

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.

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<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

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<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).

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<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	Glaucois-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) (Karbus 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), Karbus (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 (Karbuş, 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

Dizdarođlu 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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