Crisis against Egypt, the 5 June 1967 Israeli air force attack on Egypt's airfields and air force, the frequent US interventions and invasions into Arab countries, even the 2011 NATO led coalition operation in Libya that eventually toppled Muammar Ghaddafi's regime—all were foreigners who invaded the Arab Middle East via the Mediterranean. The Israeli air force's frequent raids on Iranian military bases in Syria during the years of 2011–2019 flew in from the Mediterranean. In short, all initiatives that attempted (some succeeded) to bring about the disintegration of the Arab Middle East came from the sea. Hence the title of our chapter: the Mediterranean Sea is both a threatening sea and a bridging sea.

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## CHAPTER 4:

# CYPRUS'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND THE TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIPS: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST APPROACH

*Zenonas Tziarras*

### Introduction

The 21st century has brought about changes on multiple political and socio-economic fronts, greatly impacting the structure of the international system. In this new era, the Eastern Mediterranean has become a space of growing importance, activity and tension. Located at the centre of this region, Cyprus has gradually re-discovered its neighbourhood; the island has sought to play a new role, looking into ways to maximize its security and ensure its survival while striving to instil its own vision to the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical order. The 2010s has thus far been a particularly pivotal decade for Cyprus's foreign policy and international standing. This has occurred, in large part, because of several developments that have allowed it to acquire a more pro-active role in its foreign affairs and to emerge as a central state in the growing networks of cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, dubbed 'trilateral partnerships,' a product of what is often called 'diplomacy of trilateral partnerships.'

This chapter examines Cyprus's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the context of its broader foreign policy and through the prism of its extant trilateral partnerships. Since 2010 a number of such partnerships have been formed: Cyprus-Greece-Israel, Cyprus-Egypt-Greece, and Cyprus-Greece-Jordan. At a more nascent stage are Cyprus's and Greece's synergies with Lebanon, Malta, Palestine and Italy while states such as France and the United States (US) are also considered potential participants. The main question to be answered is: why has Cypriot foreign policy become more energetic in the 2010s and what are its goals in the Eastern

Mediterranean? The subject in question is analysed using a neoclassical realist theoretical approach to explain the role of both the systemic (international system) and the unit level (domestic politics) in Cypriot foreign policy-making vis-à-vis the trilateral partnerships. Thus the chapter starts with a discussion on neoclassical realism and the way in which it is here operationalised. The next three sections focus respectively on: (a) the systemic level of analysis (including the regional level), (b) the unit level, and (c) the product of the interaction between the first two, namely, the foreign policy outcome (or the foreign policy behaviour).

I argue that changes in the systemic environment of Cyprus, especially since 2010, have enabled it to abandon a mostly *inactive* or *reactive* foreign policy in favour of a more *proactive* one by capitalizing on a number of geopolitical and geo-economic developments. The emergence of trilateral partnerships was in part a product of this new Cypriot foreign policy identity. At the same time the geopolitical environment and the trilateral partnerships have allowed Cyprus to develop – in conjunction with other neighbouring states – an external balancing strategy vis-à-vis Turkey that could not —or would not— develop in the past. However, one could argue that, despite the multiple benefits that this cooperative and balancing policy has brought about, it has contributed to the reshuffling of foreign policy preferences and domestic policy imperatives (in terms of the Cyprus Problem) in a way that might not necessarily be beneficial in the long run.

### **A Neoclassical Realist Analytical Framework**

Neoclassical realism (NcR) is a rather contemporary offshoot of neorealism (Rose 1998) that inter alia seeks to fill neorealism's theoretical gaps in the analysis of foreign policy (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009) and, most recently, in the analysis of international politics as well (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016). Neorealism is a theory of International Relations that is based on the analysis of the international system according to the configuration of and changes in its structure, the main units of which are the nation-states (Waltz 2010, 39-41). Neorealism sees the order of the international system as anarchic —an order in which the units “are distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks;” therefore, changes in the distribution of capabilities across states bring about changes in the structure of the international system (Waltz 2010, 97). Moreover, “States are differently placed by their power,” which is estimated based on their combined capabilities in “size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence” (Waltz 2010, 97, 131).

In a nutshell, NcR adopts this systemic approach but, unlike neorealism, does not see states merely as unitary actors – or ‘black boxes’ – whose domestic dynamics do not matter with regard to international political outcomes. Instead, NcR introduces intervening variables at the unit level, to consider the role of various domestic factors as well. In this sense, NcR also functions as a bridge between systemic and *Innepolitik* (domestic politics-based) theories of foreign policy. The incorporated intervening variables will vary in type and number depending on the subject and case study under examination; examples of intervening variables in the

literature include: political culture, ideology, interest groups, leaders, strategic culture, perceptions, domestic institutions, etc. (Ripsman 2009; Schweller 2008; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016; Rose 1998; Tziarras 2014). Intervening variables and their effects on foreign policy-making are analysed in conjunction with the system-level (or independent) variables; their interaction results in the foreign policy outcome (i.e., foreign policy behaviour, or the dependent variable), which as explained below, may vary.

An in-depth theoretical discussion on NcR and its value vis-à-vis other theories falls outside the scope of this paper. The NcR framework is, rather, employed here to the end of providing a more theoretically informed analysis of Cyprus's foreign policy and more clarity in terms of the factors and processes that have affected its development. The independent, intervening and dependent variables to be operationalised in this paper are laid out below.

### ***The System Level – Independent Variables***

As mentioned earlier, the international system and its structure are central to both the neorealist and neoclassical realist analysis. In general, realists view “international politics as a never-ending struggle among states for power and influence in a world of finite resources and uncertainty about each other’s intentions and capabilities” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 43). Neoclassical realists, however, do not see this international anarchy as an “independent causal force” but as a “permissive condition” (Walt 2002, 211) under which the “relative distribution of power and power trends are the explanatory variables” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 43). As such, this theoretical framework takes into account the traditional independent variable of *International Distribution of Power* (and changes within it); at the same time, however, it goes beyond the neorealist paradigm towards the better understanding of the functions of the international system and the state responses by incorporating the independent variable of *Systemic Clarity* (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016).

*International Distribution of Power* relates to the power standing – as defined earlier – of each state in the international system relative to other states. Depending on the number of great powers, and “their control over sufficient material components of power as well as the political and bureaucratic means to extract and mobilize these resources,” one can determine the international system’s polarity and structure (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 45) — namely, whether the system has only one superpower (unipolar), two great powers (bipolar), or three or more great powers (multipolar). Each of these structures entails a certain balance or imbalance of power which, in turn, affects the foreign policy of states. Imbalances of power usually produce threat perceptions and prompt some states to follow security maximization and survival strategies such as balancing and bandwagoning, even as they enable others to pursue revisionist strategies (Trubowitz 2011; 9-23, Schweller 2014). The next independent variable provides insight on the clarity of systemic threats, opportunities and state responses.

*Systemic Clarity* is an independent variable suggested by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016, 46) that refers to the “clarity of signals and information the international system presents to states.” According to the same authors, clarity has three components (Ripsman, Taliaferro,

and Lobell 2016, 46):“(1) the degree to which threats and opportunities are readily discernible; (2) whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities; and (3) whether optimal policy options stand out or not.” Most importantly, clear threats are those that come primarily from states and have three characteristics: “(1) revisionism or expressed hostility to harm the state’s territorial integrity or core interests; (2) the economic and military capability to inflict harm on the state, which depends on geography and technology; and (3) a sense of imminence” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 46). On the other hand, clear opportunities stem from the improvement of a state’s capabilities – e.g., economic and military – relative to other states, the decline of capabilities of adversarial state(s), or a combination of the two (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 46–47). From this perspective, the variable of *systemic clarity* allows for the better understanding of changes in foreign policy over time in conjunction with systemic transitions and changes in the distribution of power.

### ***The Unit Level – Intervening Variables***

As regards the unit level of analysis, namely, the role of domestic factors in foreign policy-making, this theoretical framework employs the intervening variable of *Leader Images*. Neoclassical Realism holds that intervening variables “condition whether and how states respond to the international systemic pressures that all realists assume underlie foreign policy, grand strategy, and international politics” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 58). In this light, intervening variables function as “filters” between systemic stimuli and the foreign policy outcome (Rose 1998). To a large extent, it is this notion that distinguishes NcR from neorealism, insofar as it attributes causal power to domestic factors instead of relying on system-level pressures alone.

In this context, the *leader images* intervening variable concerns the beliefs and perceptions of decision-makers who make up the foreign policy executive (FPE), namely, state leaders, ministers, advisors and other individuals with key roles in the making of foreign and security policy. The perceptions at the FPE level are perhaps the most important intervening variables since these individuals are the first to deal with, filter and respond to systemic stimuli.

### ***Foreign Policy Outcome – Dependent Variable***

Since NcR is concerned with the process between the systemic and unit level that leads to certain foreign policy outcomes, it is possible that different processes or combinations of factors will produce different foreign policy outcomes. As Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman (2009, 21) put it, “Neoclassical realism seeks to explain variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints.” For this reason, it is necessary to analyse the foreign policy of a state in relation to more than one possible foreign policy outcome so that we can better discern which combination or relationship of foreign policy drivers leads to one outcome or the other (Schweller 2008; Rose 1998; Tziarras 2014).

For the purposes of this paper, the variation in the dependent variable is examined along the lines of *inactive/reactive* and *proactive* foreign policy behaviour. The first outcome refers to

a (sub-optimal) foreign policy behaviour that for whatever reason demonstrates *inactivity/reactivity* even in the face of important security imperatives, while the latter outcome concerns a more energetic and 'appropriate' (or optimal) foreign policy behaviour in relation to the security needs and core interests of the state. The two categories are subsequently further elaborated based on specific strategies followed in given environments of high or low systemic clarity. To better illustrate the particularities of the two different foreign policy behaviours, and the transition from one to the other, the analysis of the dependent variable accounts briefly for Cyprus's pre-2011 foreign policy behaviour as well.

### **Systemic Level: A New World Order and the Eastern Mediterranean**

This section analyses the two independent-systemic variables, starting with the *international distribution of power* that deals with the changing structure of the international system (including at the broader regional level of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, MEEM). It then moves on to the variable of *systemic clarity* that demonstrates the (in)security implications of the first independent variable for the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus more specifically.

#### ***International Distribution of Power***

The post-Cold War order has been one of historic international transitions. In the span of less than 20 years, the international system has moved from bipolarity (Cold War order) to unipolarity and, according to many, is now in the process of transitioning towards multipolarity (Zakaria 2011; Schweller 2014; Nasr 2012), although others have also spoken of uni-multipolarity (Huntington 1999), non-polarity (Haas 2008), etc. The debate essentially revolves around whether the power and standing of the United States (US) in the international system is declining, and whether other states or coalitions of states have managed to elevate themselves, thus mitigating the power gap that existed between the US and other great powers. The jury is still out on whether the structure of the international system is now multipolar, albeit such a claim would be rather exaggerated at this point. What can be argued is that the current world order, fluid and uncertain as it is, has created power vacuums and made space for regions and states of various calibres to become more important, more outward-looking and assertive (Buzan and Waever 2003; Schweller 2014; Litsas 2015).

In the MEEM area, the dynamics of global power transitions have manifested especially through the ongoing war in Syria since 2011. The war broke out at a time when the US had virtually withdrawn from the Middle East, having concluded its major military and peacebuilding operations in Iraq. The power vacuum in Iraq was filled by regional states that were already involved in the country's internal affairs and sectarian conflicts (i.e., Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey), although Iran was ultimately the one to consolidate its influence over Baghdad (Fawcett 2013). This was a great blow to American strategy and sphere of influence in the region. Thus the war in Syria – a close ally of Iran – presented the US with a good opportunity to cripple Iran's regional clout via the replacement of the Syrian regime with a pro-western one. But in another error, the complexities and particularities of Syria – including

the regime's resilience, Iranian and Hezbollah support – were evidently underestimated by western states. Eventually the power equilibrium of the war changed to the benefit of the Bashar al Assad regime in 2015 when Russia intervened at the Syrian government's request.

As of the end of 2018 Russia – along with Iran and Hezbollah – has effectively helped Assad to take back approximately 75 percent of Syria's territories. The US sphere of influence is now restricted to the area east of the Euphrates River where American troops support the Kurdish forces against the Islamic State (which was officially declared defeated in March 2019) and boost their own military presence. What is more, in December 2018, American President Donald Trump announced that US forces would soon withdraw from Syria. In other words, American power in the Middle East since the end of the 2010s has shrunk significantly, albeit not entirely, prompting the Donald Trump administration to try to find ways of managing the geopolitical damage of the past and readjusting American strategy in the area. Russia's tacit openings to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and beyond further testify to the intensifying clash between the American and Russian spheres of influence.

There have been three main and overlapping geopolitical consequences of this emerging reality: (a) some middle and smaller powers have found the opportunity to develop a more independent foreign policy (see, e.g., Turkey and Iran); (b) others have tried to exploit the fluidity to manoeuvre between the two great powers and maximize their own benefits, if possible, from both (e.g., Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and Saudi Arabia); and (c) new regional tensions or processes of cooperation have arisen, not least because of the new security needs and opportunities that occurred, thus rendering the regional level of analysis more salient, complex and important (Tziarras 2016a; Litsas 2015; Buzan and Waever 2003). In Kenneth Waltz's (1967, 222) words:

When great powers are in a stalemate, lesser states acquire an increased freedom of movement. That this phenomenon is now noticeable tells us nothing new about the strength of the weak or the weakness of the strong. Weak states have often found opportunities for manoeuvre in the interstices of a balance of power.

As such, the regional distribution of power in the 2010s, apart from the superiority of the two main great powers operating and exerting power in the region (i.e., the US and Russia), ended up being quite uneven and unstable – akin to a multipolar regional order. Based on a juxtaposition of five different power indexes that collectively account for a wide range of different power variables including the most standard ones (see Table I), e.g., military power, economic and political capabilities, geographic size, population size, etc.,<sup>1</sup> Turkey is the most

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<sup>1</sup> The indexes are all from 2018 and calculated as follows: 1) the National Power Index (NPI) accounts for the winning and losing probabilities when two nations compete, in wars, business, or sports based on the size of population, the quality of manpower and the interaction of the two; 2) the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) accounts for the components of population size, total urban population, total steel and iron production, total primary energy consumption, total military personnel, and total military budget; 3) the Gross National Income Index (GNI) is purely economic and measured by the relative size of gross-national income, see, <http://www.nationalpower.info/>; 4) the



powerful state of the Eastern Mediterranean followed by Egypt, Israel, Greece, Lebanon and Cyprus in that order.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, as realist theory posits, power imbalances produce security dilemmas, threats and/or threat perceptions (Walt 1987; Waltz 2010; Schweller 2008). And as seen below, in the *systemic clarity* variable, the degree of clarity regarding the nature of external threats is important in developing the right policy responses.

**Table I: The Eastern Mediterranean Balance of Power**

Eastern Mediterranean Power Ranking	Countries	National Power Index (NPI)	Composite Index of National Capability (CINC)	Gross National Income Index (GNI)	Global Firepower Index (GFI)	US News Power Rankings
1.	USA (extra-regional)	1	2	1	1	8
2.	Russia (extra-regional)	11	5	6	2	26
3.	Turkey	21	12	12	9	36
4.	Egypt	42	21	26	12	42
5.	Israel	30	44	50	16	30
6.	Greece	32	43	48	28	28
7.	Lebanon	81	90	84	106	75
8.	Cyprus	94	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### *Systemic Clarity*

In this security environment that emerged in the second decade of the new millennium, the Eastern Mediterranean attracted more attention as a distinct geopolitical space (a sub-region or sub-regional security complex) —one of growing networks of cooperation and new points of contention, such as the newly found natural resources (Stivachtis 2019; Tziarras 2018; Tziampiris 2019). In fact, Cyprus, which in the midst of global and regional geopolitical transitions re-discovered its neighbourhood and redefined its role, had an instrumental part in shaping the new Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical order through the pursuit of and contribution to the formation of the trilateral partnerships. For Cyprus, the regional imbalance of power was not something new; it was always there, producing uncertainty and security threats. But perhaps for the first time the systemic circumstances allowed for a different management of its external environment. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016, 49-50) explain that,

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Global Firepower Index (GFI) concerns mainly the national military power and utilizes over 55 individual factors such as the number and kind of weapons (including nuclear weapons), geographical factors, natural resources, population size, financial stability, and military staff and personnel, see, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>; and 5) the US News Power Rankings measures power in terms of wealth, success, and quality of life according to 65 country attributes grouped into the following nine categories: adventure, citizenship, cultural influence, entrepreneurship, heritage, movers, open for business, power and quality of Life, see, <https://media.beam.usnews.com/ce/e7/fdca61cb496da027ab53bef37a24/171110-best-countries-overall-rankings-2018.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The list only includes Eastern Mediterranean states that are participating or potentially participating (Lebanon) in the trilateral partnership formations.

With greater degree of clarity about the nature of threats and opportunities the states face, the time frame in which they are expected to materialize, and the optimal policy responses, variance in policy choices across states and across societal coalitions within states should be low. Conversely, the less clarity there is, the greater room there is for particular leaders, parties, and states to pursue unique solutions based on their preferences, parochial interests, or strategic cultures.

In 2011, and further into the decade, two important developments coincided in the Eastern Mediterranean. First, Turkish foreign policy was taking a different turn, moving away from the 'zero problems with neighbours' (Davutoglu 2008) principle towards a more self-centred approach that was partly to blame for the country's deteriorating relations with Israel, Egypt, and Greece —not to mention Cyprus (Kouskouvelis 2013). Effectively, Ankara alienated these countries to one degree or the other, leaving them with no option but to look for other relationships, not least to deal with Turkish hostility. Second, the discovery of hydrocarbons off Cyprus and later Egypt, in addition to those of Israel, gave rise to new opportunities as well as security needs. The two developments together shaped the systemic environment that pushed Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel closer together (Tziarras 2016b; Teff-Seker, Eiran, and Rubin 2018, 623).

What is more, the discovery of hydrocarbons and the intensified efforts for cooperation in the region led Turkey to adopt a more threatening foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis Cyprus but more recently against Egypt and Israel as well (Theodoulou 2011; Daily Sabah 2018; Chrysopoulos 2018). This reality fits the first element of the definition of clear threats, as previously mentioned, namely, state revisionism or expressed hostility. In terms of the second element, there is no doubt that Turkey – as the most powerful state of the region – has the economic capacity to "inflict harm on the state," while, as far as the third element is concerned, there has been a sense of imminence (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 46) regarding the Turkish threats that was very clearly affirmed when the Turkish navy blocked the drillship of the Italian company ENI from proceeding to a drilling location within the Cypriot EEZ (Kambas 2018). Therefore, what started between Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel as a collaboration scheme mainly founded on mutual energy-economic benefits, quickly transformed into a careful balancing act against the Turkish power projection and threats.

The situation has been especially challenging for Cyprus as its own capabilities are very limited and do not allow it to deal with Turkey by itself. Yet in this increasingly insecure setting, Cyprus was this time able to find partners and pursue a much more pro-active foreign policy than in the past. The policy options and opportunities that arose for Cyprus out of this systemic environment are further discussed below, under the dependent variable. The following section examines the role of domestic factors in relation to the systemic level of analysis.

### **Unit Level: A Shift in International Orientation**

It could be argued that Cyprus entered a new era in its foreign affairs after its European Union (EU) accession in 2004. Yet it was not until the 2010s that it adopted a more pro-active foreign

policy. Paradoxically, the first Cyprus-Israel rapprochement took place under the governance of leftist AKEL and President Demetris Christofias, traditionally pro-Palestinian, Eurosceptic, and critical of Israel's policies. It was a pragmatic decision in light of the new reality that Cyprus had to face. The 2013 Presidential elections brought to power Nikos Anastasiades and his party, the Democratic Rally (DISY), a right-wing and pro-western political party. Anastasiades was re-elected to the presidency in 2018 and it was during his time in office that the idea of trilateral partnerships evolved and expanded even more. In that sense, the perceptions within the government itself, analysed under *leader images* are important to better understand the foreign policy behaviour of Cyprus during the 2010s in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### *Leader Images*

The Anastasiades government had no reservations in dealing with Israel and vowed to strengthen the international role of Cyprus. For example, his 2017 pre-election political programme read (Anastasiades 2017, 71, 75):

On our own – Cypriot – initiative we have formed together with Greece as well, Trilateral Partnerships with Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. These are alliances<sup>3</sup> that are already on a dynamic track towards materializing certain projects and actions. At the same time they have set the foundations for business collaborations and investments from and to Cyprus, which are already bringing results and demonstrate great potential. Our aim is to bring all of our alliances into a regional informal forum, soon to be transformed into an important security and cooperation leverage for the whole region. [...] Cyprus is transforming into an energetic protagonist and reliable bridge between Europe and the Southeastern Mediterranean. [...] We managed all of the threats and attempts to destabilize and prevent our drilling initiatives with decisiveness and – most importantly – safety, thus shielding Cyprus and our energy prospects.

The persisting problematic relations of Turkey with Israel, Egypt, and Greece respectively on the one hand, and the initial success of the trilateral meetings with Israel – and later with Egypt – on the other, encouraged the Cypriot government to keep the course and invest in this project. In this context, Cyprus sought to become more important not only for the neighbouring states but for international actors as well. For example, in November 2018, during a Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels, Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides and Savvas Angelides, stated that “the policy of deepening and broadening the relations of Cyprus with neighbouring countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including the strengthening of tripartite partnerships, was also part of the EU's policy to promote security and defence issues in the region” (Gold News 2018). Anastasiades also attached “particular importance to the interest shown by the US in participating in the tripartite

<sup>3</sup> Based on the mainstream political narrative these partnerships are alliances; in reality they are not, however, as they do not fulfill the criteria of an alliance. It has been argued elsewhere that for the time being they can at best be called “quasi-alliances” (Tziarras 2016b).

Greece-Cyprus-Israel" (Cyprus Mail 2018), which was affirmed when US State Secretary Mike Pompeo participated in the 6th trilateral meeting between Cyprus, Greece and Israel and expressed his support for the partnership on 20 March 2019.

Moreover, according to Christodoulides (2018),

Cyprus has adopted the view that hydrocarbons can become the new coal and steel, in a new regional context. A tool of cooperation and synergies that would create an economy of scale, an inviting environment for companies and investors; a tool that would meet the energy security needs of the region and that [sic] of the EU and gradually contribute to greater stability in relations among countries of the region and promote security and peace. And ultimately, why not, a catalyst for greater, more institutionalized political co-operation in the region.

Referring to Cyprus's energy exploration programme in an interview, Anastasiades remarked, "I hope that Turkey will refrain from any hostile act... I don't want to involve any military... but it's up to the United States to protect their own interests... Be sure that we have done whatever it [sic] is necessary to be done in order to succeed to the energy programme of the Republic" (Al Jazeera 2018). Cyprus's vision for a more stable and integrated Eastern Mediterranean is thus evident; but it is only one piece of the puzzle. It is also clearly connected to its efforts to ensure its security and survival. Based on the above statements, it can be argued that in recent years the Cypriot government has made every effort to involve different actors in its regional activities, as it understands and feels the systemic pressures, particularly the Turkish threat. From the EU and the US, even Russia for a time (Socor 2012), to international companies and other states of the region, Cyprus has tried to get support from every actor and state possible.

After all, other research has showed that at the official, policy and decision-making, level in Cyprus, Turkey is traditionally considered to be the primary security threat; yet the new security environment of the 2010s, including the aspect of energy security, has rendered the Turkish threat much more salient, imminent, and clearer (Tziarras 2018b). For the most part of the history of the Turkey-Cyprus dispute, the Cyprus Problem has been the central issue and Cyprus has always tried to garner the support of the international community in the various peace processes that have taken place over the years, towards a 'just, viable, and functional' solution of the Cyprus Problem. After 2004, Cypriot governments tried to capitalise on the country's EU membership as well. With the discovery of hydrocarbons and the formation of the trilateral partnerships, the Turkey-Cyprus dispute was no longer only about the Cyprus Problem – although the issue of natural resources is connected to that as well. Suddenly, Cyprus became an obstacle to the broader strategy of Turkey and thus the recipient of a harsher Turkish stance.

As the new regional dynamics were evolving, the Russian-Turkish relationship deteriorated over the Syria conflict and the downing of a Russian Su-24 jet by a Turkish F-16 in 2015. Just prior to the aircraft incident Nicosia tried to exploit the growing rift between the two countries by seeking deeper relations with Russia (Gotev 2015), an already strong partner of Cyprus. But six months later Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan apologised to his Russian counterpart,

Vladimir Putin, ushering in a period of normalisation and growth for the relations between the two countries. The next window of opportunity that opened for Nicosia was with the worsening Turkey-US relations, especially after the Trump administration imposed certain sanctions on Turkey over the issue of then imprisoned Pastor Andrew Brunson and other political prisoners in Turkey (Goldman and Harris 2018). This enabled the more salient expression of the already declared pro-western orientation of Anastasiades's government.

From there onwards, Cyprus intensified its efforts to strengthen its relations with the US, with President Anastasiades going so far as to suggest that NATO could be considered as a potential guarantor of a Cyprus settlement (Gilson 2018). That was a rather bold thing to say given the sensitivities of both the Greek-Cypriot left and Cyprus's long-time partner, Russia; in fact, Moscow responded to the deepening Cyprus-US relationship by saying that further military build-up by the US in Cyprus would lead to Russian reaction. Seen from this perspective, the systemic level created certain security needs and opportunities for Cyprus in the 2010s, but the more outward and pro-western tendencies of the Anastasiades/DISY government (i.e., the leader images) ultimately made an impact on the foreign policy behaviour and international orientation of Cyprus during the period in question. This intervening role and the content of Cyprus's foreign policy behaviour are further detailed under the dependent variable.

An additional intervening variable that could be analysed is that of *state-society relations*, which concern issues of societal pressures on the government or the societal legitimisation (or lack thereof) of state policies. However, for the purposes of this paper it will suffice to explain that Greek-Cypriot public opinion is, generally speaking, in favour of, or pushing for, policies that try to deal with the Turkish threat. There are occasional reactions from political parties depending on whether a government is leaning more to the West or Russia, such as AKEL's reactions to Anastasiades's NATO comments or Russia's concern regarding the US-Cyprus relationship. And yet, unless Anastasiades's – or any government's – policies actually create problems for Cyprus, the public does not raise significant obstacles, especially if the policy seems to be as successful as do the project of trilateral partnerships and the closer relationship with the US. After all, it has been argued that in more high-risk environments, it is also more permissible for the national security executive to "ignore domestic political interests and formulate security policy with the overriding goal of securing the state" (Ripsman 2009, 186).

### **Dependent Variable: The Age of Proactivity**

To better understand the reasons behind Cyprus's foreign policy changes during the 2010s and its actual outcomes we need to examine this period separately from previous years. The questions would then be: what generated Cyprus's proactivity after 2011 and what distinguishes its foreign policy from that of previous years? Also: in what ways does this new foreign policy manifest? Before proceeding to answering these questions, we first need to define the foreign policy variation under examination, namely, *inactivity/reactivity* and *proactivity*. It is here defined on the basis of reasonable or unreasonable responses to external threats or, more specifically, according to whether or not Cyprus pursues appropriate balancing strategies vis-à-vis Turkey. As Schweller (2008, 9) explains:

balancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition. Balancing exists only when the stakes concern some form of political subjugation or, more directly, the seizure of territory, either one's homeland or vital interests abroad (e.g., sea lanes, allies, colonies, etc.).

According to this definition, it is only reasonable for Cyprus to pursue balancing policies and opportunities vis-à-vis Turkey, not only because of the territorial occupation of the island's north but also because of Turkey's claims over Cyprus's maritime sovereign rights in the south. And since internal balancing is difficult due to Cyprus's limited (relative) capabilities across all power components, external balancing stands out as a more feasible and promising option. To appropriate balancing efforts we could also add the notion of 'soft balancing,' which includes the use of "international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements" and takes place when hard/military-balancing against a more powerful aggressor (such as Turkey) "is too costly for any individual state and too risky for multiple states operating together;" this strategy employs "nonmilitary tools" to the end of delaying, frustrating, and undermining the aggressor's unilateral (military) policies (Pape 2005, 9-10). It should be noted that soft balancing differs significantly from non-balancing as the former is characterised by much more active and targeted efforts.

From this perspective, the *inactivity/reactivity* variation is associated with the (sub-optimal) foreign policy strategies of non-balancing and under-balancing, whereas *proactivity* is associated with appropriate balancing, including soft balancing. The characteristics of these strategies are presented in Table II according to definitions by Schweller (2008, 10) and Robert Pape (2005, 9-10) in terms of 'soft balancing.'

**Table II: Variation in the Dependent Variable & Foreign Policy Strategies**

Foreign Policy Behaviour Variations	Strategies	Definition
Foreign Policy Inactivity or Reactivity	Non-balancing	Inaction, normal diplomacy, buck-passing, bandwagoning, appeasement, engagement, distancing, or hiding.
	Under-balancing	When the state does not balance or does so inefficiently in response to a dangerous and unappeasable aggressor.
Foreign Policy Proactivity	(Appropriate) Balancing + Soft Balancing	Creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances + international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangement.

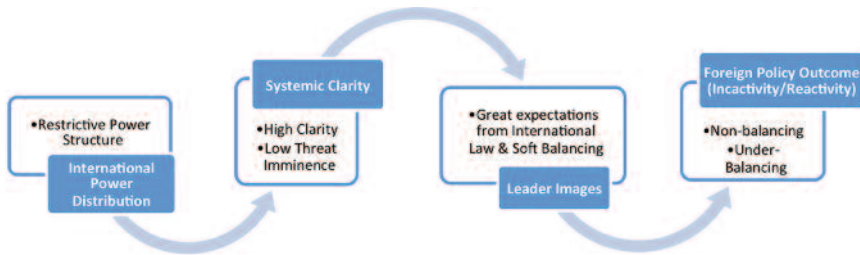
### ***Cyprus's Pre-2011 Foreign Policy***

As analysed above, Cyprus's pre-2011 foreign policy vis-à-vis Turkey, and the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly, was rather reserved. Diplomatic initiatives were exhausted in fora such as the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe while, apart from a short-lived defence alliance with Greece (see, Tsilikas 2001), inter-state balancing was largely limited to good relations with Russia – an important state for Cyprus due to its permanent position in the UN Security Council and beyond (Melakopides 2016) – and relatively balanced, if shallow, relations with the US. Relations with Israel were also relatively shallow given Cyprus's close ties with the Arab world. Furthermore, initiatives for internal balancing were limited in relation to the Turkish military power, with perhaps the most important example being Cyprus's failed attempt to import the Russian S-300 missiles in 1998 (Stürchler 2007, 146-150).

After 2004 and Cyprus's accession to the EU, things changed slightly in the sense that Cyprus obtained a degree of diplomatic leverage against Turkey because of the latter's efforts to enter the EU. However, this strategy brought limited, if any, significant results, while the nature of Cypriot foreign policy did not shift in any noteworthy way; after 2004 it merely included the EU in its toolbox of international diplomacy vis-à-vis the Cyprus Problem – and with limited results. It was an ambitious and yet largely ineffective attempt at soft balancing due to the limited power multiplication effect it offered. During that time, and particularly after EU accession, as well as a few years prior to it, expectations among Greek-Cypriot leaders and the public grew with regards to the prospect of attaining diplomatic leverage over Turkey through the EU, especially in terms of the results that this could bring about as far as Turkey's position on the Cyprus Problem (see, Vassiliou 2004, Christou 2002, Theophanous 2000, Kyris 2012, Kaymak 2006). In addition, the Cypriot governments of that time were not yet ready to break away from the traditional pro-Russian and pro-Arab foreign policy.

Therefore, because of the non-permissiveness of the systemic environment but also the perceptions and expectations of Greek-Cypriot leaders, one could argue that in Cyprus's pre-2011 foreign policy, non-balancing and under-balancing were the predominant strategies generally speaking, and more specifically in relation to Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean (see Figure I). It was a foreign policy primarily characterised by normal diplomacy and buck-passing, namely, the effort of getting someone else (usually a great power) "to check the aggressor" while remaining on the sidelines (Mearsheimer 2001, 139) – be it the UN, Russia, Greece, or the EU. Moreover, engagement is a standard strategy in Cyprus's toolbox as it is constantly trying to engage Turkey indirectly through its participation in the various cycles of peace talks with the Turkish-Cypriots for the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. In addition, the example of its defence alliance with Greece in the 1990s could be also seen as under-balancing given its ineffectiveness and short life.



**Figure I: Cyprus's 2004-2011 Foreign Policy**

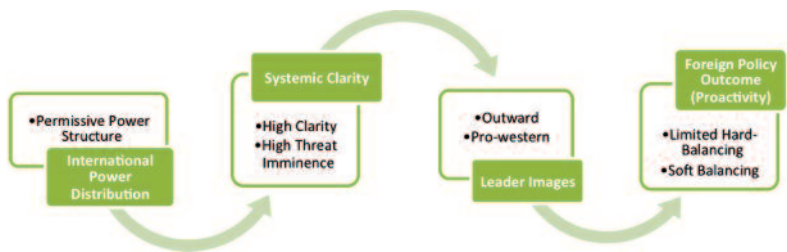
### Post-2011 Foreign Policy

This foreign policy, which has evolved since 2011, has become more energetic as explained above. The scheme of trilateral partnerships together with the hydrocarbons discoveries have become the cornerstone of Cyprus's 'new' foreign policy, and the Eastern Mediterranean the primary space of its manifestation. Contrary to the systemic environment prior to 2011, the international and regional distribution of power in the 2010s became much more permissive for Cyprus to attempt certain foreign policy openings, with the primary factors being the regional power vacuum and the reconfiguration of Turkish foreign policy as examined under the systemic level of analysis (see also Figure II and Table III). Systemic clarity has always been high for Cyprus, which can be attributed to the Turkish military presence on the island; the Turkish threat has been clear and pressing at least since 1974. However, the *sense of imminence* component regarding the clarity of the Turkish threat (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 46) increased significantly after 2011 especially with regards to Cyprus's maritime/energy security.

Further to the systemic circumstances, *leader images* under the Anastasiades government had an important intervening role as they filtered the systemic stimuli in such a way that allowed for the capitalisation of the changing geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean and enabled the realisation of a shift in Cyprus's international orientation towards the West without, however, disregarding relations with Russia – at least officially. In that sense, Cyprus gradually developed a more proactive foreign policy and to an important degree moved away from inactivity and reactivity, namely, ineffective, sub-optimal and *ad hoc* foreign policy decisions. As mentioned earlier, this proactivity manifested in a number of ways, both at the international and regional levels; for example, with the expansion of the Republic's defence attachés abroad, the active participation in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and the signing of a statement of intent on security cooperation with the US (see, e.g., Papaioakeim 2018). Regionally, it did so with the development of deeper bilateral relations inter alia with Greece, Israel, Egypt, and Lebanon respectively and, of course, with the formation of the trilateral partnerships. It is worth noting that relations with Israel and Greece – as well as with Egypt to a smaller degree – have also acquired a growing security and defence component. Moreover, Israel and Egypt's open support for Cyprus vis-à-vis Turkey's threats (Daily Sabah 2018) makes it hard to argue that their cooperation is not – also – a balancing act against the Turkish activity in the Eastern Mediterranean.



Figure II: Cyprus's post-2011 Foreign Policy



In this light, Cyprus during the 2010s has not only adopted a rather successful, thus far, soft balancing strategy via the trilateral partnerships and their interconnection with a more pro-western orientation through the EU and the US, but it also achieved some external hard-balancing via the strengthened security and defence relations with other coastal states and beyond (see Figure II), not to mention the involvement of energy companies of international interests in its energy exploration operations (e.g., Exxon Mobil, Qatar Petroleum, Total, and ENI). Lastly, based on what has been analysed thus far, Cyprus's pursued goals in the Eastern Mediterranean could be broadly summarised as the following two: (a) the management of the Turkish threat and the resolution of the Cyprus Problem through an enhanced and balancing-orientated foreign policy; and (b) the attainment of a greater regional and, by extension, international role that would contribute to regional stability, security and economic development.

Table III: Dependent Variable – Summary of Change in Cyprus's Foreign Policy

Foreign Policy Period	Foreign Policy Behaviour Variation	Strategies	Characteristics
Pre-2011	Inactivity / Reactivity	Non-balancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Absence of appropriate hard/soft balancing</li><li>• Ineffective alliance formation attempts</li><li>• International Organizations/ International Law fixation</li></ul>
		Under-balancing	
Post-2011	Proactivity	Soft-balancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation in EU security structures</li><li>• Defence Diplomacy</li><li>• Trilateral Partnerships</li></ul>
		Hard-balancing	

## Conclusions

This paper has sought to explain why Cypriot foreign policy became more energetic in the 2010s, and to identify Cyprus's pursued goals in the Eastern Mediterranean. Both the systemic and domestic leadership factors were taken into account in reaching the conclusions regarding Cyprus's post-2011 proactive foreign policy that pursued a more appropriated external balancing strategy vis-à-vis Turkey as well as the establishment of broad networks of international cooperation (including the trilateral partnerships). Furthermore, it has been illustrated that Cyprus's foreign policy goals in the Eastern Mediterranean are related to the management of the Turkish threat as well as the country's greater regional and international role. And yet it can be suggested that the multiple benefits that derive from the rather successful cooperative and balancing policy externally have led the Cypriot government to refocus its priorities on foreign policy, without working on a causal linkage between foreign policy successes and domestic policy or security imperatives.

More specifically, it seems that there is the expectation that a proactive foreign policy could be a catalyst for the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. But if the aspect of intercommunal relations and negotiations with the Turkish-Cypriot community is disregarded or downplayed, in the expectation that the negotiating power of the Republic of Cyprus will suddenly grow vis-à-vis the Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot side, foreign policy benefits might become more difficult to reap and be effectively applied towards reaching a viable solution to the Cyprus Problem. Therefore, the connection between foreign policy endeavours and the prospect for a lasting peace in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean more generally should probably be re-assessed.

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## CHAPTER 5:

# GREECE'S CHANGING ROLE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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### Introduction

There is growing global interest in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which plays a more important role in world politics today than it did at the beginning of the post-Cold War period. The discovery of hydrocarbon deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean has created new dynamics in the field of geo-economics and can act as a catalyst for stability and cooperation or for confrontation and conflict. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the interruption in Israeli-Turkish relations in 2010 and the Arab Spring uprisings, the geopolitical scenery in the Eastern Mediterranean has changed and new strategic partnerships have been formed. The most important change is that Greece and Cyprus, two European Union (EU) member states, have developed special and separate trilateral partnerships with Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. These cooperation schemes include collaboration from the level of Presidents and Prime Ministers to the level of Ministry Directorates.

This paper will critically investigate recent Greek foreign policy vis-à-vis the Eastern Mediterranean, arguing that the reasons underlying Greece's more active policy —despite its economic difficulties— are related not only to the external milieu, but also to what policy-makers believe the external milieu to be. The cognitive approach to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) for example focuses on how individuals and small groups engage in decision making processes. Important contributions to the cognitive approach are the research on leaders' beliefs (Rapport 2017) and role theory (Walker 1979). Based on this approach, the present chapter will explain how the belief systems of Greek foreign policy decision-makers, based on geopolitical assumptions and geo-economic needs, could result in new foreign policy goals, viable alternatives and a resilient discourse on Greece's role in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **The Eastern Mediterranean: From Geopolitics to Geo-economics**

The Eastern Mediterranean region can be considered a regional sub-system, and is comprised today of nine states, namely Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Palestinian Authority, Syria (to the extent that it can still be treated as a unitary/single actor) and Turkey. This was not the case during the Cold War when the Eastern Mediterranean was thought to include only Greece, Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus. Today, as Spyridon Litsas points out, the Eastern Mediterranean has taken on the grim role the Balkans played in the early 20th century:

Political and economic volatility affects more or less every state in the region. The cycle of violence, either in the form of open civil war or in terms of domestic troubles, seems almost impossible to stop solely through external institutional intervention or pleas deriving from international law (Litsas 2018, 1).

The region has two choke points: the Bosphorus Straits and the Suez Canal. The first has traditionally constrained Russian influence, while the second controls Europe's trade route to the Gulf and South and East Asia (Inbar 2014, 2, 9-10). The geo-strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean is growing, and there is evidence of a significant and multi-functional geopolitical and socio-economic change. Although it is not easy to describe or analyse the change in all its details, it has several geopolitical indicators such as state competition and conflict, and it is an important factor in a number of international issues such as the Arab Spring, the spread of radical Islam, international terrorism and the danger of nuclear proliferation.

Due to globalization, there has been a shift in focus from geopolitics to geo-economics (Coolsaet 2004, 2-3; Sparke, 1998, 62-98). The term geo-economics is attributed to Edward Luttwak, who argues that the traditional military controversy between states has been replaced by a geopolitical competition for industrial superiority, and that today economic / industrial power is equal to military power (1993, 35-36). He also suggests that geo-economics can be understood as the direct process of obtaining economic power through land occupation and market control (Luttwak, 1990: 17-23). There are other scholars, however, who see geo-economics as not only a process of obtaining power but a tool that, if appropriately used in international politics, can increase power in the military area (geostrategy) as well as in economic areas (geo-economics) (Blackwill and Harris 2016). Soren Scholvin and Mikael Wigell suggest that geo-economics, as a foreign policy strategy, refers to the state's use of economic means of power to realize strategic objectives (Scholvin and Wigell, 2018: 73).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, energy considerations have a long history of influencing the course of relations between states, and the new gas discoveries are no exception (Karagiannis 2016, 4). Energy

<sup>1</sup> For Josef Nye, however, geo-economics has not replaced geopolitics, as he believes that security and power still play an important role, rather like oxygen: "Under normal conditions, oxygen is plentiful, and we pay little attention. But once those conditions change, and we begin to miss it, we can't focus on anything else" (Nye 2002, 7).



security remains, “an essential element in national power, a major factor in world economies, a critical focus for war and conflict, and a decisive force in international affairs” (Yergin 1991, 773). As a consequence, energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have generated fresh interest in their potential impact on existing regional disputes and power constellations. The Eastern Mediterranean appears as a separate ‘new’ region in geo-economic understanding and not as merely an extension of the Middle East (Stivachtis 2019, 57-58).

### **Greek foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean since 2015 and personal belief systems**

The geopolitical significance of Greece was traditionally based more on its geostrategic value than its geo-economic status. In the middle of three continents and important seas (the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Adriatic), its geophysical morphology as a land and sea constitutes a geostrategic point of reference. Situated in the heart of the Mediterranean, Greece has been a perennial strategic trading post, enabling it to play a key role in the context of Mediterranean security. The United States (US), for example, considered Greece after World War II as part of the Southeast Mediterranean defence perimeter against Soviet expansionism. Due to the many islands, only a few waterways exist that allow big ships to go through, making navigation difficult but also easier to monitor (Argyrou 2004, 65).

Mediterranean security is very important to Greece not only because of the historical legacy but also because a Mediterranean free of tensions is imperative for the country's economic prosperity and security. The Eastern Mediterranean for Greece was, and still is, the great gateway from the East to the West, and there are significant shipping routes across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. Crete is of particular strategic importance: located midway between mainland Greece and Egypt, it is surrounded by important sea routes that enhance the geopolitical importance of Greece. Substantial US aeronautical forces are also based on the island. As early as 1953 Joseph Roucek underlined that not only Crete, but also Cyprus, are of vital concern to the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean as well as to every great power, including the US (Roucek 1953, 76-77). Moreover, a large proportion of Greece's energy resources are imported through the Mediterranean basin via oil tankers from the Persian Gulf countries and elsewhere. Therefore, Greece's location makes it a natural bridge between the energy-rich Middle East and energy-consuming Europe. At the same time, Greeks are looking to transform the country into another potential hub —like Turkey— for bringing Eastern Mediterranean gas to European markets.

On the other hand, Greece is a relatively small state. Its leadership understands that its political weight is limited to the regional rather than the international level. Perhaps for this reason, as George Voskopoulos has pointed out, “Greek foreign policy remained not only dormant in the Mediterranean region but also one-dimensional, since for several decades it was built on a sole aim that was to sustain relations with one parameter of the security equation: the Arab world” (Voskopoulos 2017, 148). Thanos Dokos has also observed that an inward-looking and passive foreign policy mentality of Greek decision-makers:

led to very few foreign policy initiatives and no exploitation of opportunities for multi-lateral initiatives nor the establishment of tactical and strategic alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean region, with the only positive foreign policy development during that was (sic) time being the cultivation of strategic ties with Israel and the realistic prospects for a more visible Greek footprint in the regional energy map (Dokos 2016, 37-38).

However, as the wider area around Greece was changing, the country was obliged to maintain its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as well as in the Balkans (Dokos 2016, 37-38).

Furthermore, in addition to all the difficulties faced by a small state like Greece in international politics, since 2010 the country has faced an enormous economic crisis, which was not only of a fiscal nature. In times of economic crisis such as that experienced by Greece, initiatives in the foreign policy field are generally seen as best avoided and Athens could have followed an inactivate and passive policy.

And yet, after the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition ascended to power in January 2015, Greek foreign policy decision-makers—and more specifically the ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Kotzias—developed a new geopolitical strategic concept. This strategy was partially based on his beliefs regarding Greek foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> As Robert Jervis has pointed out, “beliefs are powerful in the sense of producing behavior and autonomous in the sense of not directly following from other factors” (Jervis 2017, 20).<sup>3</sup> It is also important to know exactly how personal beliefs influence the formulation of foreign policy options. In the case of Greece, decision makers’ personal beliefs are much more important as the process of foreign policy-making reveals the underlying significance of personalities in the absence of efficient and systematic institutions (Ioakimidis 1999, 165). Poliheuristic theory postulates a two-stage decision process wherein heuristic shortcuts are implemented in the first stage in an effort to reduce complexity, and a rational maximizing strategy is applied in the second stage on the remaining alternatives in the choice set (Mintz 2004, 3-4). Consequently, decision-makers’ beliefs are a critical factor in understanding, diagnosing, and prescribing the decision-making process of states, particularly in situations of high uncertainty (Feng 2006, 155).

Beliefs are likely to influence foreign policy practitioners, owing especially to their specific operating environment. What new and older research traditions share is the assumption that foreign policy decision-makers use their previous knowledge and experience to reduce complexity and make sense of reality (Larson 1994, 22). Typically, they have received training and have extensive knowledge and/or experience that allows them to process information

<sup>2</sup> The presence of others, social roles, emergencies and the stakes in a particular situation further interfere with the decision-making process (Hudson 2007, 47-50).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander George (1969) has conceptualized a leader’s operational code as a political belief system with some elements (e.g., philosophical beliefs) guiding the diagnosis of the context for action, and others (i.e., instrumental beliefs) prescribing the most effective strategy and tactics for achieving goals.

quickly (Simon 1983, 29). It can thus be argued that Nikos Kotzias's beliefs played an important role in the formulation of Greek foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Nikos Kotzias, who was a professor of International Relations before becoming Foreign Affairs Minister of Greece, argued repeatedly that:

Greece needs a strategy of diverse active policy. This should be formulated very carefully in order to deal effectively with all the regional, European and global problems. At the same time, however, this strategy should have to contemplate all the possible alternatives to confront forces that act against the interests of Greece. Such a strategy should become the doctrine of Greek foreign policy (Kotzias 2010a, 36).

In an article published during the same period, he pointed out that:

[I]n the era of globalization, there are two main pathways for each country: the first is the ignorance of the new emerging issues of international politics or fear of confronting them. It is a path of paralysis, non-participation in decision-making. The second is the road of improving the country's international status and presence and of building up a strong foreign policy mechanism; [and] the steady contribution towards a well-coordinated formulation of foreign policy directed at giving solutions to global problems (Kotzias 2010b, 356).

Nikos Kotzias's belief that a state—including Greece—should not discount the value of adopting an active foreign policy was also expressed after his resignation. In an interview on 3 March 2019, he stressed that,

A Foreign Minister must record on a realistic basis the current situation of the state, its internal strengths, and potential capabilities. Second, he/she must avoid long-term procrastination and a tendency to ignore solving problems – attitudes that we have embraced in Greece for many years. Third, he must undertake initiatives to escape our endemic problems. (The Greek Observer 2019)

The concept that Nikos Kotzias promoted as Minister of Foreign Affairs, based on his above-quoted beliefs, has as a starting point the following geopolitical assumption: Greece should be considered the strategic centre of a triangle of instability, with Ukraine forming the apex in the north and Libya and Syria in the south. In a speech delivered at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) in Oslo on 10 September 2018, as well as on many other occasions, Mr. Kotzias underlined that:

Greece is faced with key challenges that stem, often simultaneously, from its South, East and West. We must always keep an eye on what occurs in our immediate neighbourhood, i.e., the Mediterranean, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa. We are situated in the middle of a triangle of instability, as I often like to describe it. At the top corner lies Ukraine, which is in deep crisis. On the bottom left lies Libya, where a brutal

civil strife does not seem to have reached its end. And at right lie Iraq and Syria. These three regions are going through very serious crises, though of different degrees and substance. These crises – and various other parameters – have put the stability of the wider region at risk. In this sense, geopolitics requires a 360-degree approach in Greek foreign policy (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018d).

The same geopolitical assumption was adopted by his successor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. George Katrougalos: “Greece is not simply a country which is a pillar of stability, but an exporter of stability; [it ought] to be a country that is an example and a model in our wider region, in this triangle of instability, with Ukraine, Libya and Syria as its vertices” (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019b; Adamopoulos 2015). According to this line of thinking then, Greece should adopt a flexible and adaptable foreign policy.

This was not the first time that Greek decision-makers tried to promote the strategic significance of their country by adopting a strict geopolitical approach. In the early 1990s Greek foreign policymaking circles were talking about the existence of a ‘Muslim arc’ in the Balkans that threatened the stability of the whole region and posed a serious threat to Greek national security. One of the most important supporters of this idea was the then Greek Foreign Minister, Antonis Samaras, who thought it could be useful if Greece were to present itself on the international scene as a bastion of the West against an ‘aggressive and expansionist Islam’: “We [Greece] are the spearhead of non-Islamic Europe and our role in the West is determined by this fact”<sup>4</sup>. The ‘Muslim arc’ was, in reality, a defensive geopolitical code, reflecting the confusion and inability of Greek foreign policy to adapt itself to the newly emerging regional milieu (Huliaras and Tsardanidis 2006, 470).

The discoveries of new gas deposits off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, and the potential for additional discoveries off Greece, Syria and Lebanon have ascribed a new strategic significance to the Eastern Mediterranean and offer Greece a number of new challenges and opportunities in the region. The discovery of hydrocarbon deposits in Cyprus, Egypt and Israel creates new dynamics according to Greek leadership in the field of geo-economics, and can act as a catalyst for stability and cooperation or for confrontation and conflict. As Nikos Kotzias stated, “I think that through Greece we can create alternative ways for the transport of gas, and gas which is coming not only from Iran or Russia but from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, from Syria and Iraq, in the future Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt” (CFR 2018). There are those to whom this vision seems not only ambitious but, as Nikos Tsafos argues, “it is also unrealistic—even delusional at times. Policy makers talk about energy as if Greece were at the center of a grand geopolitical chess game whose outcome would determine the fate of Europe and beyond” (Tsafos 2017, 141).

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<sup>4</sup> Kathimerini, 2 September 1990 (in Greek).

The narrative of Greek foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean – in both geopolitical and geo-economical terms – is primarily based on the trilateral partnerships and more particularly those of Cyprus-Greece-Israel and Cyprus-Egypt-Greece, which could become the backbone of a new regional security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Greece and the Trilateral Partnerships**

In the Eastern Mediterranean there was very limited regionalism throughout the Cold War and the post-Cold War period, particularly in regard to the formation of interstate associations/groupings that would work together for the region's overall development (Dokos and Tsakonas 2018, 12). One exception was the short-lived alliance between Greece, Cyprus, Turkey and the United Kingdom after the London-Zurich Accords in the early 1960s.

Greece and Cyprus have recently formed five trilateral cooperation schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean: with Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, while a sixth with Bahrain is under discussion. In addition to the summit meetings themselves – at least in the case of the Greek-Cypriot-Israeli and Greek-Cypriot-Egyptian triangles – their collaboration manifests in intensive activity on several specific issues that are noted in the joint declarations (Tziarras 2018). There are ministerial-level discussions on a number of issues in parallel, frequent meetings of work groups at the senior professional level, and trilateral parliamentary meetings. The broad scope of this multilateral activity, some of which takes place monthly or even more frequently, is to solidify the partnership among the three and to ensure its long-term strategic significance (Lerman 2018).

The 6th trilateral Summit Meeting took place on 20 March 2019 in Jerusalem and it was the first time the US Secretary of State attended (at this time, Mike Pompeo) (Summit 3 +1). He underlined the US support for the trilateral partnership of Cyprus, Greece and Israel, noting the importance of increased cooperation to support energy independence and security and to protect against external malign influences in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. He also pointed out that cooperating on energy issues would strengthen both prosperity and security in these countries, while highlighting that powers like Iran, China and Russia have expansionist tendencies in the Middle East as well as in the West (Hadjioannou 2019). His presence has undoubtedly given added value to the Cyprus-Greece-Israel partnership. Against the background of this intensive trilateral cooperation Zenonas Tziarras concluded, "that although the trilateral partnership of Israel, Cyprus and Greece has not developed into a traditional type of alliance, it has maintained the form of an informal 'comfortable' quasi-alliance driven by threat- and profit-related individual and collective motivations – including energy" (Tziarras 2016, 408).

One of the principal reasons for the Greek government decision to support the trilateral agreements, particularly those with Cyprus and Israel and with Cyprus and Egypt, was the potential for joint exploitation of the natural gas reservoirs in the Eastern Mediterranean. The importance of natural gas beyond, of course, its purely economic value, conceals several geopolitical challenges. The main challenge is how the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the

continental shelf between Greece, Egypt, Turkey, and of course, Cyprus will be demarcated. In short, it is an area of major strategic importance for Greece. Any other interpretation of the situation in this area would represent a medium-term vertical decline in the geopolitical importance of Greece as a whole. It should not be forgotten that the most important role Greece may be expected to play in these new energy developments, especially in the medium term, is that of the gas transit to the European market for the countries in the region that already are—or are expected soon to be—in the process of exploitation. Greece must highlight the importance of its geopolitical position, natural gas interconnectors, LNG facilities and the exploitation of energy deposits in order to strengthen its energy profile within the 'geopolitical chessboard' of Europe.

There is a perception among Greek policymakers—in different governments and political parties—that the country is becoming an important actor in the international energy scene and that it now has quite significant geopolitical importance. Nikos Tsafos argues that Antonis Samaras, who was Prime Minister from June 2012 to January 2015 from the centre-right New Democracy party, strongly believed in and supported the role of energy in economics and geopolitics (Tsafos 2017, 144). And Nikos Kotzias, in a speech at Tbilisi University on 7 March 2017, stated: "We need to dream that Georgia and Greece will become energy hubs in our region. That—beyond gas and oil—we will develop new forms of energy, renewable energy. From wind to sea energy, of which Georgia and Greece have more than they can use" (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017a).

The current Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, has also very clearly indicated that Greece's objective is to ensure the flow or the transport of energy resources from the Southeast Mediterranean to Europe:

And to that effect, our objective is, within this partnership, to also include other countries in the future. And other countries of the region with energy resources. We do not want to exclude anyone. That said, we declare our determination to move on to a partnership which has as much economic and commercial value as geopolitical value (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018e).

This option could be an attractive one for European countries, as they are looking for an alternative to the Gazprom supply if relations with Russia worsen—since 2015 one-third of European imports have come from Russia (Samaan 2016, 27). The initial impetus for the four countries' cooperation on energy security (Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt) arose in 2010 when a large natural gas deposit was discovered offshore Israel in the Leviathan field. This was followed in December 2011 by the discovery of a smaller but still significant field in the Mediterranean Sea south of Cyprus, known as Aphrodite. Then, in 2015, another massive gas field, Zohr, was discovered in Egypt's EEZ (Bryza 2018, 83).

For Greece one of the most important advantages of the trilateral partnerships in the field of energy security is the construction of an Eastern Mediterranean natural gas pipeline (also

called the EastMed Pipeline). It is considered a project of top geopolitical importance, as it foresees the construction of a 1,900-km (1181-mile) pipeline throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. The pipeline will begin in the natural gas fields off the coast of Israel, and will continue on through the islands of Cyprus and Crete to the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece. The route will then continue on to mainland Greece, where the pipeline will meet the planned 'Poseidon' pipeline, which will terminate in Oradea, Italy. The natural gas can flow from there into the European grid. A full 1,300 km (808 miles) of the 1,900 km of pipeline will run underwater. All parties involved in the project agree that this presents a great technical challenge, since the Mediterranean in those areas can reach depths of up to 3,000 meters (9843 feet, almost two miles) (Chrysopoulos 2019).

In December 2017, the Energy Ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that created a framework for political cooperation if the project is deemed feasible. The MoU is non-binding but demonstrates the commitment among the parties. The EastMed gas could diversify European energy supplies and contribute to European energy security by providing Europe with an alternative to Russian energy sources and supply lines (especially bypassing Ukraine), and develop the EU's indigenous resources such as offshore gas reserves around Cyprus and Greece. In this case, Greece would play an upgraded role as a transit country especially after the construction of the TAP pipeline, the subsequent exploitation of the LNG station at Revythousa and the construction of a new LNG terminal in Alexandroupolis.

The Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, in a statement following the proceedings of the 5th Greece-Cyprus-Israel Trilateral Summit meeting in Beersheba on 20 December 2018, underlined that:

The EastMed is not merely an energy project. It is a project of particular geopolitical value and importance. Our goal is to ensure the flow or the transport of energy resources from the South East Mediterranean to Europe... I want to underscore that this pipeline will become a bridge for our region. We want energy to become a bridge between peoples rather than an object of conflict (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018e).

Furthermore, Greece also supports the possibility of natural gas transport with LNG tankers from export stations in Cyprus, Israel and/or Egypt (using the existing two Egyptian LNG terminals) to the Greek LNG terminals in Revythousa and Alexandroupolis, considering that the Greek-owned merchant fleet remains one of the world's largest.

Greece is also an eager supporter of the EuroAsia Interconnector and the EuroAfrica Interconnector. The EuroAsia Interconnector project envisages the construction of a submarine electrical cable that will initially link Israel to Cyprus and later connect with Greece to the Trans-European Networks. The EuroAfrica Interconnector connects Greek, Cypriot and Egypt power grids via a submarine power cable, which will have the capacity to transmit 2,000 megawatts



of electricity in either direction. According to the Greek Foreign Ministry, “the projects of electricity interconnections, ‘EuroAsia Interconnector’ and ‘EuroAfrica Interconnector,’ are of strategic importance since, through Greece, they will connect Israel and Egypt with the European single electricity market” (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019a).

Greece is also a member of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which held its first annual meeting on 14-15 January 2019 in the Egyptian capital of Cairo. The Forum includes seven members: Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy and the Palestinian Authority. The EMGF is a first step in a broader plan to develop the Eastern Mediterranean’s energy profile, including increasing gas exports and production and finding new ways to transport natural gas to international markets at a competitive price. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum is of huge importance for Greece’s interests in the region. As the Greek Minister for Energy, Mr. George Stathakis, noted, “Greece plays a strategic role in regard to natural gas and its transfer to the rest of the European Union,” and added that this new Forum promotes cooperation, mutual interests and co-existence (Kampouris 2019).<sup>5</sup>

Another important reason for the emergence of the trilateral partnerships is the political tensions with Ankara. Turkey’s threats and actions have led Athens to build up several frameworks of cooperation—one with Cyprus and Israel, and another with Cyprus and Egypt. Furthermore, in addition to blocking a revisionist Turkey and sharing common interests in the area of energy security with the other two countries, Athens anticipated that the other three states are also apprehensive regarding Turkey’s objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean. This can be explained by Turkey’s efforts towards regional hegemony under the banner of a distinctly Islamist ideology. This strategy seems to be premised on the assumption that the controversial relations between Turkey and its two Eastern Mediterranean neighbours — Israel and Egypt — are of a strategic and not a tactical nature and, thus, hardly reparable (Roussos 2017, 107-108). Therefore, Turkey’s threats and actions have encouraged cooperation between Israel, Cyprus and Greece (Inbar 2014, 22), as well as between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece.

The trilateral partnership of Greece-Cyprus-Israel is also an outcome of the spectacular improvement in bilateral relations between Greece and Israel. Unlike Greek-Egyptian relations, Greek-Israeli relations have been indifferent or cold. Greece was the last member state of the EU to de jure recognize the state of Israel in 1990. The post-war Greek governments typically followed a pro-Arab foreign policy in order to protect the large Greek community in Egypt, secure Arab support on the Cyprus dispute in the United Nations, and maintain access to cheap Arab oil. Since the 1990s, however, interactions between the two countries have flourished. The Arab-Israeli peace talks between 1991 and 1993 and the Oslo Accords in 1993 served as a convenient pretext for formalizing a closer relationship, and in 1994 a military agreement was signed. Underlying Athens’ decision to sign a military agreement with the Israeli government

<sup>5</sup> Turkey, Lebanon and Syria do not participate in the Forum. Ankara has opposed gas exploration off Cyprus in areas it considers disputed waters. Political tensions between various EMGF members and Ankara also explain why it was not part of the Cairo meeting (Kampouris 2019).



was “the belief among Foreign Ministry circles in Athens and Nicosia, that it was time to seek out the support of the Jewish-American lobby over the Cyprus problem” (Athanasopoulou 2003, 112).

However, more important was the rupture of the close ties between Israel and Turkey in the wake of the Mavi Marmara incident in May 2010, an incident that spurred Greece’s close relationship with Israel. However, as Aristotle Tziampiris observes:

Greek decision-makers opted for an approach towards a rising Turkey that did not incorporate balancing aspects but focused on non-direct and primarily non-military in nature actions... At the heart of Athens’ strategy was the decision to pursue the rapprochement with Jerusalem in the realms of diplomacy and economics (Tziampiris 2015a, 246).

Following Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to Greece in August 2010, cooperation between the two countries has become broad and multifaceted, covering the realms of politics, economics, security, energy, culture, tourism and defence (Tziampiris 2015b, 113-127). As such, the Greek-Israeli relationship is more than a partnership. One area of cooperation discussed during Netanyahu’s visit to Greece was the possibility of creating a gas triangle — i.e., Israel-Cyprus-Greece — with Greece as the hub for Israeli and Cypriot gas exports to the rest of Europe (Inbar, 2014: 26).

This partnership enjoys broad bipartisan support in Greece with the exception of the Greek Communist Party and several parties on the left. On the other hand, the close Greek- Israeli relationship continues to offer Greece a high margin of diplomatic flexibility that allows “Athens to continue the balancing act that promoted an expansion of bilateral cooperation with Israel while making sure that this cooperation would not translate into diplomatic damage to Greece’s ties to Arab states” (Tsakiris 2014, 17).

Another motive for the trilateral partnerships was the economic distress experienced by Greece (Tziarras 2016, 415-416), which revealed the country’s dependence on the European political-economic system. Furthermore, the capacity and efficiency of Greece’s armed forces also suffered because of the economic crisis, revealing a negative balance in weaponry vis-à-vis Turkey. These factors lessened the country’s chances of becoming an effective and reliable security provider in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, Greek decision-makers focused on establishing an independent strategic position that rested on, among other things, a political, military and economic partnership in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to offer Athens more leverage in dealing with the EU and the US. As John Nomikos and Anestis Symeonides (2018, 29) rightly observe:

Athens seeks to promote alternative bilateral and multilateral initiatives outside the narrow Brussels dominated space—and the [trilateral partnerships] fit this bill perfectly. Any further initiative in this direction, however, will require sensitive diplomatic management and realistic estimates of regional risks vs. benefits.

Finally, Greece sees in the trilateral partnership a substantial security component as well. The Eastern Mediterranean is a troubled neighbourhood. Continued conflicts, terrorism and wars as well as the spread of radical Islam, coupled with weak or non-existent democratic structures in many countries, threaten regional stability and by extension Greece's national security. Greece sees these as good reasons for a closer military cooperation with other Eastern Mediterranean countries. And for this reason Greek decision-makers prioritize regional security and stability, turning a rather blind eye the violation of human rights by the current Egyptian (military) government. In contrast to official reactions in Brussels and in many EU member states, Greece welcomed the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood on 3 July 2013 (Lerman 2019, 145).

As Greek ex-Foreign Minister, Nikos Kotzias, pointed out in an interview:

In our region Western European conditions don't prevail. On the contrary, three to four wars break out every five or ten years, hundreds of thousands of lives are lost, and we are faced with millions of refugees and economic migrants. Therefore, the two countries attach paramount importance to security and stability in the region as well as to the safeguarding of human life. These goals determine everything else (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018a).

In another interview Nikos Kotzias admitted that, "If Egypt is being destabilized, millions of refugees or immigrants would have easier access to Greece. Human rights are extremely important, but we also need stability and security in that whole region" (Foreign Policy 2017). On yet another occasion he was more explicit, arguing the following:

[I]f we are to defend all these human rights the West talks about, first and foremost we must defend the fundamental right: the right to life. Because without human life there are no human rights. When we have 500,000 dead in Syria, when we have 12 to 14 million refugees who have lost their homes, how can we talk in abstractum about rights? How can we talk about human rights when we do not ensure people's very existence? (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018b)

Thus, it was largely the weakening of the EU anchor and the emergence of a power vacuum in the Middle East that produced the 'triangle strategy', first between Greece, Cyprus and Israel and second, between Greece, Cyprus and Egypt (Roussos 2017, 107; Tziarras 2018).

Of course, the Greek government's intensive activity in the Eastern Mediterranean post-2015 was not limited to the development of the tripartite partnerships, but extended to the creation of other multilateral partnerships, e.g., the convention of international conferences on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East and the Rhodes Conference on Security in the Southeastern Mediterranean.

Greece took the initiative to organize three international conferences in 2015 and 2017 on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East. Those conferences must be regarded as another initiative of Nikos Kotzias, who believed very strongly that Greek foreign policy should be active on numerous issues in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East including the protection of Christian heritage. As he underlined in an interview:

[M]y concern is that the strong western powers and organizations are not dealing enough with these issues. I set out some friendly thoughts with regard to the UN and some critical observations with regard to the European Union. You must consider that this creates a climate, in some countries, 'of non-defense', in general, of religious and cultural communities, but specifically of the Christian communities, which were lost to a great extent. We talked [in the conference] about thoughts and measures for ensuring the return of these people and their families, and how we can protect cultural heritage. (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017b).

The first Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability in the Southeastern Mediterranean took place on 8-9 September 2016 with the aim of creating a forum for dialogue and cooperation among states of the Mediterranean region that would address the current challenges facing the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean, and create a positive agenda for cooperation among the participating states. The second Rhodes Conference was held on 22-23 May 2017, with the participation of Foreign Ministers and high-level officials from Albania, Algeria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, and representatives from the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

We must also note the Greek proposal (presented in the Rhodes conference of May 2017) for the creation of a 'Mediterranean OSCE' that would include the participation of all regional states (plus a number of extra-regional powers), and the convention of the third conference on 21 and 22 May 2018. It should be noted that Israel and Turkey were not invited to this particular initiative, with the Greek government maintaining that Athens was not willing to get involved in a discussion about the differences of Greece or others with these countries. According Mr. Kotzias the main objective of the Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability in the Southeastern Mediterranean was stability and security; "security more in the sense associated with soft power, economic security, maritime security, culture, transport, and not in the sense of hard power" (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018c). Addressing the Third Conference, Kotzias presented his vision: the Rhodes Conference would become a soft power platform that would prioritize diplomacy and dialogue that examined crises and intervened through mediation and arbitration while providing security in all forms: from environmental security to securing people's lives. He emphasized giving the participating countries' 'ownership' of the issues that arise in the region:

We cannot have everyone else talking about our region, everyone else deciding about our region, while we simply pay, because, as I often say, one set of people began the bombardments in Syria and Libya, others are receiving the refugees, and still others are having their day-to-day lives in the Middle East made difficult... We can address the powerful players of this world and explain to them how we see peace and security, human rights and human lives in the region (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018b).

## Conclusions

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the beliefs of Greek decision-makers do matter in the formation of Greek policy vis-à-vis the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek foreign policy in this area has been based—and seems to continue to be based—on a set of decision-makers' beliefs and especially those of Nikos Kotzias, who served as Foreign Minister from January 2015 to October 2018. These beliefs have three main dimensions.

The first refers to a general perception that Greece's foreign policy—considering its location in crucial geopolitical region—should be active, not passive. It should take as much initiative as possible and not remain stagnant. It should attempt to solve problems rather than ignoring them. This belief has led Greece to take a number of initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean since 2015. As a prominent journalist wrote:

Kotzias, with deep knowledge of foreign affairs issues and firm views, has fostered an active foreign policy. He dared to seek solutions to chronic problems whose perpetuation did not benefit Greece, and he promoted regional and international cooperation schemes with several countries, including Israel and Egypt (Ellis 2018).

Athens has not only boosted existing tripartite partnerships with Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, but has also initiated other regional alliances with such countries as the Palestine Authority, Lebanon and Jordan, while it is currently considering a new one with Bahrain. Furthermore, it has established a number of multilateral forums, such as the Rhodes Conference on Security and Stability in the Southeastern Mediterranean Regions, and organised several international conferences on Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East with the participation of many countries in the wider Eastern Mediterranean region. However, it is unclear to what degree Greek foreign policy benefits from these ambitious projects, whose viability is questionable.

The second dimension is of a geopolitical nature. Greece is at the heart of a triangle of instability, with Ukraine to the north, Turkey and its neighbouring countries – Iraq, Syria and Lebanon—to the east, and failed states, such as Libya, to the south. This unstable environment has led Greece to bolster regional security. From both a geographical and cultural perspective, Greece has traditionally served as a kind of bridge between Europe and the Middle East, mediating the various social, political, and economic upheavals across the region. Thus, the

geopolitical view that Greece is at the centre of a triangle of instability, with Libya and Syria at the base and Ukraine at the top contrasts sharply with the country's views in the early 1990s. At that time, due to the collapse of communism in the Balkans, Athens was worried that Greece's 'strategic importance' was waning. Today, however, and despite negative geopolitical developments in the region, Greek policymakers seem to firmly believe —and are perhaps overconfident— that Greece is in a position to 'export' stability and to play a new significant geopolitical role. It seems that they are ignoring the fact that the country's economic crisis had not yet resolved.

As Nikos Kotzias argued during his meeting with former US Secretary of State John Kerry on 4 December 2015, "Greece is a country that knows and understands the region and can contribute to all kinds of negotiations, mediations and, if need be, to arbitration between opposing sides" (Hellenic Republic-Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). In a 2017 interview Kerry also stated that, "Our duty is to find ways to transmit waves of stability along this triangle. We have created very specific relations with some countries which are very important for the security of the whole region" (Foreign Policy 2017). However some analysts argue that Greek policymakers should cease playing the 'geopolitical' card as part of their strategy, and for two reasons: it would help manage expectations while encouraging more realistic expectations; more importantly, it would put an end to expending the state's scarce resources in pursuit of benefits that are unlikely to materialize (Tsafos 2017, 155).

The third dimension is geo-economic, and is based on energy security. Greek decision-makers believe that their country could become a regional energy hub. As mentioned above, Nikos Kotzias has pointed out repeatedly that hosting pipelines carrying gas and oil from Iran, Azerbaijan, the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq, the Kurdish-controlled areas, Russia and the US, will enable Greece to bolster its geopolitical and geo-economic potential. The idea that Greece could become an energy hub in the Eastern Mediterranean is based on the condition that the EastMed pipeline project materializes. Thus Greece could not only collect gas transport fees and strengthen its role as an energy hub, but also exploit the pipeline to meet its own needs. On the one hand, this view highlights the pressing need for cooperation, and hydrocarbons offer probably the best incentive to that end. But on the other hand, it can easily trigger conflict if the countries involved pursue policies that are insensitive to regional realities (Gürel, Kahveci and Tzimitras 2014, 60), and if the prevailing geopolitical and economic circumstances locally, regionally and globally are unfavourable for such a scenario (Stergiou 2017, 321).

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## CHAPTER 6:

# BETWEEN ALLIANCE AND ENTENTE: THE EGYPTIAN-GREEK-CYPRIOT PARTNERSHIP

*Nael Shama*

### Introduction

The discovery of a massive gas repository in the East Mediterranean, an area of considerable political tumult and security fears, has in recent years attracted the attention of politicians and scholars alike. Natural resources spawn wealth, and as such they can either promote cooperation or elicit conflict. In order to promote its strategic interests in the uncharted waters of the conflict-rich Mediterranean region, Egypt has, since the election of Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi as President in 2014, sought to develop close political and economic relations with both Greece and Cyprus. The relationship among the three countries has rapidly expanded to embody a semi-institutionalized character, including annual tripartite summits and numerous treaties and memoranda of understanding. This development begs a number of questions. From an Egyptian standpoint, what is the motivation underlying the cultivation of close ties with Cyprus and Greece? What are the nature, the potential and the limitations of the tripartite alliance? And to what extent can this political alignment alter the balance of power and the security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East?

This chapter begins with a brief theoretical discussion on the theories of alliance in international relations, followed by an historical overview of Egypt's interaction with, and geopolitical perception of, the Mediterranean. It then focuses on recent developments in Egypt's political and economic relations with Cyprus and Greece, highlighting the potential and limits of cooperation. A final section summarizes the major findings of this chapter.

### Alliances vs. Ententes

Although alliance is one of the fundamental concepts in international relations, it is still a highly vague and amorphous term. Some scholars use it to refer to any kind of agreement or cooperation between states, others as a synonym for alignment, or even just to describe voting blocks in the United Nations (Russett 1971, 262). While, at a general level of analysis, an alliance is to

some analysts, notably prominent scholar Hans Morgenthau, a means to maintaining equilibrium in global politics, others view it as a desired end in itself. For instance, Pitman Potter (1948, p. 168) perceives alliance as the "simplest form of international union approaching the forms of international government." Whatever the approach, the decision to align is always made "with reference to national interests" (Liska 1962, 40); states ally to maximize their security. "The primary benefit of alliance is obviously security" (Snyder 1991, 90).

Scholars of international relations have defined alliances in different ways. Snyder (1990, 104) sees alliances as "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states." Likewise, Russett (1971, 262-263) defines alliance as "a formal agreement among a limited number of countries concerning the conditions under which they will or will not employ military force." Fedder argues that alliances are coalitions. For him, an alliance is "a limited set of states acting in concert at X time regarding the mutual enhancement of the military security of the members" (Fedder 1968, 68). Snyder (1990, 105) disagrees, saying that coalitions are only those alliances "formed during war." Furthermore, what distinguishes alliances from collective security arrangements is the identification of a particular threatening nation and the restricted jurisdiction of the alliance (Slater 1965, pp. 10ff). Indeed, their rigidity notwithstanding, alliances tend to be short-lived (Kegley & Wittkopf 1995, 469). Alliances are different from international organizations (e.g., World Health organization), as well as agreements setting forth rules of state behavior (e.g., the Geneva Conventions), unilateral guarantees (where one party is committed to the defense of the other party), voting blocks, and custom unions. They are also different from global or quasi-global security arrangements (e.g., the League of Nations Covenant) that oblige all members to unite against any aggressor, even if that aggressor is a member in this arrangement (Russett 1971, 263).

On the other hand, the term "entente," which owes its origin to the 1904 Franco-British Entente Cordiale, is used to refer to "a flexible agreement of cooperation between two [or more] sovereign powers." By intent, ententes are "far more loosely defined than an alliance," but they are still more important and meaningful than relations based on "consultation" or "nonaggression pacts" (Kann 1976, 611). Undoubtedly, an entente is "a far less conspicuous form of association than the alliance" (Kann 1976, 616). Although ententes, like alliances, are "typically against, and only derivatively for, someone or something" (Liska 1962, 3), the most crucial function of an alliance – its deterrent effect – is believed to be "completely lacking or at least much weaker" in an entente (Kann 1976, 616). Yet, shying away from the costs of commitment to allies and the limits an alliance may impose on their freedom of action, statesmen often prefer ententes or short-lived alliances. As Kennan aptly explained (Kennan 1984, 238):

The relations among nations... constitute a fluid substance, always in motion, changing subtly from day to day in ways that are difficult to detect from the myopia of the passing moment ... The situation at one particular time is never quite the same as the situation of five years later ... statesmen usually shy away from commitments likely to constitute limitations on a government's behavior at unknown dates in the future.

On the hierarchy of types of cooperation among states – from *détente* to *entente* to alliance to special relationship – an *entente* occupies the middle position; *ententes* are less rigid and not as binding as an alliance, but more significant than *détentes*, *rapprochements*, nonaggression pacts, and consultation pacts. Small and Singer (1969, 261) offer a threefold typology of types of alliances, distinguishing between the level of political commitment of members in defense pacts, neutrality or nonaggression pacts and *ententes*. In a defense pact, signatories obligate themselves “to intervene militarily on behalf of one another if either were attacked.” In other words, an attack on one member is regarded as an attack against all members, as many such treaties in the history of international relations specify. In neutrality pacts, basically agreements not to use force against a partner, the commitment is to “remain militarily neutral if the partner were attacked.” *Ententes* occupy the middle ground between these two types of alliance, as members are obliged to “consult with, or cooperate [with each other] in such a military contingency.”

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the post-2014 Egyptian-Greek-Cypriot relationship fits the model of a loose, flexible *entente*, rather than that of a rigid alliance with airtight commitments and obligations. Parties to such agreements will confer together in the face of external threats to any one of them, may coordinate their political actions, and/or lobby for the others’ interests in international organizations, but will fall short of supporting each other using military means in times of armed conflict.

### **Egypt and the Euro-Mediterranean: Historical Overview**

Egypt’s political, economic and cultural relations with the Mediterranean go back millennia. For around 1000 years after the arrival of the Greeks in Egypt in 332 BC, Egypt considered itself part of the Greco-Roman civilization, interacting mainly with the European empires, and embracing ideas and values originating in the European continent. The Arab-Islamic conquest of Egypt in 641 shifted Egypt’s attention towards the Orient, including regions such as the Arabian Peninsula, the Fertile Crescent and Mesopotamia. The Ottoman rule in Egypt, which commenced in 1517, reinforced this shift. Although geographically based in Europe, the Ottomans linked Egypt to their predominately Afro-Asian empire, and cut links between Egypt and the nations of the Mediterranean for almost three entire centuries (Selim 1995). The French Expedition in 1798, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, and the subsequent ascent to power in Egypt of Mohamed Ali Pasha (ruled 1805-1848), revived the European orientation of Egypt’s foreign relations. For Mohamed Ali and his sons who succeeded him, most notably Khedive Ismail (ruled 1863-1879), Egypt’s modernizing efforts sought to rely on European expertise and ethos.

Throughout its long history, Egypt’s relations with Europe oscillated between conflict and cooperation (Gad 2003, 173). Moments of conflict include Crusader campaigns (in the 12th and 13th centuries), the French invasion (1798-1801), the British occupation (1882-1954) and, in the 20th century, Britain and France’s ominous participation in the tripartite aggression on Egypt (1956), whilst phases of cooperation include various protracted periods in its ancient and modern history. The French invasion in 1798 epitomizes best the two modes in unison.

Coming with guns and scientists, means of control and education, the French campaign was a ruthless military invasion as much as a deep cultural and scientific encounter that introduced Egypt to the ideals and innovations of the age of enlightenment.

In their arduous soul-searching efforts, Egyptian thinkers and scholars have over the past century or so entertained, promoted and debated two, seemingly contradictory, arguments about the nature and delineation of Egypt's identity. The first asserts that Egypt is essentially an Arab and Islamic country that is an integral part of the wider Arab and Islamic nation, and with which it should interact, socially, political and ideationally. Enamored of Western values and modes of thinking, however, the second group of writers maintains that Egypt has since ancient times been a Mediterranean country, geographically and culturally. For instance, in his seminal book *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (1938), Taha Hussein, a towering figure in Arabic literature, postulated that the ideals and traditions of Egyptian are at odds with the cultural leanings of other Arab peoples. Egypt, he argued, is quintessentially a Mediterranean country and all prior attempts to Orientalize it had been a grave mistake. A few decades later, eminent scholar and geographer Gamal Hamdan stressed in his book *We and Our Four Dimensions* (1993) that Egypt "must look northward ... It is quite useful to deepen our Med (*sic*) dimension" (cited in Selim 1995). While several prominent thinkers in the 20th century, such as Salama Moussa, Hussein Mounis, Louis Awad and Noble laureate Naguib Mahfouz, supported Hussein and Hamdan's line of thinking to varying degrees, many other cultural figures backed the orientalist identity, including Arab nationalists, such as Makram Ebied and Zaki Mubarak, national politicians like Mustafa Kamel and Mohamed Farid, and Islamists of all ideological strands.

Egyptian foreign policy has to a large extent mirrored these theoretical debates. On one hand, Egypt took part in establishing the Arab League (1945) and fought along with Arab armies against Israel (1948), reflecting its orientation to the Arab world, but it also developed close political and economic ties with European nations. At the zenith of Arab nationalism, in the 1950s and 1960s, President Gamal Abdel-Nasser focused largely on issues pertaining to the Arab world, including the Palestinian cause and national liberation movements, envisaging for Egypt the role of "liberator, defender and integrator" of the Arabs (Selim 1995). He feared that deepening ties with European countries would come at the expense of Egypt's deep-seated commitments to its Arab brethren. Anwar Sadat's upending of Egyptian politics and economics in the 1970s led to rapprochement with the US, peace with Israel and, unsurprisingly, a revival of Egypt's connection with Europe and the Mediterranean. With the eclipse of Arab nationalism, indeed, the Mediterranean came into play as a major foreign policy circle after 1975 (Gad 2003, 174). Politically, Egypt took part in the Euro-Arab Dialogue, inaugurated in 1974 in order to enhance cooperation between the two regions. Economically, through a set of agreements signed in 1975 and 1977, Egypt was accorded preferential trade access by the European Community (EC). By the end of the decade, Egypt became the largest Mediterranean recipient of economic assistance from the EC, receiving a total of ECU (European Currency Unit) 1,459 in the form of aid and loans (Selim 1997, 68).



In the aftermath of the Cold War, Egypt vigorously pursued a pan-Mediterranean policy (Selim 1997, 64). To diversify its regional allies in a post-Cold War world shaped by unipolarity, and to circumvent international irrelevance and regional exclusion, President Mubarak proposed the establishment of the Mediterranean Forum in November 1991 as a platform for regional cooperation (Del Sarto 2006, 153). The move was likely propelled by the formation in 1990 of the Euro-Maghreb 5+5 formula (comprising ten Mediterranean countries, five European and five from the Maghreb region), which had excluded Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian leadership feared that Europe's increasing interest in both newly independent Eastern European countries and Maghreb nations would jeopardize its influence and interests in the Middle East (Selim 1997, 71). The Mediterranean Forum, whose membership by 1997 included 11 countries (Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Greece, Turkey, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Malta), focused on cooperation in the fields of development, security, energy, transportation, environment, science and technology, and dialogue among civilizations. Institutionally, Egypt's ties with Mediterranean countries were further cemented by joining the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), or what came to be described as the Barcelona Process. Launched in 1995, the EMP is a regional partnership for security and economic cooperation seeking to achieve peace, stability and growth in the Mediterranean region. To that end, it aimed at removing trade barriers between the European Union (EU) and southern Mediterranean countries and creating a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area. Inspired by the EMP framework, Egypt signed a partnership agreement with the EU in 2001 (which entered into force after both parties' parliaments ratified it in 2004). Also, since it was founded in 2008, Egypt has been an active member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM), an intergovernmental organization of 43 states (28 EU member states and 15 Mediterranean states from North Africa, Western Europe and Southern Europe). In the fashion of the Mediterranean Forum and the EMP, the UFM is geared to foster cooperation and increase integration across the Mediterranean region, especially in the fields of business development, civil and social affairs, education, energy, transportation and environment. Today, Europe is Egypt's largest trading partner, the second aid donor to Egypt, and a major partner in Egypt's war against terrorism.

### **Egypt-Greece-Cyprus: The Potential and Limits of Cooperation**

Egypt's political relations with Cyprus and Greece improved markedly with the election in 2014 of Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi as President. In 2014, the then Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras announced that both Greece and Cyprus would use their membership in the EU to promote Egyptian-European relations, saying that the two countries would act "as ambassadors for Egypt to the EU" (Al-Ghamrawy and Abu Hussein 2014). This kind of diplomatic aid was vital for Egypt, which was struggling to polish its image and end a state of quasi-isolation imposed by

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<sup>1</sup> Membership of the 5+5 Euro-Maghreb formula included France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania.

the international community after the 2013 military coup that deposed the democratically elected President. More importantly, the three nations have set up a system of regular consultation, as indicated by their participation in six trilateral summits as of the end of 2018. These summits were held in Cairo (2014), Nicosia (2015), Athens (2015), Cairo (2016), Nicosia (2017) and Crete (2018). While Sisi described the relationship as “a model to follow in the Mediterranean region” (Xinhua 2018), his Cypriot counterpart, Nicos Anastasiades, reciprocated by describing Egypt as an “absolutely necessary strategic partner” for Cyprus and the entire European community (Associated Press and Khoury 2017). The main pillars and goals of the trilateral relationship were expressed in two political documents, the Cairo Declaration and the Nicosia Declaration, issued in November 2014 and November 2015, respectively. Furthermore, the three countries signed a memorandum of understanding in the fields of maritime transport and tourism, aimed at enhancing the maritime cooperation between the three countries, developing tourism packages and initiating education on maritime education and training.

Historically speaking, political relations between Egypt and Cyprus date back to the late 1950s. Egypt backed the Greek Cypriot armed struggle against British colonial rule, and was among the first countries to recognize the new Republic of Cyprus in 1960. In the 1960s, Egyptian President Nasser enjoyed exceptionally cordial relations with Makarios III, Cyprus’s first post-independence President. And President Sisi’s visit to Nicosia in 2015 marked the first visit ever of an Egyptian President to Cyprus. As a sign of appreciation, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades presented Sisi with the Order of Makarios III, Cyprus’s most important medal of honour. In reciprocation, Sisi conferred on Anastasiades Egypt’s highest state honour, the Order of the Nile. Yet, aside from the vital cooperation between the two countries in the field of energy, and the fact that Cyprus owns shares worth \$1.07 billion in Egyptian companies, mostly in the sector of tourism (Samir 2017), trade between Egypt and Cyprus is quite limited. The total volume of bilateral trade in 2013 stood at a negligible 67.5 million euros (Khalil 2014). In 2017, however, Egyptian exports to Cyprus (mostly construction materials, fruits and vegetables) increased by 81.5 percent compared to the previous year, but its volume still remained quite scant (33 million euros), while total bilateral trade rose to 350 million euros (Tawfeek 2018).

On the other hand, Greece is ranked as the fifth EU member investor in the Egyptian economy, with investments totalling around \$3 billion, distributed among more than 100 projects in the fields of chemical industries, textile, food, construction materials, banking and transportation (Khalil 2014; Samir 2017; Tawfeek 2018). Moreover, Egypt’s State Information Service estimates that these investments will increase fivefold in the near future (Samir 2017). With bilateral trade totalling 6.5 billion euros from 2012 to 2016 (Abdel-Sadek 2017), Egypt is also Greece’s sixth trading partner worldwide (Khalil 2014), and is considered to be Greece’s most important trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa region (Mabrouk 2014). And currently under consideration is the ambitious project to link the two countries’ Mediterranean harbours – in a bid to make Greece the gateway for Egyptian products into the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Several motivations underlie Egypt's recent interest in creating and bolstering its relationship with Greece and Cyprus. First, it is important to remember that the wider region surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean is a conflict-rich area, marked by both inter- and intra-state conflicts. A cross-regional comparison of all internal conflicts worldwide in the period from 1960 to 2003 demonstrated that the Middle East vied with Asia for being the most conflict-ridden geographical area for most of the time period under study (Sørli, Gleditsch & Strand 2005, 143). The security landscape in the Middle East has taken an extreme turn for the worse since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with war punctuated by short intervals of uneasy peace (Shama 2019). In the years 2000 to 2018, the region witnessed one global war (the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003), at least four rounds of Israeli wars on Lebanon and Gaza (in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2014), a major Palestinian Intifada (2000–2005), six massive popular uprisings (2010–2011), at least four grinding civil wars (in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen) and many insurgencies and internal subversions. Moreover, at least four Middle Eastern states are today considered to be failed states par excellence (Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and Libya). In the 2016 Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Middle East/North Africa is patently described as “the least peaceful region in the world” (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016, 8).

The Eastern Mediterranean region is, likewise, a theatre of pervasive conflict and competition. The region includes eight countries (Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey), many of which are at loggerheads, politically or militarily. Examples include the seven-decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict (currently intensified by Israel's warlike siege of Gaza, its occupation of Syria's Golan Heights and its frequent assaults on Lebanon), the decades-long Turkish-Cypriot dispute, the post-2013 strife between Egypt and Turkey, and, in recent years, increasingly sour Israeli-Turkish relations.

An arc of chronic conflict and instability has obviously taken roots in the wider area surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean. The area stretching from Iran to North Africa is plagued today by a jumbled mix of deep socio-economic grievances, time-bomb demographics, simmering armed conflicts, intense sectarian cleavages, raging civil wars (Syria, Iraq), failed states (e.g., Libya, Syria, Yemen), militant non-state actors and diehard terrorists (e.g., ISIS, Al-Qaeda), waves of immigrant influxes, networks of organized crime and arms trafficking, arms races and high levels of internal upheaval and external penetration. It therefore fits the VUCA status, a notion articulated in 1987 by the US Army War College to describe a world, or geographic region, characterized by the toxic mish-mash of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (US Army Heritage & Education Center 2018). So while only 5 percent of the world's population lives in the Middle East, around 17 percent of the world's conflicts in the period from 1948–2014 took place in the Middle East. Also, in 2014, the region accounted for 45 percent of terrorist attacks worldwide, 47 percent of internally displaced persons and 57.5 percent of the world's refugees (Korany 2018, 70).

Itself suffering from many of these afflictions, the state in Egypt is living atop a dormant volcano. Its economy is underdeveloped and cash-hungry, its bureaucratic machinery is

bloated and ineffective, its youth are weighed down by unemployment and economic deprivation, and since 2013 it has been facing an intense armed insurgency in Sinai, which managed to perpetrate a number of terrorist attacks in Egypt's mainland. Situated in the throes of these whirlwinds in a capricious region, Egypt recognizes the all too imperative need to devise an effective foreign policy strategy aimed at diversifying allies and mechanisms of interaction and maximizing interest. Egypt is particularly concerned about being marginalized in regional politics, as it has been over the Syrian crisis, where its influence has been negligent; in fact, its voice has been superseded by other regional powerhouses, such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and even small states such as Qatar and the UAE.

Secondly, with the recent massive gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, estimated by the US Geological Survey at somewhere between 122tcf and 227tcf (as well as 1.7 billion barrels of oil), the region has the chance of becoming "one of the world's most important sources of natural gas over the next half-century" (Stocker 2012, 579). The gas reserves include the Tamar and Leviathan fields off the Israeli coast (2009 and 2010), the Aphrodite field south of Cyprus (2011), and the giant Zohr field, located around 190 kilometres off Egypt's northern coast (2015). These are worth hundreds of billions of dollars, and suggest that the region could "literally become a new Persian Gulf in terms of oil riches" (Engdahl 2012) and a source of energy diversification for Western European countries striving to lessen their dependence on Russian gas. Table 1 shows the major natural gas fields discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean and their potential reserves.

**Table 1: Major Gas Fields in the Eastern Mediterranean**

Field	Country	Potential Reserves Discovery Year	(trillion cubic feet)
Tamar	Israel	2009	10
Leviathan	Israel	2010	22
Aphrodite	Cyprus <sup>2</sup>	2011	5
Zohr	Egypt	2015	32

Source: Ahmed Kandil, 2018, "The European Union and Eastern Mediterranean Gas: Interests, Policies and Future Horizons," *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya*, vol. 54, no. 213, p. 112.

There is no denying that with these massive discoveries, both cooperation and conflict are knocking at the gates of regional parties. The trouble is that the state of political tension and overlapping maritime borders in the region may hamper the possibility of using this burgeoning wealth for the welfare of the entire region. In the crosshairs of several conflicts, the current

<sup>2</sup> The potential reserves of Cyprus are expected to increase in light of the new discoveries recently made by ExxonMobil in plot 10 of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (between 5 and 8tcf), although the exact amount is not yet confirmed (Ekathimerini 2019).

security setting in the Eastern Mediterranean is marred by volatility - albeit quiescent - complexity and uncertainty. In 2013, a scholar warned that "inadvertent escalation due to incidents at sea is becoming an increasingly probable scenario [in the Mediterranean] ... even a minor incident or provocation might be mistaken for an act of aggression" (Zhukov 2013). For instance, there are no formal diplomatic relations between Israel and Lebanon, and the maritime borders between the two countries have not been drawn. Both have laid claim to a vast area comprising 850-square-kilometers off their coasts (Mostafa 2016). The discord turned on a few occasions into a war of words, and the possibility of escalation into a heated conflict should not be discounted. In 2010, for instance, Israel's Minister of National Infrastructures Uzi Landau warned in an interview with *Bloomberg* that Israel "will not hesitate to use force" to protect its interests and defend the gas fields (Ferziger and Wainer 2010). In response, Lebanon's Energy and Water Resources Minister, Gebran Bassil, said that Israel "will pay the price" if it violates the Law of the Sea Convention (Mostafa 2016).

The lingering dispute between Turkey and Cyprus is another case in point. The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, declared "null and void" the 2003 Egyptian-Cypriot maritime demarcation agreement (El Dahshan 2018). Moreover, the Turkish leadership gave its naval troops the right to engage militarily with any warships in the disputed waters of the Eastern Mediterranean. When asked how he would react if he encountered Greek or Israeli ships, the Head of the Turkish Navy said: "We will move according to the rules of engagement that have been given us" (Smith 2014). Indeed, in February 2018, Turkish military ships intercepted a vessel owned by the Italian company Eni (en route to carry out drilling activities sanctioned by Nicosia) around 30 miles before its destination off the Cypriot coast.

Against the backdrop of such an intricate security environment, Egypt has made it clear from the onset that it is poised to be an energy-exporting hub in the Eastern Mediterranean. To be sure, Egypt has many of the prerequisites necessary to play such a vital role, including a central location at the intersection of the Asian and African continents and close to Europe, control of the vital Suez Canal, two huge liquefying facilities on the Mediterranean (in Idku and Damietta) that could be used as main trading points for East Mediterranean gas, as well as access to suppliers and proximity to markets.

To that end, Egypt took a number of important steps in 2018. In February, Israeli media announced a \$15 billion gas deal with Egypt, allowing natural gas from Israel's Tamar and Leviathan reservoirs to be exported to Egypt for 10 years. According to the agreement, quantities supplied will begin at 100 million standard cubic feet (scf) of gas in early 2019 and then rise gradually to reach 700 million scf per day (Magdy 2018). Against public concerns about the deal, Sisi asserted that by signing the deal with Israel, Egypt had "scored a goal." Explicitly stating his government's plan, he added: "I've been dreaming about it for four years, that we become a regional hub for energy ... All the gas coming from around the region will come to us. It's either re-exported to other countries or we use it locally" (El-Tablawy and El Wardany 2018). Two months later, Egypt signed a memorandum of understanding with the EU "for a strategic cooperation" in the field of energy. Moreover, in September 2018, Egypt signed

an agreement with Cyprus to establish a direct subsea gas pipeline, at the cost of \$800 million, which would transport Cypriot gas from the Aphrodite field to Egypt's liquefaction facilities for re-export to European markets (Farouk 2018)<sup>3</sup> The 2003 Egyptian-Cypriot agreement on delineating maritime borders and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) did not specify the starting point of the territory on the eastern side (which borders Israel), but in December 2013 both countries signed a unitization agreement on the joint exploitation of hydrocarbon reserves on the median line between their EEZs.

Furthermore, in 2018 Egypt renewed a natural gas deal with Jordan, according to which it will provide Amman with gas starting in January 2019. Egypt had begun to provide Jordan with 250 million cubic feet (mcf) of natural gas daily in 2004, but this came to a halt in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising due to successive attacks targeting the Arab Gas Pipeline. The new deal with Jordan will allow Egypt to export natural gas to Amman via the Arab Gas Pipeline that runs through the Sinai Peninsula. According to Egyptian sources, the deal will supply Jordan with a significant 2.6 billion cubic meters of gas a year, around 75 percent of the country's annual consumption of natural gas (Azran 2018).

Egypt's growing interest in the Mediterranean is reflected in its recent efforts to develop its naval forces and bolster its naval presence. In this regard Egypt has been vigorously backed by major European powers, which are deeply concerned about the dual spectres of terrorism and illegal immigration. As one analyst put it, the Europeans perceive Egypt to be "the only southern Mediterranean state that can help police the region and secure Europe's southern border" (Soliman 2017). Towards that end, Paris, Berlin and London have ramped up their arms sales to Egypt. Over the past few years, Egypt has received helicopter carrier warships, corvettes, amphibious assault ships and a reconnaissance satellite from France, submarines from Germany, and armored vehicles and components for aircraft from the UK. Additionally, in 2017 Egypt opened two military bases in the Mediterranean: the Barrani Base, near its porous border with conflict-ridden Libya, and the Mohamed Naguib base west of Alexandria, proclaimed to be the largest military base in the Middle East. Meanwhile, Egypt's armed forces have conducted several joint military and counter-terrorism exercises with France and the UK.

As a consequence of these investments, it is fair to say that Egypt has become a major military player in the Mediterranean region (Shama 2017). That Egypt has established a central military command for the Mediterranean reflects the prime significance it attaches to securing its Mediterranean gas fields. Indeed, Egypt's military spokesperson has on several occasions posted photos of Egyptian navy forces stationed close to the giant Zohr field. As a result of these efforts, Egypt now has the sixth most powerful navy in the world (Global Firepower 2018). The Egyptian President has stated that he did not purchase these arms for defence purposes, but to project Egypt's power in the Arab world. In April 2017, Sisi said: "Nobody will invade you

<sup>3</sup> Earlier, in November 2017, the two countries had signed a preliminary agreement to transport Cypriot gas to Egypt.

from the outside. So why do we own these [military] capabilities? We own them because a huge vacuum has happened in our region ... in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq ... this vacuum has to be filled, filled with these capabilities."

Several obstacles and hazards, however, militate against the materialization of the ambitious Egyptian scheme. For one, the economic rationale of the gas deal with Israel is questionable. According to an investigative report by the independent website *Mada Masr*, it is "unlikely that Israeli gas can be exported to Europe" because of its high cost. It is estimated that the imported Israeli gas will be sold for around \$7.5-8 per MBTU, while the current market price of gas bought by Europe stands at around \$5.8/MBTU (Bahgat 2018).

Aside from economic considerations, Turkey's enmity is one —if not the *main*— challenge to Egypt's geo-economic plans in the Mediterranean. Although the leaders of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece emphasized that their trilateral relationship "is not directed against anyone," it is clear that it is, at least partially, directed at Turkey (Spiliopoulou 2015). Bilateral relations between Cairo and Ankara sunk to a nadir when Turkey's strategic ally, former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, was jettisoned from power in July 2013. Bristling with anger, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan minced no words in describing Morsi's removal as a military coup, virulently attacking President Sisi and the new regime in Egypt, and even asking the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions on Egypt. In response, Egypt's foreign minister accused Turkey of interfering in Egypt's domestic affairs, recalled its ambassador from Ankara and declared the Turkish ambassador in Cairo persona non grata. Consequently, Egyptian-Turkish relations have been marred by acrimony and persistent mistrust as reflected in fervent rhetoric, media wars, and accusations of espionage. The fact that Turkey still tenaciously hosts a number of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood group (which is designated in Egypt as a terrorist organization and its political party outlawed) as well as several satellite channels run by hostile Egyptian dissidents, and that Egypt in late 2017 arrested 29 people accused of spying for Turkey, indicates without doubt that no conciliation or rapprochement between the two countries is in sight.

Although the partnership between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece includes a degree of military cooperation, its nature and scope appear to be quite limited. In June 2018, Egyptian, Cypriot and Greek forces took part in joint military exercises in the Mediterranean aimed at exchanging expertise and increasing combat capabilities in the management of naval and air force operations. Doubtless, such drills send a message to Turkey or, as one Turkish analyst put it, "are a sort of a psychological test for Turkey" (Sputnik News, 2018). However, it is unlikely that such cooperation will be elevated to include cooperation in real combat. The Cairo and Nicosia declarations, the most important political documents signed by the three countries, highlight the nature and limits of cooperation among the three countries. In both statements, the three countries affirm their interest in developing and nurturing the tripartite partnership and announce their stance towards a number of vital security issues in the region, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the challenge of international terrorism, the situation in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, and the Cyprus problem.



However, aside from announcing unified political positions regarding these general issues, emphasizing their adherence to the principles of international law and the ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and expressing the partnership's interest in promoting peace, stability, security and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean, the documents say little about what to expect from the parties in the case of any party's involvement in a military conflict. In light of these documents and other imperative factors, the trilateral relationship can hardly be described as an alliance or a defence pact. The closest the two documents come to hinting at potential security and military cooperation is the three countries' commitment "to mobilize" all their "capabilities in order to effectively promote" their common interests and values, and the reference in the Nicosia Declaration to the three countries' agreement to "step up cooperation" against terrorism and for defence and security issues. Legally and politically, such wording is too general and elusive to reflect real commitment in times of conflict.

Although the Egyptian leadership sees in its partnership with Cyprus and Greece an antidote to Turkish hegemonic plans, it will nevertheless have scant appetite for throwing its navy's weight in gunboat diplomacy with Turkey if tensions escalated in the Eastern Mediterranean. This reluctance is not only due to the specific perils involved in an unwanted confrontation with Turkey, which owns the "largest and most capable naval force" in the Mediterranean, consisting of hundreds of frigates, corvettes, submarines, and amphibious vessels (Zhukov 2013), but also because, discerning how the huge cost of military engagement would impact Egypt's troubled economy, Sisi has tread carefully in regional politics since his rise to power, showing little enthusiasm for sending Egyptian troops abroad.

Despite Saudi pressure, he has shied away from getting involved in the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts, ostensibly not only because of the complexity and intensity of both conflicts, but more broadly due to the army leaders' unwillingness to endanger their troops in missions beyond Egyptian territory. Although Sisi is overall more daring than Mubarak, a cautious politician who preferred quiet diplomacy and maintenance of the status quo, when it comes to military action, his preference seems to be to conduct limited aerial strikes, as Egypt did several times against the positions of ISIS and other Islamist militias in Libya, or participate in multinational coalitions where sizeable Egyptian forces could play crucial roles in low-risk, internationally-legitimate missions (Shama 2017).

## Conclusion

The birth and rise of the current Egypt-Cyprus-Greece partnership has its genesis in the complex security setting in the Eastern Mediterranean. Rich in hydrocarbon deposits, yet awash in conflict and mired in instability due to lack of a regional security organization, Eastern Mediterranean countries have, instinctively, striven to serve their interests and maximize their gains through bilateral and trilateral partnerships. Albeit looking on the surface like a solid alliance, the Egypt-Greece-Cyprus nascent association is at best a loose alliance, effectively a tactical short-term entente rather than a full-fledged alliance with clear responsibilities and binding commitments.



Economically, the tripartite relationship carries huge potential, especially for cooperation in the fields of energy and tourism. Yet, its security and military component has a limited deterring effect on the actions of other regional parties, particularly Turkey. Its litmus test would be to be capable of rolling back Turkish attempts at jeopardizing or encroaching upon Cyprus's economic interests. Still, the partnership may fare well if regional tensions are kept at bay, and if it succeeds in the long run in attracting other Mediterranean members. The closest candidate at the moment is Israel, although such a step would depend on a number of regional developments, especially on the intractable Arab-Israeli peace process.

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## CHAPTER 7:

# TURKEY'S GEOSTRATEGIC VISION AND ENERGY CONCERNS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: A VIEW FROM ANKARA

*Emre İşeri & Ahmet Çağrı Bartan*

*As we made the terrorists in Syria pay, we will not leave the scene to the bandits of the sea [referring to energy companies working in off-shore areas of Cyprus]. It is absolutely unacceptable to usurp the natural resources of the Eastern Mediterranean while excluding Turkey and the TRNC.*

– Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Sputnik, 4 November 2018).

### Introduction

According to the Turkish state-run news agency, Anadolu, on 18 October 2018, the Turkish navy blocked a Greek frigate trying to obstruct the operations of a Turkish seismic exploration ship, Barbaros Hayreddin Pasa, which was active in the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>1</sup> (AA 2018). Upon notification of the incident, Turkey's Foreign and Energy Ministries both quickly issued official statements, emphasizing that Turkey would continue to defend the exploration and drilling rights of Turkish Cypriots in their *de facto* territorial waters (AA 2018). Turkey's use of such 'gunboat diplomacy' can be traced nearly a decade back to the diplomatic debate and intimidation over discoveries in the Aphrodite gas field between Cyprus and Israel in December 2011. These politically laden energy developments have prompted Greece, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and Israel to align for a "soft-balance" (İşeri and Andrikopoulos 2013) and/or to form a "comfortable quasi-alliance" (Tziarras 2016) vis-à-vis Turkey.

İşeri, Emre and Bartan Çağrı, Ahmet (2019) "Turkey's Geostrategic Vision and Energy Concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean Security Architecture: A View from Ankara" in Tziarras Zenonas (ed.), *The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security. Re-imagining the Eastern Mediterranean Series: PCC Report*, 3. Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 111-124.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, the Eastern Mediterranean includes Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, and the island of Cyprus. Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, instead referring to it as Greek-Cypriot Administration. Turkey is the only country that recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

In fact, this scenario of heightened tension over the delimitation of maritime zones instigated by energy explorations is not peculiar to the East Mediterranean. There are several other areas where maritime boundary disputes (e.g., the East China Sea, the Arctic, Iran-United Arab Emirates, the Gulf of Paria) have not been resolved—in the absence of a concrete need to do so. Discoveries of energy reserves in disputed areas have led to two main types of boundary delimitation conflicts: sovereignty in an area with (potential) resources; distribution of the rights to extract and transport those resources. Energy deposits located in areas overlying various borders raise further problems, and require approval of the implicated states for exploration, exploitation, and transportation through cross-country pipelines (Shaffer 2009, 67-77). At this point, the question arises: Why do those energy discoveries (and their prospective transportation routes to markets) create tension and further strain relations, rather than promote peace and stability?

This paper will examine the above question in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves, focusing on Turkey's (energy) security, and the related regional partnerships of Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and Greece. There are several reasons why Turkey makes a good case study. First, Turkey has both a growing gas market and a potential transit route, in combination with an ambition to become a regional energy hub/centre<sup>2</sup>—at least at the level of official discourse (Bilgin 2010; Özdemir 2017; Yılmaz 2018). Second, to protect its strategic interests Turkey has adopted an assertive foreign policy approach, utilizing a wide array of instruments ranging from diplomacy to military deterrence in regional political disputes – including, but not limited to, the Cyprus conflict (Demiryol 2018, 3). Clearly, this rather over-ambitious stance on the part of Turkey will jeopardize the efficient exploitation and transmission of those gas discoveries.

Drawing on a neo-classical realist approach, the paper assumes that the international system determines the context in which units (i.e. states, bureaucracies, and individuals) respond to the threats and opportunities that the international system provides (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016). In this light, it argues that self-help politics at the regional level (i.e., the recurrent partnerships balancing one another and recent energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean) sets the contours of the units (i.e., the Turkish state-energy sector complex) in the making of Turkish (energy) foreign policy (cf. Cesnakas 2010). The paper relies

<sup>2</sup> An Energy hub means having a profound influence on an abroad network of energy pipelines and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) trade. Such status confers not only the ability to influence transit terms and conditions, but also re-exportation. An energy center represents a genuine trading centre in which energy hub characteristics have been complemented by massive energy investments. To qualify as an energy center, a country must attain both a sustainable energy mix and energy intensity figures (Bilgin 2010, 114). Regardless of official discourse promoting the country as a regional energy hub, through a political-economic perspective, Özdemir (2017, 111) argues that Turkey has effectively become "a gas corridor especially for producers rather than consumers." Beyond those technical terms, Richert (2015) emphasizes the political concept of "energy leadership" – mustering followers by giving them a common energy vision – to better understand Turkey's prospects of becoming a hub or centre in its immediate neighbourhood.

on primary official documents (i.e., 'Vision 2023',<sup>3</sup> energy strategy documents, etc.) and relevant academic literature to examine the Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) geostrategic vision that shaped Turkey's foreign (energy) policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The paper is outlined as follows: The first section provides a conceptual framework to examine how Turkey's geostrategic vision, together with its energy security considerations, determine its foreign (energy) policy. Drawing on official documents and policy-makers' public speeches, the second section explains more clearly the goals of Turkey's strategic vision and their impact on its energy policy. The third section focuses on Turkey's foreign (energy) policy ambitions within the Eastern Mediterranean security architecture, with a particular reference to the complex regional partnerships, especially between Israel, the RoC, Greece, and Egypt. The paper concludes that the new (energy) security architecture in the East Mediterranean put Turkish policy makers into difficult task of reconciling their energy ambitions (i.e. becoming an energy hub) with an assertive geostrategic vision.

### **Grand Strategy, Energy Security and Foreign Policy**

A state's grand strategy reflects its basic principles and/or policies in the long term, as it describes its highest priorities in all spheres of statecraft (e.g., military, diplomatic, and economic) (Silove 2017). For our purposes, we define a state's grand strategy as a guideline of how national power should be utilized in the face of developments in international/regional politics and trends – for our purposes, energy developments—in order to serve its national security goals. Therefore, as Shaffer (2009, 1) states: "a country's ability to access energy supplies and the ways in which it utilizes energy crucially determine not only the state of its economy, but also its national security." This stems from energy's dual attributes in relation to a state's economy (i.e., as a source for its growth and as revenue) and its sovereignty (i.e., as a strategic *national asset* consolidating a given state's domestic order and external influence). These political and economic characteristics of energy raise numerous "sovereignty stakes" pertaining to ownership, access, transport and sale, thereby rendering it a "source of relative power" (Hadfield 2012, 442).

In this light, energy is the key driver of a grand strategy's three main components: *ends* (securing sufficient energy at affordable prices), *ways* (instruments or tools to pursue non-energy goals), and *means* (revenue for pursuing non-energy goals) (O'Sullivan 2013, 32). This leads us to a multifaceted energy security definition: "being energy secure means having access to affordable energy *without* having to contort one's political, security, diplomatic, or military arrangements unduly" (O'Sullivan 2013, 31; emphasis in original). Hence, energy represents both an issue (economic and security) and a foreign policy tool for states (Hadfield 2012, 441).

<sup>3</sup> 'Vision 2023' is a 10-year government plan issued by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party in 2012, and includes a set of political, social, and global aims to be achieved by 2023, at the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic.



Considering that the (strategic) importance of energy resources is “largely rooted in the political and economic vulnerabilities of resource dependent states” (Le Billion 2005, 1), those dependent states (both consumer and transit states) are likely to be concerned economically (e.g., maintaining energy supplies) as well as politically (e.g., anxieties over political leverage that could be exercised by producers). For consumer/transit states, discussions over maintaining (energy) supply security and political anxieties turn into language of foreign policy (Hadfield 2012, 445).

When the energy resource at stake is natural gas, it comes with a variety of additional interrelated political and economic features. One should note that there has been growing demand for natural gas with relatively low carbon emissions in world energy markets, particularly in the European Union (EU) with its agenda to diversify away from Russian gas. Indeed, the International Energy Agency (IEA 2018) in its World Energy Outlook 2018 report indicated that natural gas, as the fastest growing fossil fuel both in production and in consumption, will become the world’s second largest energy source by 2030. Nonetheless, contrary to oil trade’s global scope, natural gas trade is still mainly regional and its supplies rely on long-term permanent infrastructures (i.e., pipelines, LNG facilities).

For this reason, prospective investors in the gas sector require long-term horizons with a predictable geopolitical and economic environment in which to “sink their capital and knowledge” (Barnes, Hayes, Jaffe and Victor 2006, 3). Understandably, the need for long-term certainty encourages investors to rely on inter-governmental agreements implicating all gas-trading units (i.e., producers, consumers, and transit states) and guaranteeing supply. Indeed, as Shaffer (2013, 115) notes, a natural gas supply chain (i.e., upstream, midstream, and downstream) has considerable potential to spark (geo)political tensions that could disrupt gas supply.<sup>4</sup> Thus we must assume that a state will consider all possible factors – including but not limited to prevailing political relations – when choosing its energy-trading partners.

As a consumer state poised to upgrade its transit state status to a regional energy hub/centre, Turkey presents a good case study to examine the interaction of energy security concerns and foreign policy ambitions. Thus, we will begin by examining how Turkey’s grand strategic vision relates to its energy security and foreign policy orientation.

### **Energy as both an issue and a tool in Turkey’s geostrategic vision**

Because of the many geopolitical and economic advantages that becoming an energy hub would bring to the country, Turkish leaders have adopted various policies towards this end. In the long term, such a transformation would mean: (1) enabling the country to diversify its

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<sup>4</sup> Shaffer (2013) argues that the prospects of natural gas disruption – and this could be initiated by others besides suppliers – will be determined by the form of supply relations: (1) neither side is dependent on the gas trade; (2) one side is dependent on the gas trade; (3) the two sides are interdependent on the gas trade. Among those forms, the third option is the least common (i.e., Germany-Russia).



suppliers and thus secure its energy reserves at home; and (2) using its 'transit country' position as leverage against its rivals, enabling it to maximize national interests and strengthen its hand as a rising regional power (Yılmaz 2018, 1). In other words, Turkey supports an energy policy with three distinct components, i.e., *ends* (e.g., procurement diversification, securing sufficient reserves), *ways* (e.g., instrument to elevate its geopolitical importance), and to a lesser extent, *means* (e.g., revenue).

This foreign (energy) policy outlook became prominent in the 2010s, when the Turkish government took decisive steps to transform the country's regional/global stance into a more pro-active one. In 2012, the government issued 'Political Vision 2023', which portrays Turkey as a rising global player, a powerful mediator for peace and stability in the Middle East. The Vision statement specifically notes the place of energy in foreign policy, and highlights Turkey's approach to energy trade as a "common denominator for regional peace." It is clear that the Turkish government openly associates the country's political and economic stability with its regional energy-related interests, and intends to be in a constant dialogue with all of its neighbours in this regard (AK Parti 2012, pp. 58-62).

Such an agenda might well explain why the Turkish government strives to integrate the country into the energy and transportation networks already established in the Middle East by presenting itself as a trade hub for the resources flowing through the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean (MFA 2013, 9). In other words, Turkey recognizes its weakness in terms of hydrocarbon production, but also realizes the importance of its geopolitical location in the midst of the European consumer market. Having 70% net energy import dependency, the country currently aims to secure its ever-increasing energy demand by diversifying its contacts and routes in its vicinity (AK Parti 2012, 58-62).

The Turkish 'National Energy Strategy' report, which set out a 4-year plan for the period 2015-2019, explicitly states that the country must be more pro-active if it wishes to present itself as a regional energy hub. The Energy Ministry stresses that, along with (1) diversifications in external purchases, the country should also mitigate its dependence on petroleum and natural gas through actively seeking (2) new resources using powerful national companies (AK Parti 2012, 23). In the effort to diversify external purchases, the Energy Strategy advises Turkey to practice effective energy diplomacy—especially with its neighbours possessing rich natural gas and petroleum reserves, and to invest much more in its infrastructural set-up to make better use of the resources to be traded. In this regard, the Strategy report states that the country must quickly initiate and complete the planned pipeline projects and establish itself as an energy hub. Only then, according to the document, could Turkey integrate with the energy markets in the neighbourhood, increase its economic growth, and eventually prove to be a powerful actor in the international arena (ETKB 2017, 79-86).

On 7 April 2017, then Energy Minister Berat Albayrak made related statements at the public meeting on the 'National Energy and Mining Policy of Turkey', by linking Turkey's energy needs (specifically natural gas) with its overall economic, foreign and security policy. According to

Albayrak, the good management of the country's energy needs would ensure success in Turkey's economic and security policy, and strengthen its hand as a rising 'soft' power in the Middle East (ETKB 2018a).

Against this backdrop, Turkey considers energy as both an issue (security and economic) and a tool of its foreign policy, especially when geopolitical/security concerns are at stake. On the one hand, energy seems to be *an economic issue*, since Turkey has long been aiming to diversify its energy supply to meet a growing energy demand and to generate revenue as a transit state. Energy is also *a security issue*, considering its peculiar characteristics as a national power asset. On the other hand, Turkish policy-makers consider energy as *a tool*. Regardless of its energy profile with rising imports, Turkey has set the ambitious target of becoming an energy hub not only to generate additional revenue, but also to acquire more geopolitical influence in the region. This has prompted Turkey to initiate various energy pipeline projects both in the east-west (e.g., TANAP) and north-south axis (e.g., the Turkish Stream). In the context of Turkey's turbulent geopolitical environment, the aforementioned energy strategy has paved the way for Ankara to deal with the daunting task of "synchronizing geopolitics and foreign policy with energy security" (Bilgin, 2015). Parallel to this, Yılmaz and Sever (2016, 121) discuss the Eastern Mediterranean as an area "where [there is a] major incongruence between energy interests and current foreign policy choices." Within the framework of the new energy (in)security architecture owing to the emerging trilateral partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean, this is especially true for Turkey with an additional dimension: *sovereignty claims*.

### **Energy (In)security in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey**

Significant natural gas reserves have been found in the East Mediterranean, as noted above; however, most countries in the region – excluding Egypt – have only recently sought and located their reserves. In the last decade, extremely large-scale reserves have been identified, heralding 'a new deep water province gas bonanza' totalling over 3000 billion cubic meters (bcm), one-third of which has been found in the Levant Basin and the rest in Egypt (see, Table 1). Hosting one of the world's largest under-explored fields, the region has good prospects for additional reserves in both gas and oil as well. Differently put, potential gas reserves in Israel and Cyprus will provide much more than their domestic consumption needs for decades, meaning there is export possibility for those significant amounts of gas for the region. Unsurprisingly, those large reserve potentials have lured international energy firms into the foray.

**Table 1: Off Shore Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean**

Country	Discovery date	Field name	Estimated reserves (bcm)	Production Status
Cyprus	2011	Aphrodite	140	Awaiting development
	2019	Glaucus-1	142-227	Further evaluation needed
	2018	Calypso-1	170-230	Further evaluation needed
Israel	1999	Noa	1.2	Nearly depleted
	2000	Mari-B	30	Nearly depleted
	2009	Tamar	317	In production
	2010	Leviathan	605	Awaiting development
	2012	Tanin	34	Awaiting development
	2013	Karish	50	Awaiting development
Egypt	2015	Zohr	850	In production
<b>World proven reserves in total</b>	201.729 bcm			

Sources: Delek Group official website (2019), EIA (2018), Exxon (2018) Noble Energy official website (2019)

Nonetheless, the discoveries represent only one side of the coin; the other side involves converting those reserves into production capacity and transporting them to international/domestic markets in a timely manner. There are three main gas export options: (1) pipeline (e.g., the EastMed gas pipeline linking Israel and Cyprus to European markets through Greece and Italy; Israel-Cyprus-Turkey); (2) LNG (e.g., two export terminals in Egypt, and/or the prospective terminal in Vasilikos, Cyprus); (3) a combination of both (e.g., Cyprus-Egypt; Israel-Egypt) (Karbuz 2018, 238-247).

It must be noted, however that there are several conditions that must be satisfied before those huge energy investment projects can be realized, mainly related to the tense geopolitical environment of the Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, the director of Hydrocarbons at the Mediterranean Observatory for Energy (OME), Karbuz (2018, 248) argues that “exploitation and export of hydrocarbon resources present enormous technical, commercial, administrative, security, legal and political challenges with some geopolitical implications.” Those security, legal, and political challenges manifest themselves in disputes over the maritime zones demarcation and the ownership of resources, namely the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)<sup>5</sup> and the continental shelf sovereign rights.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Conferring states to exclusive rights to seabed (energy) resources for up to 200 nautical miles from the coastline.

<sup>6</sup> Conferring states to exercise sovereign rights in the coastal shelf (the part of the continent that is under water) for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources.

Against this backdrop, Turkish policy-makers evaluate the RoC's delimitation agreements (with Israel, Egypt and Lebanon) and their common stance with Greece against the Turkish EEZ claims in the Eastern Mediterranean as transgression of not only the economic, but also the sovereign rights of both Turkey and the TRNC. First, Turkey recognizes neither the RoC nor its proclaimed EEZ. Second, Turkey does not think that the RoC represents Turkish Cypriots in the island. Third, Turkey claims that the RoC's unilateral exploration process is undermining the resolution of the Cyprus problem. Fourth, Turkish policy-makers consider the Greek Cypriots' granting of exploration licences to various energy companies as an attempt to outmanoeuvre Turkey into a narrow area of open sea within the Antioch Gulf (Başaren 2013, 258).

This conflicts with Turkey's continental shelf claims on the west of Cyprus. Even though it has not declared so officially, Turkey has been pursuing a policy of utilizing riparian states' rights in the continental shelf under customary law. The country is not a signatory of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, but Turkish officials argue that disputes concerning EEZ and continental shelf rights in the Eastern Mediterranean could be solved via multilateral agreements between Turkey, the RoC, Greece, Egypt and Israel. Therefore, Turkey rejects the Greek Cypriot deals with Israel, Lebanon and Egypt on behalf of the whole island, which isolate the interests of the Turkish side. In line with this policy, Turkey's subsequent continental shelf agreement signed with the TRNC in 2011 inherently opposes the RoC's decision to grant licenses to certain EEZ blocks (1, 4, 5, 6, and 7) on the grounds that they overlap with the Turkish continental shelf (Karbuz, 2018, 249). Hence, Turkey has been concentrating on protecting not only its continental shelf claims, but also those of the TRNC (Başaren 2013, 259-262).

On the other hand, Turkish policy-makers perceive the current drilling efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean as attempts to shift regional power balances at the expense of its national security interests. In this parallel, Turkish leaders have resorted to not only "coercive diplomacy" (Kontos and Bitsis, 2018), but also the empowerment of the country's naval presence in the region. At this point, one should note 'Blue Motherland' as the largest navy drill conducted across three seas through which, the Turkish military aimed to "showcase its strength and advertise energy security" (Soylu, 2019). Through those initiatives, arguably, Turkey has intended to relay naval military might messages to the trilateral agreements of the RoC, Israel, Greece and Egypt. Indeed, as Demiryol (2018, 10) asserts, these partnerships have prompted Turkey to feel even more anxious in the region (especially when it comes to energy issues).

Turkey and the TRNC have made three major moves to protect their sovereign rights in the Eastern Mediterranean (Pamir 2018): First, Turkey has used all possible means, including military intervention, to stop foreign operations into those off-shore blocks (1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12, and 13) that are licensed by the Turkish government to the Turkish national energy company TPAO (*Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı*). Second, similar military actions have also been implemented to stop incursions into the TPAO areas licensed by the TRNC. A very recent example of this was when an ENI drilling platform was moving towards the block 3, namely the Cuttlefish target (Pamir 2018). Lastly, the TRNC and Turkey are pursuing well-organized diplomatic efforts to assert their rights over hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On all occasions, Turkey tends to remind international actors that its support for the Turkish-Cypriots living in TRNC is vested and interminable (AK Parti 2012). In the Vision 2023 statement, the political, economic, and infrastructural investments in TRNC are specifically underlined and the achievements of the Turkish Cypriot administration are repeatedly praised (AK Parti 2012). More importantly, reading through the Vision (AK Parti 2012), one may also infer that the TRNC's interests are treated as the interests of the broader Turkish nation, as the very last part of the document touches upon why Turkey should look out both for its own and the Turkish Cypriots' interests in the Mediterranean. In this context, it is openly stated that the reason behind Turkey's recent quest for the discovery of natural gas and petroleum in the Eastern Mediterranean is actually "for the sake of the empowerment, self-sufficiency, and prosperity of the all Turkish-Cypriots on the island" (AK Parti 2012, 69).

Turkey is officially aware of the fact that there might be significant natural gas reserves to be discovered around Cyprus, and thus highly prioritizes its potential as a supply centre for natural gas in the East Mediterranean. Such being the case, the Turkish government condemns the RoC's unilateral seismic activities in the vicinity, and regard them as a violation of the Turkish Cypriots' (unrecognized) sovereign rights on these reserves, since they are also part of the island (MFA 2017, 162). Turkey, then, approaches the issue as a part of the long-standing 'Cyprus Problem' in the sense that it insists the TRNC is a full-fledged, legal political entity whose rights and status must be internationally recognized and respected.

In line with this, Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Dönmez has stated that "Turkey will block any attempt in the Eastern Mediterranean that is unilateral and violates the territorial rights of Turkey and the TRNC" (ETKB 2018b). Conformably, Energy Minister Dönmez (ETKB 2018b), like his predecessor Berat Albayrak, also agrees that "independence in energy is a key to a strong economy, strong diplomacy, and (thus) a strong national security". Here, one can argue that Turkish officials treat the issue in the sphere of hard-politics, as a matter of sovereignty. That is apparently why Turkey is now more actively using its two relatively new ships, Oruç Reis and Fatih, for seismic research and drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, with an aim to further intensify its presence there, in face of increasing riparian state activity (and tensions).

Today, Israel and Cyprus are collaborating in the security domain based on a common perception of a 'Turkish threat,' as Turkey vows to interfere in Cyprus's offshore development plans (Prontera and Ruszel 2017, 155). However, Turkey's policy options are, in fact, limited on this matter. The recently intensified hydrocarbon explorations and Turkey's gunboat diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean seem to do nothing more than attract even more international attention to the decades-old regional issue of the Cyprus dispute (Kahveci Özgür 2017, 36). At this point, Carlson (2016, 67) argues that, right now, the most expedient economic option in the Eastern Mediterranean is the construction of a new pipeline carrying the Cypriot and Israeli gas through Turkey (as the Egyptian market could well saturate itself after the Zohr discoveries). However, as long as Turkey has been left out of the intensified Israel-Cyprus-Greece-Egypt energy partnership, namely the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, prospects for regional stabilization and, therefore, efficient energy resource development might go down the drain.

## Conclusion

This paper has aimed to contribute to the on-going debate over the geopolitical implications of the East Mediterranean gas discoveries and the emerging trilateral partnership of the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey, considering its growing gas market, and with an ambition to become a regional energy centre/hub, has adopted a more assertive foreign policy. At the same time, however, Turkey is increasingly anxious over the new trilateral partnerships, which it feels threaten its own efficient exploitation/transmission of the Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries. To better understand Turkey's position, this paper has attempted to clarify the overlap between the country's geostrategic vision, foreign policy and energy security concerns. In doing so, we argue that political developments around the gas discoveries (i.e., emergence of the trilateral partnerships) have proven to be more of a challenge than an opportunity for Turkish policy-makers and their foreign (economic) policy ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean. The paper has relied heavily on primary sources (e.g., official reports, documents and speeches), relevant academic literature and expert opinions to substantiate its argument.

The findings have confirmed that in the Eastern Mediterranean region gas pipelines are not likely to offer a route to peace (cf. Hayes and Victor 2006); in fact, they are more likely to provoke political tensions (cf. Shaffer 2013) unless constructive steps are taken via more inclusive partnerships embracing all riparian parties concerned. In line with this, we would argue that the chances of those proposed peace pipeline projects ever materializing (e.g., Israel-Cyprus-Turkey) are quite low today, due to the absence of a solid political ground (cf. Shaffer 2014). Even if those pipelines become operational, there will likely be high risks for distribution without a policy alignment. If they wish to avert this bleak scenario, the trilateral partners should design natural gas projects that could consider Turkey's foreign (energy) policy anxieties as well. As TRNC President Mustafa Akıncı stated: "the East-Med pipeline [is] not a route to peace" (Daily Sabah 2018). With an estimated cost of 5.8 billion euros to carry the Eastern Mediterranean gas to Italy through Crete and Greece, this transmission option will be neither economically nor politically feasible according to Akıncı, as such a plan excludes Turkish Cypriots' and Turkey's interests (Daily Sabah 2018). He also stated in the same speech that managing stability in the region requires a mutual-beneficial approach, which necessitates a route that would transfer the gas to Europe via Turkey, which is the shortest, cheapest and fastest (Daily Sabah 2018).

In this sense, Winrow argues that the "regions and empires" perspective should be replaced by a "markets and institutions" thesis for peace and stability in the region (Winrow 2016, 434). He acknowledges the political gravity of the situation for Turkey as well as its relationships with Gaza and Cyprus, but says that the Turks are the ones who are thirstier for energy. Therefore, by working for a 'peace pipeline,' the country could greatly benefit from prospective gas supplies, transit revenues, and possible gas re-exports. This is, for Winrow (2016), also something that could strengthen Turkey's geopolitical position in the region.

All in all, our analysis of official government reports and policy-makers' speeches have confirmed earlier studies (Bilgin 2015; Yılmaz and Sever-Mehmetoğlu 2016; Aydın and

Dizdaroğlu 2018) that reveal the regional systemic challenges posed to Turkish policy-makers as they try to harmonize their assertive geostrategic vision and ambitions pertaining to energy policy (e.g. becoming a centre/hub) in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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## CHAPTER 8:

# CONCLUSIONS: THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IS WHAT REGIONAL STATES MAKE OF IT

*Zenonas Tziarras*

Between 19 and 23 March 2019, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, visited Kuwait, Israel and Lebanon. The State Department's press release noted, among other things, that Pompeo would also participate in "the [6th] recurring trilateral Head of State meeting with Israel, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus" that took place in Jerusalem on 20 March (US State Department 2019). The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) stated that Pompeo's participation in the trilateral meeting "was a very important development" and "a vote of confidence" regarding the emerging energy cooperation among the Eastern Mediterranean states in question (Tzanetakou 2019). The timing of the meeting roughly coincided with at least six additional related developments that demonstrate the complexity and dynamism of regional activity: a) the discovery of new hydrocarbon reserves in Cyprus's EEZ (Block 10, location Glafkos-1) by the Exxon Mobil-Qatar Petroleum consortium; b) the "largest navy drill" in Turkey's history (Blue Homeland, *Mavi Vatan*) (Kasapoglu 2019); c) the arrival of the new US ambassador to Cyprus, Judith Gail Garber; d) the deepening of French-Cypriot relations, including in the security domain; (e) growing diplomatic tensions between Turkey and Israel; and (f) the Greek Foreign Minister's visit to Turkey via an official visit in Cyprus.

These developments point to three geopolitical tendencies in the Eastern Mediterranean: a) cooperation, b) conflict, and c) great power mingling. These tendencies are not new as such, but they are manifesting in different ways. In terms of 'conflict,' whereas the West-backed Turkish-Israeli alliance (since the 1990s) and the close RoC/Greece relationship with the Arab world (and rather cold relationship with Israel) were integral to the Eastern Mediterranean security structure and to a certain extent antagonistic, the 2010s brought about something of a reversal in this pattern. Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and Israel are collaborating closely, while having

either cold or non-existent relations with Turkey. At the same time, the stalemate in the Cyprus peace talks and the assertiveness of Turkish foreign policy raise further obstacles to the prospect of an expanded and inclusive regional cooperation that would go beyond the existing trilateral partnerships. In terms of 'great power mingling', the growing interest of the US, the EU and France in the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates the value that these actors ascribe to the region in terms of their own objectives, be they energy-related, economic or security-oriented. But what do these geopolitical tendencies tell us about the present and future of the Eastern Mediterranean?

### ***Making Peace or Reconfiguring Conflict?***

Contrary to initial hopes and expectations (see, e.g., Gürel and Le Cornu 2014), the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean has not – yet – catalysed peace in the region. This should not come as a surprise given that natural resource-abundant countries are generally more prone to conflict, especially in complex geopolitical environments (Feldt 2008). As the chapters of this report have demonstrated, energy – along with other factors – has indeed played an important role in the formation of the trilateral partnerships but only among certain actors thus contributing to the shifting power balances in the Eastern Mediterranean. The outcome was not the emergence of peace but the reconfiguration of conflict and the creation of a new regional 'bipolar tension': one of the power poles is Turkey and its often coercive strategies vis-à-vis the (energy) developments in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kontos and Bitsis 2018); the other power pole consists of the various trilateral partnerships among Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Israel.

There is little doubt that two poles are antagonistic, even though the participating states often declare that the trilateral partnerships are not formed against any other country (including Turkey) and are open to Turkey's participation – provided that issues such as the Cyprus Problem are resolved (Marathovouniotis 2018). Indeed, the resolution of the Cyprus Problem has not become any easier; not only have energy discoveries not provided incentives for peace but they rather have become another point of contention that has exacerbated inter-communal tensions (eKathimerini 2018; TC PIO 2018). What is more, it seems that energy discoveries are also creating some antagonism within the Cyprus-Israel-Egypt triangle, with Egypt's rather ambiguous stance on the EastMed pipeline project<sup>1</sup> and the discontent of certain Israeli circles over delays to a Cyprus-Israel monetization agreement on the Aphrodite gas field (Block 12 of Cyprus's EEZ) and the Cyprus-Egypt agreement on a pipeline from Aphrodite to Egypt (Coren 2019; Ellinas 2018). Against this background, despite the benefits gained thus far, the question that arises is, how viable and how instrumental is the emerging security structure for the peace and development of the Eastern Mediterranean in the long term?

<sup>1</sup> In February 2019, Egypt's Petroleum Minister stated that his country was not interested in participating in the EastMed pipeline project, only to change his approach in March 2019 saying that Egypt will support the pipeline (EnergyPress 2019).

***Targeting Domestic Audiences and Facilitating International Interests?***

There is no doubt that the trilateral partnerships have created new prospects for the participating states and the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole. After all, the ongoing collaboration within the partnerships is quite tangible in many, if low-politics, domains (Tziarras 2018, 17-23). It is true that major practical steps forward in the domains of collective defence and energy cooperation have not been made yet – or, are not yet visible – despite rhetorical proclamations and projected expectations. As the authors in this report have demonstrated, the partnerships in question are not as rigid as they may seem insofar as participating states want to keep their options open. Not surprisingly, this rhetoric, the cultivation of expectations, and sometimes the exaggeration of certain political-diplomatic achievements, serve well the agenda of the participating governments vis-à-vis their domestic audiences.

At the same time, this approach has a twofold effect on external relations: a) it creates a collective-interstate momentum that attracts the interest of third parties – e.g. states, companies, and international organizations; and b) the networks of collaboration become useful —provided that participating states are open to it— for the agenda and objectives of these third parties, including great powers. From this perspective, the US Secretary of State's participation in the 6th Cyprus-Greece-Israel meeting, during a broader tour in the Middle East that aimed to push the American foreign policy agenda (State Department 2019), suggests that Eastern Mediterranean developments are not merely a regional affair but also part of broader geopolitical activity and even antagonism between great powers. Cyprus's shift towards the West (as discussed in Chapter 4) despite its traditionally close relationship with Russia can be seen in the same context: that of growing western efforts to exert influence in the area and find proxies (states or networks of collaboration) that would facilitate their interests as the US is 'falling back' to regroup.

***Epilogue***

In his seminal work on Constructivism and the anarchy of the international system, Alexander Wendt famously wrote that "anarchy is what states make of it" arguing that the realist notion of international anarchy is not inherent in the international system; it is rather a (social) construct of the system's nation-states (Wendt 1992). Putting aside the Realism vs. Constructivism theoretical debate, there is little doubt that the foreign policy behaviour of states has an impact on their external environment and interaction with other states. Perhaps national interests narrowly defined, traditional geopolitical problems and historical patterns of enmity set the stage and the pace of international relations in the troubled region of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, states are not merely mindless and passive victims of their geopolitical circumstances, although they may sometimes be powerless in the face of certain challenges. More often than not, states have a choice to either indulge in conflict and competition or engage in dialogue and negotiation. As such, the future of the Eastern Mediterranean largely depends on what regional states will make of it. If either of the two antagonistic poles of the Eastern Mediterranean

chooses polarization and confrontation over dialogue and collaboration, the future of the region will not look much different from its turbulent past. Peace and more regional integration is by no means a given outcome of the new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean.

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The purpose of this collective volume is to examine in depth the new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean with particular focus on the various aspects of the emergent trilateral partnerships of the Greece-Cyprus-Israel and Greece-Cyprus-Egypt. The authors are particularly interested about the individual and collective drivers and motivations that brought these countries together, as well as the strengths, weaknesses and prospects of these partnerships. Moreover, the volume aims to shed light on how regional and global powers shape the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean, and how they view the trilateral partnerships. At the same time, the prospects and pre-conditions of success for these partnerships are also examined in light of the common interests of participating states, areas of cooperation and third party inclusion or reactions.

ISBN 978-82-7288-966-0 (print)

ISBN 978-82-7288-967-7 (online)



The report can be ordered from:  
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P.O.Box 25157, 1307 Nicosia, Cyprus  
Tel: +357 22 456555/4  
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