

Winning the Zero on Eastern Mediterranean Chessboard : Players, Games, and Moves

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ABSTRACT

Competition over the extraction, transmission, and marketing of energy resources is one of the most fundamental contentious topics in contemporary international relations literature. The parties in this competition are the states, international institutions, and multinational corporations. The participants in this competition, which has taken place mainly on the chessboard in the Eastern Mediterranean, include regional and global powers. The fact that Türkiye holds rights over a portion of Cyprus, its historical ties to the region, and its status as an energy hub make it a significant regional actor. The new energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are based on alliances between players and are different from other energy regions. Regarding ongoing competition, this raises questions about how these alliances will affect the relationships between the players, the moves regional actors will make, and the continuation of the game. From this vantage point, this study will explore the chessboard in the Eastern Mediterranean region in terms of the players and the position of Türkiye in this region and among these actors. It will be asserted that Türkiye engages in a lose-lose game that it cannot win alongside other actors

Keywords : *Eastern Mediterranean ; energy ; stag hunt ; Nash equilibrium ; Turkish foreign policy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean region has long been a vital communication hub for nations, civilizations, and trade routes. This geopolitically significant region has become strategically crucial due to the presence of hydrocarbon reserves. In other words, the region has evolved from being only a nexus point to a chessboard where many players from outside the region are participating and where they move to defend their interests. This paper will detail Türkiye's role and actions in this equation.

There has been a protracted conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. Players of the region disagreed over the delineation of maritime zones for a long time, but modern public opinion seems to have forgotten about these disputes. They have not agreed again until a 2019 maritime zone of influence agreement between Türkiye and Libya was signed. It has been noted that the regional actors took action to exclude Türkiye until 2019, the year when the last political maneuvers of the world before Covid were seen.¹ One other common thread is that the years 2019 and 2020 were the only ones in which significant discoveries were made in the region. Considering the new paradigm, Türkiye is well on its way to transitioning from a country that serves as a transit hub to an international energy center beginning in 2019. However, given the complexity of the Eastern Mediterranean, it appears impossible to transport future-promising gas deposits without the participation of all regional actors. As observed throughout history, regional actors are undermining each other in the Eastern Mediterranean basins rather than

¹ From 2015 to 2020, the offshore natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean changed the territorial sovereignty disputes between Greece, Cyprus, and Türkiye from being mostly local to becoming the center of wider conflicts between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

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drilling their natural gas wells. Under these conditions, it seems unlikely that an uneasy and cautious Türkiye will be on the side of collaboration.

In this regard, the Nash equilibrium and Rousseau's allegory of "Stag Hunt" will be used to analyze Türkiye's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation. The transport of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe was considered a Stag in the allegory; The EastMed pipeline project, directed by the actors of Israel, Southern Cyprus, Greece, and Italy planned by ignoring Türkiye, was thought of as a hare that emerged out of nowhere. Based on this metaphor, the study's argument states that Türkiye's strategy is a lose-lose strategy because Türkiye cannot obtain a share of stag and hare. At the same time, other regional actors cannot get their desired outcomes either.

In line with this argument, the first section will discuss the Stag Hunt allegory of Rousseau and the Nash equilibrium, which form the theoretical framework of the study, and the second section will go into more detail about the geopolitical significance of the Eastern Mediterranean region, its hydrocarbon potential, and how this potential affects the region. The third section of the study will detail domestic and non-regional countries that have a say or are attempting to have a say in the Eastern Mediterranean region and multinational corporations that are still operating there. The fourth and final section will focus specifically on Türkiye's position on this chessboard and the game being played there.

2. MAKING HUNTERS DEPRIVED OF STAG AND HARE: THE NASH EQUILIBRIUM AND THE STAG HUNT ALLEGORY

In order to understand Türkiye's regional policies, it would be appropriate to talk about the Stag Hunt allegory first. The Stag Hunt analogy first appeared in "Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men" by J. J. Rousseau. According to Rousseau, once people began living together, they developed fundamental ideas about mutual reconciliation and effectiveness. However, this consensus was based on the short-term interests of individuals, and the compatibility of these interests determined its efficacy because people lack the awareness to set and attain long-term objectives (Rousseau, 2010, p. 137).

For example, when it comes to hunting a stag that people can agree on, people would cooperate and work to catch and share a stag. However, when a hare passed within the range that any hunter involved in the hunt could hunt, the able hunter would stop chasing the stag and hunt the hare. It should never be doubted that when the hunter caught the hare, he would never share it with the other hunters in his team (Rousseau, 2010, p. 137).

Rousseau's allegory of Stag Hunt was later used in game theories by different academics. This example was used to study how economic actors share an existing resource. Skyrms and Irvine started to change the allegory by doing the following (Skyrms and Irvine, 2001, p. 31): Hare and Stag can be hunted by any hunter. The chance to hunt the hare is independent of other hunters because any hunter who can afford it can hunt the hare. It is impossible to hunt a stag without the cooperation of hunters, and the number of hunters is significant for a stag hunt to be successful. At the same time, a stag is much more valuable than a hare.

No matter what the other hunters do, hunting hares is likely to be successful, and the hunter who goes after hares will do so regardless of what the other hunters do. On the other hand, hunting a stag does have a probability of success, but there are so many things that can go wrong that hunters may not be able to hunt a stag, and hunters who prefer the stag may not gain. From this point of view, a pessimist hunter would rather hunt a hare as soon as possible because he or she would think it is impossible to hunt the stag. At the same time, a careful hunter who doesn't know what other hunters will do may prefer to hunt a hare. This doesn't mean that reasonable people can't work together to hunt the stag. Still, this way of hunting is based on trust (Skyrms and Irvine,

2001, p. 32). Even though this is what rationality says, it is not valid in the real world because people want to maximize their interests.

In one of their articles, Amitav Acharya and Richard Stubbs says that the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations would be a trust-based solution to the problem of cooperation between its member states. They use the Stag Hunt allegory to explain how this would work (Acharya and Stubbs, 2006, p. 130). Waltz, on the other hand, explains in this allegory that the tension between man's self-interest and the general interest of the group would be resolved by a man acting alone, and he says that the first thing that drives hunters is hunger. He thinks it would be best for the group to work with other hunters and choose stag over people. But his mind also tells him that if he doesn't follow the hare, the hunter next to him may leave him and that they will never catch the stag because they don't work together. It also tells him that he will act irrationally if he stays true to the group and its interests (Waltz, 1959, p. 169). From this point of view, for harmony to exist in an anarchic society, it is necessary to assume that subjects themselves and others will act rationally (Waltz, 1959, p. 169).

In the allegory "Stag Hunt," it makes sense, and predictably, people will want to catch the hare. The other hunters in the group will think this is cruel and arbitrary because when hunters go out to hunt a stag, they all have to work together. If even one hunter gives up, they can't hunt the stag. Even if a state has only good intentions for itself, other states may fight hard against it (Waltz, 1959, p. 183).

Nash equilibrium tries to find the best way to play a game. In this balance of mutual best decisions, each actor has to think about what is best for him or her when the other actors make a choice. So, a Nash equilibrium happens when game theory gives a unique answer to the equation in question (Gibbons, 1992, p. 8). In light of all of this, Rousseau's Stag Hunt allegory, a game that can show the Nash equilibrium, will be used to look at Türkiye's moves in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation.

First, to do an analysis of game theory in international relations, you need to know who the players are, what decisions they can make, how much they know about each other (alliances, decisions made, order of preference, etc.), and if the decisions are made in a particular order (Güner, 2003, p. 167).

Considering what is happening in the region, it will be apparent that Türkiye's moves in the ongoing energy game in the Eastern Mediterranean ensure the "Nash Equilibrium" (Hargreaves, Heap, and Varoufakis, 2004, p. 58–78). Türkiye is one of the countries that has a stake in this basin. Bearing in mind what has happened between now and 2019 in terms of the geopolitical effects of discoveries, the decisions made on the chessboard and what they mean can help us make assumptions that will help us finish the game. Through different legitimizing discourses and structures in the Eastern Mediterranean stage, all of the players in the game have had strategies that can be used to describe the game and moves (decisions) in this context. The critical role of Türkiye as an actor lies in figuring out how the exploration of hydrocarbon reserves affects players in the Eastern Mediterranean in a broader sense.

It has already been said that Türkiye has a policy of "lose-lose," which means that it doesn't take advantage of its energy resources and can't make a profit, but other regional actors can't get what they want, either. This situation can be modeled as a game. The results make a model that can help with convincing analyses of how this balance of power has changed over the past few years as of 2019 about major global players like Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Türkiye, and Greece, as well as the US, China, Russia, and the EU.

The problem of sharing natural gas is one of the essential parts of the energy game, which has many dimensions. There is no energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. All the talks should be about getting energy, processing it, and moving it. People think of energy security as the safety of this process and misuse the term. In fact, there are no questions about energy security. Countries that use energy and countries that produce it play a game to protect their energy security. They do this by sharing policies and following different rules and procedures to determine the best way

to coordinate their interests. As a country exporting energy, Türkiye works closely with countries that import energy to keep energy supply secure. Depending on natural gas and oil from other countries to meet its own needs drags Türkiye to other pursuits.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF HYDROCARBON FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The great historian Braudel, who is known for his book *"The Mediterranean and Mediterranean World in the Period of Philip II"* and is the founder of the Annales School with his long-term (*longue duree*) history readings, says that to understand the Mediterranean, *"is a singular effort to understand the details that shape its common destiny such as human, commercial, geographical, religious and climatic features"* (Braudel, 1989, p. 237). This also means that the people who live around the Mediterranean should be seen as representatives of civilization today.

Braudel, who offers a historical perspective guided by sociological and economic developments by going beyond chronological distinctions, defines the Mediterranean as a *"complex of seas"* (Braudel, 1989, p. 1). According to this view, it can be said that this is where the difference between East and West starts. This sea, which stretches from Gibraltar to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, has created two hostile worlds from the Greek and Phoenician colonial period to modern times (Braudel, 1990, p. 11-12). The Mediterranean is exposed to numerous blows from Northern Europe. However, the counter-blows are also relatively high and mostly decisive (Braudel, 1989, p. 2). At this moment, Braudel puts Eastern civilizations like Egypt, Phoenicia, and Mesopotamia in the same lane as Greek and Roman civilizations. The Mediterranean is what ties them all together. When one comes to the 21st century, it is seen that the axis of the discussions is locked in this traditional distinction and cannot go beyond interpreting the control mechanisms of developed/hegemonic states. Braudel said, *"just as 20th-century man could not fully dominate the Pacific area just yesterday, it has always been difficult to dominate the Mediterranean space"* (Braudel, 1989, p. 238).

Eastern Mediterranean coasters all have different backgrounds and concerns about the region. In addition, the relations between them are deeply intertwined. According to the currently discussed models for the Eastern Mediterranean and the logic of regional conflict, the struggle for energy sharing emerges in an environment of normative fragmentation in which coasters or non-regional actors are not hegemonic (Heydemann and Chace-Donahue, 2018, p. 29-32).

According to Brzezinski, France's most significant geopolitical zone in the Mediterranean is the territory that reaches as far as the Iberian Peninsula, the Western Mediterranean North Coast, East-Central Europe, and Germany. For the interests of France, according to Brzezinski, this territory must either be under French control or avoided at all costs by another major nation (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 63). At the same time, all Southern European states are becoming more and more socially and politically threatened by the instability of the Mediterranean's southern coastlines (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 78-79).

According to Huntington, in a similar vein to Braudel, it has served as the nexus of civilizations that have come together, particularly with the Eastern Mediterranean, southwest Asia, and northern India, since the 1500s. The ability to communicate or conduct business with other civilizations was restricted without these link points, and traveling great distances was a significant challenge. In other words, the region has grown in geopolitical significance due to the realization that the Eastern Mediterranean is a linking point for civilizations (Huntington, 1996, p. 48-49). The Mediterranean, particularly after the Cold War era, has gained significance for Greece in terms of transporting oil from the Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe via the Bulgarian-Greek pipeline so that it will not be restricted to Türkiye and other Muslim countries, in cooperation with Russia over Orthodoxy (Huntington, 1996, p. 163).

The region's energy potential is currently increased by the energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is a part of the Middle East. According to Brzezinski,

the Caspian Sea basin and the Central Asian region have an important place within the framework of energy and pipelines in addition to the resources in the Middle East. If the significant pipelines indicated above to go through Russia, the political ramifications of this position would become evident without the necessity for Russia to get stronger. In such a scenario, the relevant regions' dependence on Russia would significantly increase, and Russia would unavoidably receive a portion of its resources. No country will have a monopoly on access to energy if a pipeline is built using the Oman (Arab) Sea over Afghanistan or the Mediterranean connection via Türkiye (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 140-156). The Mediterranean is a particularly strategic waterway in this approach, where new energy pathways are developed, and coastal states are kept from establishing economic or commercial monopolies. In other words, the energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean resemble the stag in the allegory in which no state can monopolize it, and to benefit it, the states should cooperate.

When one looks at the energy policies of the countries on the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean basin, it can be seen that they all want to reach large markets through natural gas pipelines. They also want to ensure their own countries are self-sufficient in terms of energy security. The strategies of the coasters are affected by the economic, business, and technical factors that affect energy policies, which are thought of in terms of costs and benefits. From this point of view, it's crucial to think about the future of hydrocarbon energy until the 2050s. From a global point of view, considering the potential natural gas reserves of the future for the US, Russia, China, which are the determining countries in the world energy scene, and especially the European Union (EU), the largest trading partner of the region, it can be expected that the Eastern Mediterranean will turn into an area where possible energy scenarios become more evident.

Energy reports from organizations like BP (British Petroleum), EIA (Energy Information Administration), and IEA (International Energy Agency) say that natural gas will be the second largest source of energy after oil by 2050. It will have passed coal as the fastest-growing fossil fuel in the New Policies Scenario. Gas use could be about 45% higher in 2040 than it is today if demand keeps growing at a rate of 1.6% per year. Natural gas is the only fossil fuel expected to be in higher demand in 2040 than it is today. It is also likely to become the most popular fuel in the world energy market (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2019, p. 133-134; BP, 2022, p. 59; International Energy Agency, 2019, p. 171-172). However, from 2019 to the present day, IEA transformed its mantra for natural gas from a rising star of energy resources to a fallen one. Concerns regarding the future cost and availability of natural gas have been sparked by the severity and duration of the current crisis, which has damaged confidence in its dependability and seriously hampered the concept of its use as a transition fuel. Consequently, the era of tremendous worldwide expansion in demand for natural gas is ending (International Energy Agency, 2022, p. 366-367).

Although optimistic prediction has shifted, the increase in production is expected to continue through 2025, with most of it coming from the US. More than 80% of the expected rise in production will come from just five countries: the US, China, Russia, Qatar, and Iran. Even though these countries will still be the top five producers in 2050, they may not be able to keep up with the rest of the world's production growth. With the rise of new producer countries after 2025, it is expected that the top five countries will make up less than 40% of the total increase in production until that time (International Energy Agency, 2022, p. 377-381). This prediction could mean that interdependence and energy sharing will happen in different places and circumstances. Additionally, because of the severity of the current crisis, many people are worried about how much it will ultimately cost. Despite the gloomy predictions for natural gas, the commodity is still vital to the energy sector in emerging economies.

Estimated data on regional reserves should also be looked at to figure out how the finding of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Levant region)^{2*}

^{2*}Cyprus, Eratosthenes High, Latakia, Levant, Judea, Nile Delta, West Arabian province, and Zagros province are the eight largest basins in the Eastern Mediterranean. In terms of proven natural gas reserves, Israel's Levant basin is the most important of these.

will affect the policies of countries worldwide that deal with natural gas. The US Geological Survey used a geology-based method to estimate that the Levant Basin Region has 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and an average of 122.4 trillion m³ of recoverable gas. (see Kirschbaum et al., 2010, p. 1-4). As of 2022, 3.5 trillion m³ of natural gas has already been found. In other words, if all the natural gas reserves already found in the Eastern Mediterranean are moved on, the world will only have enough natural gas to meet its needs for one year. About 195 trillion m³ of natural gas reserves have been found worldwide. According to a calculation made with the same data, the discovered and ready-to-process reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean make up about 1.5% of the total reserves (International Energy Agency, 2018, p. 173-177).

The energy potential for this region, which creates economic and diplomatic profit opportunities, is frequently emphasized. Aside from the expected gas reserves being the most crucial thing that makes people more interested in the area, the interpretations of the already existing reserves seem more realistic. In this situation, Fatih Birol, the Executive Director of the International Energy Agency, says that the fact that there is too much gas on the global market is one of the biggest problems with making an energy market in the Eastern Mediterranean that will change the game (Kutlu ve Kaya, 2018). We are in the middle of a time when a lot of gas is being made worldwide. Also, a new wave of main production is expected in the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) sector to complete an important economic project in the region. As such, projects that will bring in money don't seem to be a problem for Qatar, which will continue to be the leader in LNG production for the next 12 years, or the US, which is still building up its export routes (International Energy Agency, 2018, p. 182). So, projects that won't significantly affect the gas market can't get realized because they aren't possible. There are political problems or other troublemakers, and giant gas producers nearby. Because of this, three pipeline plans for the area came to the fore: (1) the Israel-Cyprus-Greece Pipeline, also called the EastMed Pipeline; (2) the Israel-Türkiye Pipeline³; and (3) the Israel and Neighboring Arab Countries Pipeline, which includes Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan. From the Shah Deniz II field, one of the ways to get gas to South Eastern Europe is planned to send 10 billion m³ of gas per year to the border between Türkiye and Greece (TANAP, n.d.). Birol says that Türkiye focuses on the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) project⁴, which is supposed to bring gas from the Shah Deniz II field in Azerbaijan to Türkiye and Europe (Kutlu ve Kaya, 2018; see also: The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2018, p. 9-11). On the other hand, the transportation of Russian natural gas to Europe with the TurkStream project strengthens Türkiye's hand in alternative energy transportation.⁵

Considering that the EU is the customer with the most potential in regional energy-sharing scenarios, it is known that the gas reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean are one of the goals not only for the people of the region but also for Europe. So, finding an answer to the EU's role in sharing energy in the Eastern Mediterranean is crucial.

Despite being the world's largest gas consumer, the EU is Russia's largest gas customer. For instance, in 2017, Russia supplied the EU with nearly half of the gas demanded (174 billion m³) (International Energy Agency, 2018, p. 199-200). Russia also provided 39.4% of the EU's natural gas needs in the first half of 2019 (European Union, 2019). According to reports from international energy authorities, the EU appears to become even more reliant on natural gas from Russia between now and 2050. The EU is concerned about its heavy reliance on Russian natural gas supplies and the growing demand for gas in the region. In addition, Russia cut off European gas supplies in

³ According to Sohbet Karbuz, director of Hydrocarbons at the Mediterranean Observatory for Energy, Eastern Mediterranean natural gas resources could only substitute up to 20% of the European Union's imports of Russian natural gas if LNG facilities in Egypt operate at full capacity and the proposed Türkiye-Israel pipeline is built (OME). see. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/international-relations/east-med-gas-could-substitute-only-20-of-eus-russian-gas-imports/35261>

⁴ Also, for more detailed statistics on the possible gains that Europe and Türkiye will make over Azerbaijan gas, see. *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, Let's not exaggerate: Southern Gas Corridor prospects to 2030*, 2018: 9-11.

⁵ The TurkStream project, whose construction has been completed, is both an example and an obstacle for the EastMed pipeline, which is expected to be built in the Eastern Mediterranean with the current offshore pipeline technology.

retaliation for the EU sanctions imposed in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Because of this, cutting off EU energy imports from Russia became priority number one. Yet, the EU policies toward energy efficiency and renewable energy sources demonstrate that these concerns are fading. Especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a question must be pointed out: What can one expect from the natural gas market in the EU? As a significant energy user, China's demand for natural gas can influence the world market and the EU's natural gas pricing and availability.

Regarding the global natural gas market, Russia's actions in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions have added a level of uncertainty and potential for disruption to the market, which may affect the prices and availability of natural gas for the EU. In response to the sanctions, Russia has sought to strengthen its energy ties with other major players, such as China. This can be seen in the energy deals between Russia and China, which may further influence the global natural gas market and the EU's access to natural gas (Government of the Russian Federation, 2022). It is clear that one of the critical impacts on the EU would rely on the specifics of China's demand and the actions of Russia as an important global natural gas market player. Eventually, the expense of energy demand and seasonal variations in heating demand highlights the importance of a reliable supply for the EU's gas policies and create a crisis inside the EU via energy price shocks (International Energy Agency, 2022, p. 200).

Table 1. Gas Demand in the European Union Towards the 2050s

	2010	2021	2030	2050	2030	2050
Europe	698	625	511	395	394	122
European Union	446	421	340	235	242	45

Table 2. Natural Gas Production in the European Union Towards the 2050s

	2010	2021	2030	2050	2030	2050
Europe	341	239	247	208	177	65
European Union	148	51	39	34	17	2
Norway	110	119	126	78	80	20

Source : IEA's World Energy Outlook 2022

Since there is less demand, the EU will depend more on imports by 2025 because domestic production is decreasing. Even though there was a slight increase in the demand for gas in the EU in the 2020s, it started to go down after that. As the chart shows, Europe's gas production is dropping by 40%, which means that by 2040, three-quarters of Europe's gas will come from imports (BP, 2019, p. 100-101). Russia is still the region's most significant single source of gas, and its prices are the cheapest. However, in the scenarios mentioned above, the fact that many countries are now producing hydrocarbons means that the EU has access to more imported gas resources. This can be seen as a chance that will make the Eastern Mediterranean more critical in the near future. So, in a world market with interdependence, achieving zero in a metaphorical sense in the surplus-value/benefit-cost conditions created by the regional pipelines that lead to the EU makes it possible for Türkiye to make good policies in regional competition.

On the other hand, without cooperation, it is not possible to supply energy to the EU from the resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. In such an interdependent equation, every actor, including Türkiye, should cooperate to benefit resources or hunt the stag. Hunting the hare would not satisfy the European energy need.

4. ACTORS: STATES AND COMPANIES

4.1. Regional Actors

4.1.1. Cyprus⁶

Greek Cypriot Administration Of Southern Cyprus (GCASC)

After the GCASC and the Greek government invited the giant international energy companies to the region and signed the fossil fuel exploration licenses, in January 2019, in a meeting held in Cairo with the participation of Greece, the Greek Cypriot Administration, Italy, Israel, and Egypt has founded a platform called the "*Eastern Mediterranean Gas Platform*", which aims to create a regional gas market and ensure supply and demand security without the participation of representatives from the Turkish Cypriot Administration and Türkiye (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019c). Later, France, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) joined the EMGF, with the EU, US, and World Bank Group serving as permanent observers.

Türkiye disregards traditional and customary international law and disrespects GCASC's sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement dated 19 September 2019 regarding Türkiye's hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The national wealth of GCASC belongs to the state, and the government is responsible for managing this resource to benefit its population. Zone 7 is located within the exclusive economic zone of GCASC and has been granted a license by GCASC, taking into account bilateral agreements with surrounding states such as Egypt. Region 7, which is located within GCASC's exclusive economic zone, does not involve any third party, including Türkiye. This way, the seventh region was licensed to ENI and TOTAL companies. Accordingly, the actions of Türkiye in this region are offensive and illegitimate. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has claimed that Türkiye has once again violated international law and that GCASC will continue its hydrocarbon exploration activities in the region in compliance with international and European law (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

In addition, the GCASC views Türkiye's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean as provocative and a reckless disregard for its sovereignty. On the one hand, it is asserted that this strategy shows the primary objective of the Ankara government regarding the Cyprus issue, and it is questioned why Türkiye did not attend the informal meeting in the format of Crans Montana to discuss a solution to the Cyprus issue. As a member of the EU and the United Nations, GCASC will take all means necessary to play an active role in the Eastern Mediterranean, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement dated 19 September 2019 (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

On the Eastern Mediterranean, GCASC has prepared numerous legal and political presentations to build international public opinion, claiming that Türkiye's actions violate international law by destabilizing the international system and causing conflict (see, Tzionis, 2019).

According to the statement made by GCASC Foreign Minister at the time Nikos Christodoulides on the exclusive economic zone/continental shelf agreement between Türkiye and Libya, through the so-called memorandum of understanding signed between Türkiye and Libya, which lacks a legal basis, Türkiye, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Libya will reach an agreement on the exclusive economic zone/continental shelf by the end of 2019. It seeks to undermine rule-based order and cooperation in Türkiye (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b).

With the new paradigm that emerged in 2022 following the outbreak of the Ukrainian War, the current GCASC Foreign Minister, Ioannis Kasoulides, pointed out the sudden rise in energy prices. He stated that alternative and affordable energy sources

⁶ Throughout the study, the south of the island of Cyprus will be called the Greek Cypriot Administration Of Southern Cyprus (GCASC); the north will be called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

are urgently needed referring to the promising gas field of the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, he added that Türkiye has been a destabilizing actor, a disruptive force whose revisionist and aggressive activities not only against its neighbors but also in the wider area, in flagrant violation of international law, creates fresh tensions and impedes cooperation for the mutual benefit of all parties (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)

Kudret Özersay, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, stated on 30 January 2019 that the Barbaros Hayrettin Pasha ship was licensed in regions F and G of the TRNC-designated regions and that drilling operations will be conducted in areas with high gas potential. It was highlighted that TRNC is licensed by TPAO, much as ENI and EXXON are licensed in the region by GCASC. He added that the ideas for cooperation regarding the peace and stability of the region are still legitimate and that the trade and collaboration which would grow will deepen interdependence in the region and reduce the possibility of violence (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Public Information Office, 2019).

After Türkiye and Northern Cyprus were accused of pursuing unilateral policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, TRNC declared on 7 May 2019 that GCASC was the one that followed unilateral measures. The Turkish exploration of natural gas on the continental shelf continues in conformity with international law. Consequently, these actions are compliant with international law. Regarding GCASC's invasion charges, it was emphasized that their policies on the island of Cyprus better illustrate the invasion concept. Simultaneously, TRNC and Türkiye issued a plea for collaboration in the region from the onset of the contested process in the Eastern Mediterranean, and yet no one responded. Although the TRNC and Türkiye's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean have been constant from the start, it is inconsistent that the existence and will of Turkish Cypriots are neglected while it is stated that the exploited resources will benefit the entire island's people. In this context, the GCASC and the international community are encouraged to act consistently (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

In 2021, in response to Exxon Mobil's announcement that it would resume natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, the TRNC Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement emphasizing that the GCASC should be recognized as the source of tension and that it is possible and necessary to eliminate the deep crisis of trust between the two sides on the island through cooperation, diplomacy, and dialogue (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

4.1.2. Greece

Along with the new resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is one of Greece's foreign policy that aims to engage in beneficial cooperation with its neighbors and the EU. Planning an energy infrastructure investment in the region and taking prompt action are essential to successfully implementing this program. In this perspective, the EastMed Gas Pipeline, the project of delivering gas from the Levant region to Europe via Crete and mainland Greece, which includes Greece, GCASC, Egypt, Israel, and Italy, will give significant economic and geopolitical benefits for both Eastern Mediterranean and European nations (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Both Greece and GCASC view Türkiye as a game-changer in the region. According to Greece, Türkiye violates not just the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the GCASC but also the regions granted to and restricted by European companies. Moreover, as stated by the Greek government, Türkiye disregards requests from the EU and international community to respect the rights of the GCASC and to avoid escalating tensions. In addition, the EU will attempt to counteract these Turkish attitudes through various legislation (Tzionis, 2019).

During a conference in Washington, Greece's Deputy Foreign Minister K. Fragogiannis stated that Greece, particularly after 1974, is a balance-providing pillar for Eastern Mediterranean dynamics. He noted that trilateral collaboration with Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine demonstrates Greece's commitment to peace and stability in the area. In particular, GCASC stressed that the cooperation between Greece and Israel would considerably contribute to the fulfillment of the EastMed pipeline project and that the United States would also assist Greece in becoming a regional energy hub (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019c).

According to a statement made by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Alexandros Yennimatas, the exclusive economic zone agreement between Türkiye and Libya violates the internationally recognized sovereign rights of the Greek islands, especially international maritime law. Instead of debating whether the Greek islands are on the wrong side of the dividing line, Türkiye should consider if it wishes to be on the wrong side of the law (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b).

The same viewpoint was expressed by the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias when Libya and Türkiye signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the utilization of hydrocarbons in the Mediterranean in 2022. According to him, this so-called memorandum is based on a previous "memorandum" that went against not only international law but also basic principles of geography (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

4.1.3. Israel

The 1999 discovery of gas deposits off the coast of Gaza was one of the primary factors that prompted Israel's search for energy. Israel began exploring its gas deposits one by one shortly after that. Israel entered a new energy age in 2009 with the discovery of the first big natural gas deposit, Tamar, by Noble Energy and its partners, specifically in 2010 with the finding of the Leviathan field, the world's largest gas reserve at the time. It has become a regional gas power and substantially altered its geostrategic stance (Zalel, 2015).

Natural resources have heavily influenced Israel's relations with its neighbors. Israel and the GCASC appear to have the most robust interaction at the energy level. Israel is attempting to bolster its geopolitical standing by forging strong ties with Greece and the GCASC. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the three nations conduct joint military drills and coordinate security actions. In addition, cooperation is presently underway for constructing a natural gas pipeline between Israel and the GCASC natural gas reserves near the Greek island of Crete for Italy at the cost of 6 billion euros (Reuters, 2017). Considering the Nash equilibrium, considering that this is the best option Israel can make for itself by focusing on EastMed, this plan may become even more lucrative if additional natural gas reserves are discovered due to continuing gas exploration activities surrounding Crete.

On 20 March 2019, during a four-way meeting between Israel, the GCASC, Greece, and the United States, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized that at the sixth summit between Israel, the GCASC, and Greece, the aforementioned states are cooperating on virtually all issues, including energy. Simultaneously, he stated that the EastMed pipeline project would considerably contribute to their economy, support regional stability, enrich the local population, and diversify Europe's energy supplies. He also stated that the United States' involvement in this meeting is crucial regarding its support in the area (U.S. Department of State, 2019a). In the meantime, Türkiye is disturbed by the rapprochement between Greece, GCASC, and Israel in direct proportion to the formation of hostile relations with Israel.

Prime Minister Netanyahu met with US Energy Secretary Rick Perry on 23 July 2019. Netanyahu highlighted that he is delighted with US backing for the EastMed project and that it is in everyone's best interest to transit gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, even though the central topic of this discussion is Iran's

aggressive attitudes, nuclear and regional goals (Prime Minister's Office of Israel, 2019a). Moreover, at the 28 July 2019 meeting between Netanyahu and Greek Foreign Minister Dendias, it was highlighted that the EastMed pipeline project should be implemented, and proposed that bilateral relations be strengthened (Prime Minister's Office of Israel, 2019b). This was the policy of the US until the Biden administration revised its stance.

Alongside the normalization of Israel-Türkiye relations, with the maritime border agreement signed with Lebanon, Israel has shown that it is trying to adapt its activity in the region according to win-win policies. In this context, Israel has developed its trilateral relations with Türkiye, the GCASC, and Greece. It has sought its share of economic cooperation, emphasizing the energy market (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2022).

4.1.4. Egypt

Since 1990, Egypt has been a significant producer of hydrocarbons. It is now the largest non-OPEC oil producer in Africa and the third-largest natural gas producer on the continent (International Energy Agency, 2018, p. 1-6). Egypt's potential to become the region's major gas exporter and hub was realized in 2015 when the Italian energy giant Eni made an extensive gas discovery at Zohr. Zohr, which began the production in January 2018, is the largest Mediterranean gas deposit. By 2025, Egypt intends to boost production by more than 25 billion m³. In addition, the Egyptian government wants to build eleven new gas projects and position itself as a regional hub for the worldwide commerce and distribution of natural gas (International Energy Agency, 2018: 6-8).

On the other hand, Egypt's energy policy focuses on regaining the strategic regional position that it lost during the Arab Spring and the subsequent political problems. In this way, the Egyptian military promotes energy security plans by constructing military capabilities and training programs (Bahgat, 2012, p. 505-508).

Egypt recognizes Cyprus' sovereignty and rights over the resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the activities of the firms it licenses in conformity with international law. It was highlighted that Türkiye should comply with international law in light of its activities that would disturb the dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean region, destabilize the region, and violate the rights of GCASC (Tzionis, 2019).

On 30 July 2019, Egyptian Foreign Minister Samih Shukri conveyed President Sisi's letter to Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis during a meeting. This letter expressed the expectation that collaboration between Greece and Egypt would continue. Cairo would host the seventh summit between Egypt, Greece, and the GCASC. In addition, Shukri identified Greece as an essential ally of Egypt. Finally, it was suggested that they should collaborate in the Eastern Mediterranean (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

Following his meeting with the Greek Prime Minister, Shukri visited GCASC and emphasized the absolute cooperation between GCASC and Egypt over the new resources that arose or might emerge in the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt State Information Service, 2019).

By 2022, Egypt viewed the memorandum between Libya and Türkiye as a negative development for regional stability. For Egypt, the outgoing Tripoli government of unity lacked the authority to sign any foreign treaties or memorandums of understanding (Reuters, 2022).

4.2. Extraterritorial Actors

4.2.1. The European Union-East Med

Negotiations on potential energy cooperation between Türkiye and Israel failed amidst a downturn in diplomatic relations. Israel then decided to build the EastMed pipeline with GCASC instead of Türkiye. At the same time, Türkiye, together with Russia, built the TurkStream gas pipeline (operated by Gazprom), which was ready to be fully operational by the end of 2019 (see. Tsafos, 2019; U.S. Congressional Research Service, 2021).

EastMed, the world's longest and deepest undersea gas pipeline, will transmit natural gas from Israel's offshore gas resource to Southeast Italy via GCASC, Crete, and Greece (Matalucci, 2019). Despite the feasibility studies examining the project's cost-benefit ratio, particularly over the gas price, which must be competitive in the worldwide gas market, according to the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), the project is unfeasible because of the geopolitical context, the high costs, and the significant technological difficulties (Weiss, 2019).

As a Project of Common Interest, the European Commission has already contributed substantially to the EastMed pipeline project (PCI). Not only for energy supply but also geostrategic considerations, the project is considered to be of enormous importance. In 2019, the US provided political backing for the EastMed pipeline project. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's attendance at the EastMed pipeline's official signing signaled to Türkiye and Russia that the United States desires to preserve its interests and increase its presence in the region (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2019). However, in 2022, Biden Administration reversed its support for the EastMed pipeline project. It stated that instead of supporting this project, it is better to transfer the Eastern Mediterranean energy via electricity interconnectors by emphasizing clean energy transition (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2022).

EU's support for new pipelines in the Mediterranean by member states like Greece and GCASC must be weighed against the need to keep good relations with Türkiye in the energy sector. The EU's, Greece's, GCASC's, and Italy's weak responses to Türkiye's warship diplomacy have hardly been noticed. This shows that the EU doesn't want to deal with Türkiye directly about energy issues.

Türkiye's exploration and extraction of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean with the Yavuz and Fatih ships is against the law because it happens in the GCASC's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. Mogherini's comment demonstrates that the EU disagrees with Türkiye's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and backs the GCASC. These statements say that Türkiye should keep looking for natural resources in its exclusive economic zone, which is set by international law, and should respect the rights of the GCASC. Also, Türkiye and the GCASC should work together to solve the problem of exclusive economic zones and delineate continental shelves based on international law (The European External Action Service, 2019).

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on 5 October 2019 that drilling ships of Türkiye's in the exclusive economic zone of the GCASC are breaking international law and the sovereignty of the GCASC. According to the French Ministry, these things are not helpful and will worsen things in the Eastern Mediterranean. France was on GCASC's side (France Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2019a). At the same time, the statements say that Türkiye should quickly stop acting in ways that are against the law and will upset the stability of the region (France Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2019b).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on 5 October 2019 that Italy is worried about the illegal activities of the Turkish ship Yavuz in the GCASC's exclusive economic zone. Italy wants the rights of the GCASC to be respected and to stop illicit activities in the area. In response to Türkiye's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean, the EU will take political steps to show its support for the GCASC. Italy

hoped that Türkiye would make better decisions due to all these steps (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2019).

The European Council decided to prolong the framework for the regime of sanctions against unauthorized drilling activities in response to Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean for another year, until November 12, 2023. In the press release, it was said that the EU would continue to be able to impose specific restrictive measures on individuals or organizations that are accountable for or involved in illegal hydrocarbon drilling operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. This decision followed an assessment of the framework in 2022. An asset freeze for entities, as well as a travel ban to the EU are included in the sanctions. EU individuals and organizations are also prohibited from funding people on the list (Council of the European Union, 2022).

4.2.2. *The United States*

The US Senate passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, which two senators put forward on 25 June 2019. The law says a center will be set up to help the US, Israel, Greece, and GCASC work together on energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean. The US will lead this center (Foreign Relations Committee, 2019).

The US says it will do everything it can to keep the issue from becoming military and to find a solution that everyone can agree on. It tells Türkiye that there are rules about what can and can't be done in international waters and that drilling in them without permission is not decent. The US will do everything needed to ensure that all activities in the area respect international law. It was stated that the extraction of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean is subject to a set of rules, and no one can hold Europe hostage. At the same time, it again says that the Turks' illegal drilling is unacceptable and that the US will take necessary steps (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2019).

After the summit between the US, Israel, Greece, and the GCASC on 21 March 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo underlined US support for trilateral cooperation between Israel, Greece, and the GCASC and emphasized the need to develop their partnership. At the summit, the four nations pledged to strengthen regional cooperation, promote energy independence and security, and defend the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East from hostile foreign forces (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2019).

The US worries about Türkiye's continuous gas exploration operations in GCASC's territorial seas. The US added that these actions were provocative and urged the Turkish side to cease the operations, and urged all parties to act rationally for the regional peace and stability. In order to ensure and safeguard economic prosperity and energy security, it was suggested that every energy-related development in the Eastern Mediterranean should be carried out cooperatively and that the dialogue between the two communities in Cyprus and the countries in the region should be heightened (U.S. Department of State, 2019b). The US Government supports the physical transfer of Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe, but not through the EastMed pipeline project. By pointing out the gas and renewable energy sources, it started to focus on electricity interconnectors (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2022).

4.2.3. *Russia*

In a statement issued on 6 October 2019 by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was stated that the production of hydrocarbons in the exclusive economic zone of the GCASC caused tension in the Eastern Mediterranean and that the parties involved in this crisis should avoid policies that would cause instability in the region and act following international law. The foresight that the Cyprus crisis could be handled under the leadership of the United Nations was communicated in a manner that took into

account the common interests of all island residents (Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

Following the meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias on 6 November 2019, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov highlighted the expansion of bilateral cooperation in several locations and sectors, including the Eastern Mediterranean region. He indicated they were troubled by the increased tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean but were more concerned about the US and NATO's military presence in the region, which was taking advantage of its disarray. He highlighted that the solution in the region is for all parties to pursue their national interests. It was emphasized that the region's interstate conflicts should be resolved through diplomacy by locating a common ground. He stated that they believe the United Nations will be instrumental in resolving the Cyprus issue (Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b).

Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, remarked that they did not believe it was appropriate to link allegations that Russia was revisionist after the Ukrainian War with the unresolved Cyprus issue in the Eastern Mediterranean. She also stated that the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts are irrelevant (Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Therefore, Russia thinks that its policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the war in Ukraine should not be compared. It appears that Russia seeks to maintain its current position in the region.

In terms of the regional and extraterritorial actors, Greece, Israel, and the GCASC would like to hunt the hare, which is the EastMed, and prefers not to cooperate with Türkiye to hunt the stag, which is transferring the resources in the Eastern Mediterranean via the most efficient and easiest way. Since EastMed is an expensive and complex way to transfer resources from the region to Europe, the US withdraws its support for this project. Furthermore, Türkiye and Israel have a developing relationship. It could affect the future of EastMed. The actors should cooperate and find a way to benefit the resources efficiently.

4.3. Companies

According to the international realist perspective in energy geopolitics, energy companies stick to the policies of their governments (see Mearsheimer, 2001; Gilpin, 1987). On the other hand, the “markets and institutions” camp allows for an examination of international relations within a neo-liberal framework since the primary motivation of energy firms is to maximize profits (see Keohane, 1984; Strange, 1994). It is possible that characteristics from both groups can be observed in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Business organizations are taking more active steps towards collaboration despite operating in a highly competitive environment. Businesses are increasingly turning to outside investors to help with the cost of infrastructure projects. How natural gas is developed, who is involved, how the project is structured, and where the gas is exported are all impacted by this factor. Finding new energy reserves in the world in a traditional way means prioritizing initiatives that can secure funding. Companies operating in the Eastern Mediterranean region, like the world's most significant energy projects, often receive funding from a mix of public and private sources. These factors point to a cost-benefit analysis used by the parties engaged in the proposed energy sharing.

Table 3. Financial Measurements of Master Licenses in the Eastern Mediterranean**Cash from Operating Activities (\$ million)**

Companies	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Noble Energy	3,662	2,062	1,421	1,951	2,336
TOTAL	25,608	19,946	16,521	22,319	24,703
ENI	14,496	12,875	7,673	10,117	13,647
ExxonMobil	45,116	30,344	22,082	30,066	36,014
Shell	23,241	8,399	5,710	23,613	34,440

Source : Company financial reports

Economically, European firms (namely Italian ENI, French Total, and Anglo-Dutch Shell) appear to be the most engaged in regional exploration and production. During the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the majority of the region's leading energy companies exhibited a high level of activity.⁷ Since 2009, the US firm Noble Energy (Sadeh, 2015) and Israeli firm Delek Drilling have explored the offshore hydrocarbon reserves by drilling Leviathan (2010) and Aphrodite (2011) off the coast of Tel Aviv and within the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) of Cyprus. The process that began with Noble Energy's discovery of these vast gas reserves was the first event that affected geopolitical balances (Stergiou, 2019, p. 13-14; ElBassoussy, 2018, p. 72).

ENI (working with Egypt, Greece, and GCASC) is a major oil company operating in the region; Total, ExxonMobil, and Qatar Petroleum (all cooperating with GCASC) are aggressively continuing their drilling activities by acquiring regional licenses today. Four foreign companies (ENI, Total, ExxonMobil, and Qatar Petroleum) were given zones 6, 8, and 10 in 2016 – following a decline in cash flow in 2014, as seen in the table – in conjunction with the launch of a new license cycle by GCASC (Gifford, 2019). Zone 6 was granted to the cooperation of Total and ENI. ENI plays the position of the operator with 50% ownership. Zone 8 is dedicated exclusively to ENI. Zone 10 was granted to a partnership of 60% ExxonMobil and 40% Qatar Petroleum. Shell, Total, Kogas of South Korea, and the ENI consortium have also been granted exploration rights in Cypriot waters. In the meantime, ENI has been given a new exploration permit in the East Nile Delta Basin of the Mediterranean (Stergiou, 2019, p. 14).

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has once again attracted the attention of major energy companies, such as Total, Statoil, ENI, and Exxon Mobil, due to the rise in global oil prices and the updating of drilling technology in the direction of cost savings, as hydrocarbon enterprises began to generate more income in 2017. As a result of the newly discovered potential reserves in Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, BP, Rosneft, and Qatar Gas have begun to expand their operations.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, which did not feature prominently on the agenda in April 2017, Exxon Mobil, Total, and ENI appeared unconcerned with Ankara's responses and threats. They could work without interference in licensed blocks 6, 8, and 10. After the increase in drilling activity, the energy game began to take a different turn. As described in the preceding titles, it has been noted that navies follow drilling operations in the international waters. On 8 February 2018, Italian business ENI and French company Total reported a gas discovery in the Calypso region on the coast of Cyprus, which is considered comparable in size to the Zohr region. Since then, the seas of the Eastern Mediterranean have been much warmer. Three days later, on its way to a gas exercise location in zone 3 of the Cyprus EEZ, ENI's drill ship Saipem 12000 was intercepted by Turkish armed vessels (Casilli, 2018). The incident resulted in fierce mutual accusations and a diplomatic declaration of war; several geopolitical and

⁷ Noble Energy, which is based in the United States and is smaller than other foreign corporations active in the region, is known to work with the US-Israel lobby. Chevron's acquisition of Noble Energy appears to have boosted lobbying efforts on behalf of both the US multinational corporation Chevron and the Israeli government. see. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/premium-digging-into-the-lobbying-efforts-of-noble-energy-1.5376108;> <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/issues/summary?cycle=2022&id=FUE>

economic warnings regarding Europe's energy policies have emerged in the wake of the Calypso discovery. As the international tensions grow, ENI CEO Claudio Descalzi said: "If someone arrives with battleships, I will refrain from drilling wells... I do not wish to start a war in the region by digging wells." in his expressions (Reuters, 2019).

ENI and Total continued to drill in the sixth region, which was anticipated to contain six quadrillion cubic meters of potential reserves at the start of 2017. This was a disputed exploration drilling activity between Türkiye (through the TRNC) and GCASC. The U.S.-based ExxonMobil granted permission to continue drilling in the tenth region and made an agreement with the Cypriot government in February 2019 to conduct exploration in southern Cyprus. First, the results are said to be quite encouraging (Kambas and Zawadzki, 2019). ExxonMobil revealed that it had discovered between 142 and 227 billion cubic meters of gas in the Glaucus-1 well in the 10th area roughly a year after Türkiye's action against the ENI drill ship. Thus, Glaucus-1 was the third significant exploration in Cyprus. The vice President of Europe, Russia, and Caspian Studies for ExxonMobil states that "*success is by no means assured.*" Aspray, who discusses the finds with reticence, emphasizes that the most recent discoveries are available on a regional scale for the energy game, but his opinions are not finalized (South EU Summit, 2018). According to Morris, a researcher at WoodMac, the commercialization of the Exxon field is not forward-looking. According to him, "*there is little room in local markets and existing export infrastructure, and exploration is insufficient to supply ExxonMobil and its partner QP's planned two-train LNG plant*" (Kambas and Zawadzki, 2019).

In 2022, ENI and Total resumed drilling operations that had been postponed for one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Regional operators and companies involved intend to continue drilling into 2023. Continued drilling will also be essential for advancing higher export quantities, necessitating sufficient gas to ensure that the Eastern Mediterranean's regional market, however modest, stays adequately supplied. It is expected that Egypt, the largest gas market in the region, will play a crucial role in achieving this goal (Connelly, 2022).

Considering the operating cash flows provided by the companies, it is clear that gas price fluctuations and worldwide market stagnation impact energy geopolitics. The sums of money involved with the enterprises that signed regional license agreements between 2014 and 2018 illustrate the aforementioned situation. Companies' drilling operations sped up or slowed down depending on the surplus-value indexed company policies, as shown by a year-by-year analysis of their activities. In practice, it may be anticipated that state-controlled firms like Gazprom or TPAO will have an easier time navigating international trade rules that affect their overseas economic operations. As such, it's not strange that energy geopolitics can both speed up or slow down the chess game going on in the region.

The involvement of various energy companies in the region can be understood as an expression of the drive for profits and the accumulation of capital by these firms. States are also involved in protecting the interests of these firms by providing military protection and diplomatic support while also creating laws and regulations that favor them over the national interests of other regional states. The presence of these companies in the region can also complicate Türkiye's relations with other states and international organizations, as can be seen in the case of the drilling activities of these companies in the EEZ of GCASC, which Türkiye does not recognize. This can also lead to a potential increase in military tension and potential conflict in the region, as seen in the case of the incident between ENI's drill ship and Turkish armed vessels in 2018. From a geopolitical perspective, the actions of these companies might amount to a "lose-lose" strategy for Türkiye, as they threaten Turkish control over resources and territory in the Eastern Mediterranean and could therefore increase Ankara's efforts to assert its strategy in the region.

5. TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Regarding Türkiye's regional policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, two main internal factors are at play. First, Ankara evaluates natural gas extraction and distribution within maritime borders and sovereignty. In other words, Türkiye has taken increasingly rigorous policies to prevent the likelihood of future violations since the exclusive economic zone agreements signed by GCASC, Israel, and Egypt violated the sovereignty rights of Türkiye and TRNC. The discovery of natural gas and subsequent drilling activities have begun to tip the regional power balance in favor of some actors. The alliance between GCASC, Greece, and Israel has become a significant security issue for Türkiye. Feeling surrounded by regional powers, Türkiye strengthened its military presence in the Mediterranean and heightened the likelihood of violence in the region (Demiryol, 2019, p. 451).

Because of Türkiye's long-standing conflict with Greece over the continental shelf in the Aegean Sea, the Turkish government is very concerned about the prospect of maritime borders being redrawn in the Mediterranean (Demiryol, 2019, p. 452). Given that Türkiye will not take delivery of its share of the gas in the region and will not transfer it to Europe, it might be argued that Türkiye pursues a policy that will result in a net loss. Preventive policies will be implemented regarding the transport of potential gas in the region, especially to Europe, and no international benefit can be anticipated unless progress is made in favor of Türkiye regarding the issue of the maritime border, which is significant for Türkiye but has not yet been resolved.

Türkiye possesses the most powerful navy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Increasing tensions in natural gas development activities, maritime boundary conflicts, and the massive influx of refugees, mainly from Syria, are some of the reasons why Türkiye's navy is being strengthened. As an evidence of this power, at the start of 2018, Turkish navy ships prevented a drilling ship belonging to the ENI firm, which continues to operate in the territorial seas of GCASC. At the same time, Ankara expresses its regional strategic objectives through its fleet. The Blue Homeland exercise, held in March 2019, a few weeks after the Turkish Foreign Minister declared that no action would be permitted in the Eastern Mediterranean without Türkiye, illustrates the challenge of divulging its strategic objective (Rubin and Eiran, 2019, p. 990). This declaration makes it evident that Türkiye will not help the countries in the region and other neighboring countries, some of which want to hunt the stag and others who wish to hunt hares, achieve their goals at any cost – if necessary, at no profit.

In exporting gas from the region to Europe, the consensus in Türkiye is that the EastMed pipeline project asserts that the EU is unified around similar interests, is technically and economically possible, and will complement existing pipeline projects. It is nothing more than a pipe fantasy of 2 billion euros in Europe (Tsakiris et al., 2018, p. 20). Therefore, from an application standpoint, it is clear that neither the alliance between Greece, GCASC, Israel, and Italy nor the coalition between Egypt, Israel, and GCASC has the advantage to rule out Türkiye as the most suitable path, and Türkiye does not feel threatened by this position (Tsakiris et al., 2018, p. 20). From this perspective, it is possible to assert that, due to its privileged location, Türkiye pursues a stag hunting program that benefits neither itself nor other nations. In other words, Türkiye is the most practical and efficient route for delivering gas from the region to Europe. Other participating nations will not benefit from a game in which Türkiye does not prevail. Considering the Nash equilibrium, Türkiye's policy of achieving a draw in the region is the most reasonable choice.

Regarding the disputed parcel no. 7 as divided by the GCASC, the Turkish side first stated that the GCASC's parceling is illegal and that a large portion of parcel no. 7 is located on the Turkish continental shelf, which the United Nations also recognize. In addition, Türkiye emphasized that it will not tolerate policies that violate its own or the TRNC's rights, nor will it engage in unauthorized hydrocarbon utilization in such contested areas (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b).

As previously mentioned, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement on 28 September 2019 criticized Greece and GCASC for their maximalist policies. It has been

noted that these maximalist measures destabilize the Eastern Mediterranean and hence should not be implemented. It was stressed that possible projects in the region (EastMed and comparable projects) would be inefficient and fail to achieve their intended purpose unless Türkiye and TRNC were included (Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Ulaanbaatar, 2019). As stated previously, Türkiye was pursuing policies that preclude all enterprises in which it cannot receive a share (financial or moral) and profit nothing.

According to statements made by Türkiye following the Greece-Egypt-GCASC Summit on 8 October 2019, the formation of a regime within the framework of international law that serves the interests of all parties in the Eastern Mediterranean is a top priority. This is an area where Türkiye makes every possible effort. The principle of equity in international law is vitally important, yet the other parties have not followed it. Egypt was the victim of a circumstance comparable to previous occurrences. Egypt will be victimized once more if it supports a similar situation, but Egypt does not take any action in this regard. In addition, the Turkish government has stated in every forum that it is open to dialogue and collaboration with regional nations. Only GCASC is not recognized in the aforementioned region's countries. TRNC is the primary beneficiary of GCASC and has repeatedly stated its willingness to engage in dialogue and collaborate with the organization. Regarding settling issues between the GCASC and TRNC, Türkiye views the hydrocarbon issue in the region as an opportunity (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a).

Recent events have shown that regional tensions have risen, and resource competition has become institutionalized. The UN-recognized Libyan National Government and the Republic of Türkiye signed a "*Memorandum of Understanding on Security and Military Cooperation*" and a "*Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of the Maritime Jurisdiction*" on 27 November 2019 (Çelikpala, 2019). The bilateral agreement signed by Türkiye and Libya to designate mutual marine jurisdiction regions in the Eastern Mediterranean is consistent with all aspects of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Türkiye has the longest mainland coastline in the region, and it has been asserted that the islands' continental shelf cannot impede the rights resulting from this circumstance. Before the signing of this agreement, the Turkish government repeatedly attempted to establish dialogue and compromise with the relevant governments, and it still wished to do so; however, instead of reconciling with Türkiye, the relevant states framed Türkiye with unilateral actions. At the same time, declaring the marine jurisdiction area of Meis Island to be 4,000 times its surface area is a consequence of the beneficial policies of Greece and GCASC. It may have negative repercussions for other nations in the vicinity. In the light of this, on the occasion of the bilateral deal with Libya, Türkiye made it clear that it would not simply fall prey to countries in the region (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019d).

The memorandum of understanding inked with Libya indicates that Türkiye will pursue more aggressive and dominant policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, beginning in the West and potentially advancing eastward. This action also represents a preventative blow in a symbolic sense. Through the island of Meis, this policy hindered Greece's attempts to be a player in the Eastern Mediterranean (Çelikpala, 2019).

In the light of recent events, with the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf deal that Türkiye made with Libya, GCASC nullified the efforts of Greece, Egypt, and Israel to remove itself from regional dynamics and rushed into the game. Türkiye's final action was safeguarding drilling vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). UAVs have been sent to the TRNC, and the TRNC has stated that this was a necessary step to defend the interests and rights of Türkiye and the TRNC. (The Guardian, 2019).

While there have been no significant developments regarding the region's energy resources since 2019, the new agreements signed between the actors draw a picture of Türkiye's detriment. First, on 6 August 2020, Egypt and Greece signed an EEZ delimitation agreement in the Eastern Mediterranean. There are two motivations behind the agreement, which was ratified by the parliaments of both countries in August and entered into force: Türkiye's delimitation agreement signed with the Libyan

Government of National Accord in November 2019 and the defense and cooperation agreement signed between the same parties in November 2020. With this agreement, Greece wanted to eliminate the advantages provided to the parties by the Türkiye-Libya agreement and, therefore, made intensive efforts to sign an agreement with Egypt. Egypt's motivation for this agreement is its discomfort with Türkiye's close relationship with the Libyan Government of the National Accord. The agreement's main purpose is to neutralize the agreement between Türkiye and Libya (Acer, 2020, p. 15-17). For this reason, Türkiye protested the agreement with a note (Başeren, 2021, p. 41).

The second and most recent development in the region is that Israel and Lebanon, under the mediation of the US, have agreed on a memorandum of understanding to end a long-standing maritime jurisdiction dispute. According to this agreement, which is not expected to last very long (Hussain, 2022), these two states have reached an agreement on maritime jurisdiction for the first time in their history. As long as it is valid, this agreement will enable the parties to explore and make use of energy resources without problems (Marsi, 2022). Based on meeting the demands of Israel and Lebanon, the agreement is seen as the beginning of a new era for Lebanon and a political victory for Israel. With this agreement, Israel was fully authorized for exploration activities in the Karish region, while Lebanon was fully authorized for exploration activities in the Qana region. At the same time, Lebanon will give Israel a working interest through the French company Total. The distribution of profits is not clearly defined and is seen as a critical weakness of the agreement (Al Jazeera, 2022). Türkiye welcomed this agreement between Israel and Lebanon. It was stated that the agreement, which was necessary for ensuring peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, could also serve as an example of the dispute settlement between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Ankara supports cooperation agreements in the Eastern Mediterranean, which it hopes will continue (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

From 2019 to the present day, despite the aforementioned agreements between the states of the region, no progress has been made in the utilization and transportation of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This is a consequence of Türkiye's lose-lose policy. Unless or until Türkiye is included in the energy equation in the region, it is unlikely that there will be any energy development. Based on all these developments, it can be said that Türkiye continues to implement a lose-lose policy, losing on the one hand and making the countries in the region lose on the other.

6. CONCLUSION

As the first quarter of the twenty-first century comes to a close, the Eastern Mediterranean, which historically was the center of trade, is once again on the agenda as a war zone and an area influenced by complex interactions. The cards have been redistributed on the chessboard, the moves have been recalculated, and the players' roles have been drastically altered.

The game is motivated by the region's strategic location and the desire to expand the influence of energy producers and consuming nations. Although natural gas is one of the most critical resources discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is not the sole cause of regional competition. To achieve this objective, the relevant parties have devised strategies to exclude Türkiye. Because of its legal rights to the island of Cyprus, Türkiye refuses to leave the Eastern Mediterranean. As described in the preceding sections, Türkiye has made numerous attempts in the Eastern Mediterranean to attain its objectives. In this regard, Türkiye's participation in the region is a positioning to supply the energy demand and exercise its sovereign rights as a civilization basin of the Eastern Mediterranean. In response to Türkiye, other interested parties have made counter-claims and maneuvers.

Faced with the hesitant attitudes of foreign firms in the region, Türkiye's ongoing efforts with a state-controlled company and two finished pipelines to Europe via Russia and Azerbaijan make it possible to create a policy that functions. It is evident that Türkiye, which has previously hunted the stag with Russia and Azerbaijan, is the most experienced player in the energy chess game in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Nonetheless, whereas the stag hunting in the Eastern Mediterranean necessitates complete cooperation, the prevalent method appears to have shifted to hare hunting.

The optimal scenario in the Eastern Mediterranean involves a zero-sum game, not a win-win one. Due to the game's nature, hunting the stag and excluding Türkiye at the same time is not possible in this new game. If picked, the stag cannot compete with other hunters' stag pickers; they must settle for nothing. The other players who abandoned the stag purposely left Türkiye out of the game and opted for hare hunting (EastMed), which is more accessible and provides a taste of it more quickly.

It is expected that Türkiye will make the move that unlocks the game, and based solely on the argument of the study, Türkiye will continue to implement a lose-lose strategy as long as the frozen conflicts in the region are not resolved, preventing the transport of natural gas from the region to Europe and abandoning its policy of exploiting its energy hub potential. In this view, Türkiye will reestablish the game in the region by choosing the most sensible policy for itself and will prevent all actors, including itself, from hunting both the stag and hares.

Consequently, regional energy architecture is evolving in Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, preventing Türkiye from entering the Eastern Mediterranean natural gas market. Türkiye is the only country without oil and gas resources in this scenario. Still, it has the potential to become one of the world's most important energy centers, with multiple pipeline projects now under development or in the process of being constructed. To transfer energy more efficiently and affordably and to ease the exploitation of gas reserves in the region, countries in the Eastern Mediterranean should adopt a more pragmatic and sensible approach to the energy concerns. Economies will save billions of dollars if infrastructure and market access are shared. If they do not share these resources, most gas will remain underground. A policy based on energy cooperation is required to break the current impasse and build feasible initiatives for a southern gas corridor.

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