



ISSN: 2146-1740  
<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ayd>,  
Doi: 10.54688/ayd.1283770

Research Article



## EXEMPLIFYING THE (DE)SECURITISATION OF ENERGY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

#### Article Info

**Received:**  
15/04/2023

**Accepted:**  
18/06/2023

Growing energy resources demand an increase in the importance of new energy suppliers as well as routes. Alternative abundant energy suppliers and routes simultaneously increase the importance of the Black Sea Region (BSR). Inspired by the concept of securitisation, this article examines the nature of energy relationships among BSR countries. It is argued that accepting the fact that all countries in the region are prone to securitise energy supply or demand in their bilateral relations, the degree of securitisation differs from country to country. While Russia and a number of former-Soviet Union countries highly securitise energy, Turkey sees energy as a foreign policy tool, and tends to desecuritise energy in its relations with other countries. Securitization in this regard refers to conceptualising energy as a high political and security issue and potentially brings conflict or creates tension, whereas desecuritisation transforms security concerns into a commercial transaction. Moreover, criticising the conceptual aspect of the securitisation, this article examines the actions and practices of states referring to actual policies, such as energy projects (pipelines) in addition to speech acts.

**Keywords:** Black Sea Region, Energy, Energy Projects, Securitisation

**Jel Codes:** F50, F59, Q49



<sup>1</sup> The study was produced from the doctoral thesis titled “The Russian-Turkish Relationship within the context of the Black Sea Region: A Case Study of Energy”.

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**Citation:** Akgül, P. (2023). Exemplifying the (De)Securitisation of Energy in the Black Sea Region. *Journal of Academic Approaches*, 14 (1), 215-239.



## **1. Introduction**

The common view is that global energy demand is increasing, whereas energy resources are decreasing (IEA, 2021). Since most consumer states need resources for their demand, they tend to seek alternatives. As a result, concerns over energy security have intensified with all states and regions aiming to reduce the risks associated with resource dependence. States aim to trade with reliable suppliers and transport resources by way of secure routes. “However, current suppliers are in rather problematic regions, dealing with domestic conflicts as well as state-to-state tensions. When states have to import energy resources from such troubled regions, they might tend to perceive energy insecurity as a threat and locate it in high political concern. This is because security problems in energy supply would strongly affect political stability and economic wealth; in other word a state’s survival” (Akgül, 2019:163). In this atmosphere, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a significant development for the global market and, in particular, for consumers needing to find alternative suppliers since new energy abundant post-Soviet states gained their independence. In particular countries from the Caspian Sea have rich natural gas resources. However, its landlocked location makes it difficult to transport resources to consumers. Therefore, the Black Sea has become important as a route. The Black Sea Region’s (BSR) geographical proximity to the Caspian Sea, therefore, adds a new dimension to its geopolitical importance as a route.

Currently, in terms of natural gas, the BSR consists of two significant gas suppliers, Russia and Azerbaijan; salient transit countries are Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine, and customers, Turkey and Greece. When looking at the current picture of energy in the region, it hosts Russian and non-Russian pipeline projects. As non-Russian projects, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline projects are major influences on the newly-designed BSR. Also the Nabucco gas pipeline (proposed), the Trans-Adriatic Natural Gas Pipeline (TAP) and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) aim to transport Azerbaijani natural gas resources to the European market. On the other side, Russia also chooses to use the Black Sea routes proposing the South Stream and currently the TurkStream. In this clashing environment, analysing the region through energy lenses is important. Thus, it is necessary to accept the region as a single energy actor which has its own concerns.

Energy cannot be independently analysed from political, economic and security dimensions. For instance, states’ concerns with their sovereignty, stability, territorial integrity, non-intervention in their domestic politics, and foreign policy choices, reflect on their energy relations. This article explores the dual impact of energy in BSR countries and examines states’

perceptions of it, whether as a security/conflictual issue or as normal/cooperative politics. As such, it contributes to the picturing of the BSR as an actor rather than a security concern for other customers engaging with the concept of (de)securitisation. Revealing states' concerns and political dynamics, this article examines how these direct inter-state energy relations operate. Due to this, the reasons and factors behind current energy cooperation and energy tensions can be easily understood. The concept of (de)securitisation provides a powerful analytical tool to explore why, and through which processes, issues become security issues in certain cases, but not in others. In essence, this article argues that energy is important for all of the countries in the region. However, they all perceive it differently. For a number of countries energy is linked to security or survival as a state, whereas for others it is linked to the economy or normal politics. These divergent linkages affect and are affected by political developments, as well as each state's own political ambitions reflecting on their bilateral relations.

The states in the BSR have, to some extent, problematic relations with each other, leading them to put energy supply or demand, in particular natural gas, in high concern, as well as political/security levels, and so possibly seeing energy as less normal or usual. In these circumstances, an analysis of the (de)securitisation process helps to answer the question of the effect of energy in bilateral relations, as well as in the region as a whole. This is because, in order to see the results of the effect of energy, one needs to bear in mind that it is a long process and has been affected by various issues, therefore, securitisation is applied in this article to analyse these variations and the transformation of states within a process. This is particularly the case when addressing whether energy is perceived as a security threat or as a commercial transaction.

However, securitisation has also limitations with speech acts being accepted as the main methodological tool. In this regard, in order to widen the scope apart from using discourse analysis to analyse speeches as a methodology, the concept of securitisation is also illustrated with a case study of divergent energy behaviours of countries in the BSR. This article analyses and interprets actions (Balzacq, 2008) and practices (Bigo, 2000) since they indicate the transformation of inter-state relations within a process, or actual policies, of countries in the region, by way of energy projects in particular, as well as inter-state relations. This analysis provides objectivity to the research.

The main focus of this article is energy, but particularly that natural gas demand and supply are securitised by all countries in the BSR. However, the degree to which they do so varies from one country to another. Natural gas demand "is prone to securitisation for small

countries and for Russia (albeit for different reasons related to their relative positions as net importers and exporters). In particular, it is linked to their survival/sovereignty as a state (smaller countries in the region) or regaining and maintaining its power (Russia). By contrast, for Turkey it is perceived more in terms of desecuritisation, and is linked to the country's attempts to gain the advantage of economic growth and political cooperation with foreign actors" (Akgül, 2019:60). This reflects on their bilateral energy relations, while Russia has problematic energy relations, for instance with Ukraine; Turkey's energy relationship with Azerbaijan and Georgia is perceived as normal politics, and while with Russia it is perceived as desecuritisation. Securitisation in this regard refers to conceptualising energy (natural gas supply) as a high political and security issue which potentially brings conflict and creates tension indicating itself such as in increasing prices or attempts to bypass the transit, whereas normal politics consist of liberal policies as well as non-conflict and day-to-day activities, such as long-term contracts and diversifying projects. Desecuritisation refers to a transformation leading to liberal policies from a high political concern. Therefore, the concept of (de)securitisation provides a full range of understanding of political dynamics influencing inter-state energy relationships.

This article starts with drawing the conceptual framework of the concept of energy (de)securitisation. It continues with cases from the energy relations between countries in the BSR. While Russian-Ukrainian energy relations is an example of energy securitisation, Turkish-Azerbaijani, Turkish-Georgian and Georgian-Azerbaijani energy relations are energy as normal politics. Finally, the Russian-Turkish energy relationship is an example of energy desecuritisation. Due to this, the aim of this article is to widen the understanding of energy security by not simply referring to availability, affordability, accessibility or acceptability, but to create a constructivist view and, in this sense, to draw the concept of securitisation to trace and conceptualise within the BSR variation in energy relationships.

## **2. The Concept of the (De)Securitisation of Energy**

The end of the Cold War accelerated the requirement to widen the conceptualisation of the classical security concept, which emphasises the military sector. This is because classical realist interpretations were too narrow to explain new threats, due to excessive dependence on the military perspective, which prevented theorisations of issues other than military affairs (Nyman, 2014). The concept of (de)securitisation emerged as a new theoretical framework. Buzan et al. (1998:26) define securitisation as meaning that "the security act is negotiated between securitiser and audience". Securitisation occurs "when an issue transforms into a

securitising threat. Securitisation is a political process in which the securitising actor defines or utters an issue as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures, and where their target audience has to accept this. This means that if an issue is not expressed as a threat, it is not recognised as a threat needing to be securitised. Contrary to realist thinking, the authors argue that neither security in general, nor threats to national security specifically, are objective phenomena. Rather, security is a socially constructed concept that can differ from one context to another” (Akgül, 2019:42).

Securitising actors are those “who securitise issues by declaring referent objects, which are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survive, in order to persuade their audience, particularly the public (Buzan et al., 1998). Thus, the actor’s defined notion of threat is at the centre of the theory. In this manner, the authors attempt to define the boundaries of security. Security concerns only occur when political elites or interest groups think there is an existential threat to a valued referent object which necessitates the taking of exceptional measures. Moreover, the acceptance of the audience legitimises the elite’s act. Desecuritisation emerges when an issue is transferred from being a security threat to a normal political issue” (Akgül, 2019:43). The spectrum would be:



This categorization depends on how the state perceives the threat or labels a case as a threat. This claim means that “security is therefore a self-referential practice, because it is in practice that the issue becomes a security issue; not necessarily because a real existential threat exists, but because the issue is presented as such a threat” (Buzan et al., 1998:24).

However, it has a number of deficiencies. The most important are as Ciută (2009:302-3) notes: “conceptual (structural issues particularly related to speech acts); epistemological (how securitisation reads empirical contexts); and normative (related to the shift from practices of theorizing securitisation into practices of securitisation)”.

Considering these criticisms, it can be argued that, “first, there is a problem in making a distinction between the terms. Most of the terms have a vague context, so it is difficult to produce clear definitions. For instance, as a criticism of the above-indicated spectrum, Emmers

(2010) points out that, because there are no clear distinctions between the security and political realms, the model does not sufficiently dissociate an act of securitisation from a case of politicisation. In this situation, readers have to rely on their own judgements. It can be said that, in order to define an issue as politicisation, it should be a part of states' ordinary activities or normal relations, which Williams (2003) describes as the day-to-day workings of politics, while desecuritisation is the shift toward politicisation from a condition of securitisation" (Akgül, 2019:44).

The second problem "is the inability to identify what Hansen (2000) calls, 'the silent security dilemma', which occurs when the potential subject of (in)security has no, or limited possibility of speaking out about its security problems. Methodologically, there is a certain ambiguity in the securitisation theory, as it argues that the utterance of the word 'security' is not the decisive criterion, and that a securitisation might consist of "only a metaphorical security reference" (Buzan & Hansen, 2009:216). However, there are serious concerns on this issue and the concept of securitisation itself cannot solve this problem. This is because, in order to identify an issue as a security threat, it needs to be expressed as such, but in some cases, the real victims cannot explicitly express that an issue is a threat. In these cases, although an obvious security problem exists, because it is not expressed by the political elite, the issue is not accepted as a referent object" (Akgül, 2019:44).

This criticism is associated with "the theory's strong emphasis on speech acts, which is another element of the concept that is usually criticised. It is important not to reduce the concept of a speech act to simply a linguistic act. Only depending on *saying the word* (Buzan et al., 1998:26) or focusing on speech acts in an understanding of (de)securitisation is flawed, because in certain cases elites might prefer to securitise an issue as an existential threat on the basis of actions/practices rather than uttering it. Therefore, apart from utterance, following Bigo (2000) who focuses on practices and Balzacq (2008) who focuses on empirical referents of policy (meaning policy tools or instruments), for an analysis of the concept of (de)securitisation, actions/practices are considered here. Actions/practices in this context represent policies, projects or behaviour of states. It does not need to be explicitly uttered, but through actions one can understand that a specific issue is a referent object" (Akgül, 2019:44).

Although the concept of (de)securitisation has certain limits, it has the potential for improvement through a combination of different aspects. According to Emmers (2010), the concept can be improved by way of empirical studies and is refined in the light of their findings. This is because the Copenhagen School primarily focuses on framing a theoretical approach to

security studies, with insufficient use of empirical research. In this study, energy is chosen as a case study. This is because states depend heavily on energy, since they have insufficient domestic resources, and they tend to consider their energy supply and demand as being of extreme importance. Therefore, they want to ensure that their supply and demand is secure. The interrupted flow of resources might cause an existential threat to the survival of the state. For instance, an unexpected incident in energy transportation, or a refusal to supply a resource, can seriously affect a state's production and consumption, or cause a transformation in the relationship between supplier and customer. Therefore, there is a high possibility that it will be taken out of the agenda of normal politics. Energy in this sense refers to natural gas, as resources and its supply and demand are often analysed through states' actual policies in inter-state relations, namely pipeline projects.

Energy security is a predominant concern, particularly in the IR literature. Essentially, the concept of energy security "is often discussed in the context of security of supply, security of demand or environmental issues. A number of studies discuss geopolitical challenges and the economic cost of existing and future pipeline routes (Tekin & Williams, 2011); others attempt to theorise relations between producers and customers (Kirchner & Berk, 2010). These aspects derive their theoretical framework from two significant IR theories; Stoddard (2013) notes that a number analyse the causes of and solutions to energy (in)security issues from a realist/strategic perspective, while others do so by way of a liberal market-based approach or global energy governance" (Akgül, 2019:48-49).

The strategic/realist approach to energy security "sees the international struggle for energy security as a zero-sum game (Raphael & Stokes, 2014), emphasising competition, national security, state survival and conflict (Klare, 2008). According to this approach, energy security is geopolitical, and scarce resources and increasing demand lead to competition. Furthermore, there is no possibility of cooperation in this approach. However, the market-based approach emphasises the integration, interdependence and liberalisation of the global energy market (Raphael & Stokes, 2014), where energy security is not a zero-sum effort. However, this debate is too narrow to provide an analytical basis for understanding energy security. Indeed, Nyman (2014) argues that these approaches provide a state-centric perception of security, associating it with self-sufficiency. They cannot, therefore, be objectively identifiable; on the contrary they are contingent, and therefore open to change" (Akgül, 2019:49).

The idea of energy security has not been clearly defined, due to these problems. As Luft & Korin (2009) argue, it is a multifaceted issue, and has different meanings for different

countries, strongly affected by their geographical location, geological endowment, political system, global circumstance and economic situation. Energy security can be characterized according to “the sources of risk, the scope of impact and severity filters in the form of the speed, size, sustention, spread, singularity and sureness of impact” (Winzer, 2012:36). The most common definition of energy security is observed by Yergin (2006, cited in Heinrich, 2008:1539) as “the objective of energy security is to assure adequate, reliable supplies of energy at reasonable prices, and in ways that do not jeopardise major national values and objectives”. For the International Energy Agency (IEA), more narrowly, it means “adequate, affordable and reliable supplies of energy” (2007:160, cited in Bradshaw, 2014:24). Radoman (2007:36-37) briefly summarises it to mean “access to sufficient energy supplies at reasonable prices from a stable source, as well as the actual, physical security of oil and gas pipelines”. All these definitions place an emphasis on three significant and strong adjectives, affordable, reliable and adequate, to define the character of energy supply. The common feature of these phrases, according to Ciută (2010), is that energy is a vital element for states, societies and economies, even though it receives little conceptual attention. The security perspectives of energy suppliers and customers are important elements of this case.

As can be seen from these definitions of energy security, these phrases pave the way for securitisation (Cherp et al., 2012), since they explicitly express that not protecting energy can cause a security issue. They provide evidence that energy has become a part of high politics. However, realism and liberalism explain energy relations between countries more simply.

Furthermore, energy security itself as a research topic is not sufficient to explain certain issues, such as *security for whom*, *security for which values* and *security from what threats* (Cherp & Jewell, 2014). In other words, the attitudes of states when they determine their policies or in the way that they value energy, to some extent, are the missing link in the classical security concept of IR. A (de)securitisation approach can “show how a commercial acquisition bid moves from a non-politicised market-based issue to an (inter)national security crisis”, or the other way around (Nyman, 2014:60). It shows how the threat is constructed. It can also demonstrate the possibility of broadening a security approach, considering different sectors (political, economic, military, societal and environmental), different levels (domestic, bilateral, (inter)regional and global) and different actors (states, companies, and international institutions).

Even though it “has not been specifically researched by the Copenhagen School, particularly in regard to securitisation, the concept of energy can be scrutinised under different



sectors. This is because, as Wæver (2011) contends, securitisation can refer, not only to who enacts securitisation and how or when it happens, but also to what securitisation does. In other words, an analysis of securitising practices can reveal causal mechanisms and provide hypotheses as to why specific issues are securitised and what changes securitisation has brought” (Akgül, 2019:51). As energy has become an important security issue for states, analysing the issue in a more comprehensive manner can provide a clear understanding for the reader.

Securitisation potentially broadens the perception of the context of energy. However, Buzan et al. (1998:98), place the securitisation of energy in the economic sector. Natorski & Surrallés (2008:74) state that energy is “an elusive policy domain” and that it has close relations with the five sectors of securitisation and may be analysed under these sectors. Belyi (2003) suggests the following: “in terms of the political sector, energy can be an example of states’ self-sufficiency; in terms of the military, energy availability can have close relations with self-defence; in terms of the economy, it can refer to the financial possibility of projects and the unpredictability of the energy market; in terms of the environment, it has a connection with environment-friendly formations and natural resource protection; and, in terms of the societal sector, it sees energy as a social necessity for social welfare” (Akgül, 2019:51).

Considering these possibilities, it is necessary to construct energy as an issue prone to securitising. Buzan (2003:148) states that issues become securitised when leaders begin to talk about them “in terms of an existential threat against some valued referent object”. Based on this view, in fact “energy has always been an issue of securitisation. Energy insecurity is a picture often stated by states’ elites to their audience as a referent object, referring to interruption of supply, import dependency, insufficient capacity, high energy intensity, and sudden price fluctuations due to global and regional security developments (Cherp et al., 2012). In terms of expanding this, Ciută (2010) analyses the effects of the securitisation of energy on energy policies. States, according to the author, might first develop a logic of war framework, using the words weapon, battle, attack or fear in their explanation of energy security. This inherently changes political rationality. Second, states might develop a rhetoric of logic of subsistence (Ciută, 2010). A key element of this notion is that everyone needs energy. Therefore, it includes energy resources, activities (infrastructure, transportation) and actors (policy-makers, securitisation actors). Including this kind of variety has led to the logic of subsistence being perceived differently by different actors. In this logic, states utilise threats and challenges as

reference words. Third, in the logic of totality, everything is energy” (Ciută, 2010; Akgül, 2019:52).

Illustrating “these developments as existential threats, elites claim that their state’s survival is under threat, and so they need to take emergency measures in order to protect it. States attempt to diversify either their suppliers or resources or even attempt to use domestic resources, such as renewable resources, in order to decrease their over-reliance on them. This study argues that the diversification attempts of energy suppliers and resources are essential factors in deciding the level of securitisation of the energy sector. These can easily be analysed by way of pipeline projects and political initiatives, and provide a wide insight into how energy actually affects states and regions” (Akgül, 2019:52).

Regarding the categorisation of the securitisation of energy, “the spectrum ranges from non-politicised to securitisation, where non-politicised refers to the circumstance where energy is not perceived as a security threat in a state’s affairs and so energy agreements can act as a reinforcing mechanism for positive relations and it may be subject to commercial norms (Christou & Adamides, 2013). The politicisation of energy, meanwhile, is where it contributes to “two levels (economic and political), using both economic and political arguments and with divergent interpretations of the concept of energy security” (Radoman, 2007:40). The securitisation of energy, on the other hand, is the extreme state of politicisation, with Radoman (2007) asserting that energy cannot only become an issue that takes public attention, but which can also be a matter of survival. Regarding the desecuritisation of energy, according to Nyman (2014), desecuritising energy leads countries to cooperate with each other and perceptions (us vs them) start to lose importance in relations. Moreover, most importantly, it moves energy out of the security sphere and traditional energy security discourses. States begin to discuss alternative policy options” (Akgül, 2019:52-53).

Each spectrum “illustrates the importance of actions/practices. When energy supply or demand is securitised by states through their action/practice, cooperation becomes difficult and securitisation has a clear impact on policy choices. For instance, any energy-based activities may be demonstrated as an existential threat. However, if states do not securitise their energy supply or demand through their action/practice, cooperation becomes possible and energy-based activities are illustrated, for instance as trade activities. The securitising actor chooses the path that the state follows. One can understand these differences through the nature and atmosphere of states’ mutual (energy) relations. This new approach reshapes the methodological consideration of securitisation, and so one can see whether energy is securitised

or not in where energy security is placed in national security strategies, and in the discourse around the significance and sources of energy threats, the timing of concerns, and exceptional measures” (Akgül, 2019:53).

There are a number of issues needs to be bear in mind here, because they limit the operationalisation of the concept of (de)securitisation in energy. Expressing “an issue as an existential threat needs to be reconsidered. Regarding the evaluation of the above-mentioned criticism of speech acts, apart from only focusing on speeches of the securitising elite or policy documents in the understanding of security threats, it can be argued that energy projects, such as pipelines, can also be drawn upon. In these cases, the main aim is to understand how actions/practices construct securitisation. This is because, in certain cases, states do not explicitly securitise suppliers or transit routes, but they materialise their security concerns by way of pipeline projects. Such projects, in this case, are used as exceptional measures. In other cases, pipeline projects may pave the way for convergence, where states desecuritise their energy relations. In the context of this issue, the aim of this study is to lead the analysis beyond speech acts” (Akgül, 2019:54).

The supply of natural gas can be given as an example of the securitisation of energy, and is often securitised by states since they aim to find alternative resources to oil, as well as it being an environment-friendly resource. It affects and is affected by political developments (Christou & Adamides, 2013). For instance, when bilateral relations between countries have tension and political relations are at a high level of securitisation, this reflects on their energy relations where the supplier state might choose to take economic measures, such as increasing the price of gas to too high a level (Newnham, 2011), or aim to bypass the other country as a transit. States might also decide to be part of other projects or use their resources as tools for diplomatic coercion. Moreover, states view gas as a national security issue (Wilson, 2019). On the other hand, if bilateral relations are less problematic and relations are at a low level of securitisation, states may prefer to sign long-term energy contracts with affordable prices or diversify their energy projects (Wilson, 2019). They might also agree on the construction of new projects and thereby strengthen their interdependence. Moreover, states view gas as a liberal policy issue. In the desecuritisation of natural gas, states leave their problematic past behind and enhance their energy relations with multi-dimensional projects. They may also redefine each other either as a reliable supplier or as a transit country. These initiatives are exemplified in the case of the BSR below. It is argued that while Russian-Ukrainian energy relations is an example of securitisation, Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian ones are normal politics. Finally, Russian-

Turkish energy relations is an example of desecuritisation. These are analysed through revealing the transformation of inter-state relations and pipeline projects.

### **3. Examination of Cases from the Black Sea Region**

The BSR hosts some of the world's most significant energy producers and consumers, as well as a number of important energy transportation routes, so BSR countries have become important actors both regionally and globally. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, BSR countries have had to face a number of problems, such as corruption, integration into a market economy, internal conflicts and others and, "in order to solve these problems, energy has become one of important potential solutions. This is because energy, as one of the instruments contributing to how countries of the region build their state, has two significant roles; economic and political. Regarding economic development, all states depend on energy resources in terms of both supply and demand and, in addition, it helps countries to improve their industrialisation by virtue of the production of goods and services. Regarding politics, energy can help in the production of a state identity, either as a supplier or as a transit route. Therefore, it helps shape states' international recognition. It can also ensure relative stability at a state level" (Akgül, 2019:63).

As Table (1) indicates, "the countries of the region have extremely different energy profiles. In some cases, such as Russia and Azerbaijan, they are significant energy producers, of natural gas in particular, and rely on exports for economic development and government revenue. In others they are largely energy importers whose economic fortunes and domestic security are dependent on reliable supplies at reasonable prices. The vulnerability of the latter group is to some extent moderated by their role as transit countries; notably Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine. These conditions may reinforce, or may be reinforced by, their domestic state capacity. Domestic weaknesses are a deep influence on states' conceptualization of energy as a security issue, because interstate security issues might risk their new positions as transit countries and their involvement in international pipeline infrastructure. This makes the domestic level the basis of all other levels. Therefore, energy has become a major national and regional security concern and it is effectively moved from normal politics to high politics" (Akgül, 2019:64).

Table 1

*Net Energy Import (Mtoe)*

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
<b>Armenia</b>	7,76	1.42	1.43	1.69	1.73	2.2	2.71
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	2.77	-2.11	-7.44	-12.62	-52.65	-44.15	-42.6*
<b>Bulgaria</b>	17.92	13.56	8.72	9.56	7.27	6.92	6.80
<b>Georgia</b>	10.57	2.58	1.56	1.9	1.85	3.46	3.97
<b>Greece</b>	15.32	18	21.78	23.14	21.3	18.38	17.94
<b>Moldova</b>	9.89	4.69	2.82	3.42	3.15	3.06	3.24
<b>Romania</b>	22.03	14.34	7.87	10.65	7.56	5.44	9.06
<b>Russia</b>	-412.59	-314.97	-349.59	-339.33	-576.14	-621.47	-666.65*
<b>Turkey</b>	27.78	36.34	50.66	61.82	75.92	103.62	104.81
<b>Ukraine</b>	120.94	82.26	57.63	59.75	41.9	30.05	29.40

\* Negative value indicates net exports as a share of total energy supply

Source: IEA, 2021

Energy resources “are the basis of national security, because they are essential to the proper functioning of states. Owning sufficient amounts of energy resources increase states’ internal stability as well as their power. In the opposite situation, in which such resources are not available, states need to adopt an active foreign policy to ensure energy security. Given that most of the BSR countries are heavily dependent on energy imports for their economic growth, they need to prioritise a secure and reliable energy supply (Table 1). They aspire to decrease dependence on only one supplier or only one resource. Therefore, diversification of energy resources is the priority” (Akgül, 2019:65). In other words, energy is fundamental to national security as well as state sovereignty and so is intrinsically prone to be securitised.

Since “most of the regional countries were part of the Soviet Union (or its sphere of influence), they tend to have a higher dependency on Russia, both in terms of supply and transit. This is because most of the Soviet energy infrastructure went through Russian territory. However, the demise of the Soviet Union and the increasing importance of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea as alternative energy suppliers have made a significant contribution to the ability of post-Soviet republics to isolate themselves from Russian hegemony. Therefore, it can be claimed that while during the period of the Soviet Union energy was perceived as low politics, with its increasing importance and the requirement of solving political and economic problems, energy has become a high politics issue. The risks linked to energy dependence on Russia are expressed as an existential threat and the need to ensure energy supply diversity as

an exceptional measure. Problems, such as the Russian-Ukrainian gas crises, and Russia's support of secessionist activities in various countries and the use of energy resources as a weapon to intervene in domestic politics, have increased the concerns and threat perceptions of certain countries in the region. Therefore, they are reluctant to improve their energy dialogue with the country and, on the contrary, aim to diversify their supply options. As can be seen from the energy import Table (1), BSR countries have even made constant efforts to decrease their energy imports, with mixed results" (Akgül, 2019:66).

Concerns regarding the energy security of BSR states, "as stated in their national security strategy statements, arise from their dependence on external suppliers, as is the case in Armenia; or the need for a diversification of energy resources and a strengthening of the transit role, as in the case of Georgia; or the need to ensure secure supply as in Azerbaijan; or a desire to integrate with European energy strategies, as with Romania and Bulgaria (Armenia National Security Strategy, 2007; Azerbaijan National Security Concept, 2007; Romania National Security Strategy, 2007; Bulgaria National Security Strategy, 2011; National Security Concept of Georgia, 2015). Although, in terms of policy, they appear to have different priorities, in practice these concerns are closely-related to each other. These explicitly-stated concerns highlight the importance of energy security for states' domestic politics, and indicate why and how they consider energy as a national priority. This indicates that if any developments threaten their energy supplies, states are likely to shift from normal to extraordinary political action" (Akgül, 2019:66). These domestic level vulnerabilities reflect on their bilateral energy relations.

### **3.1 Securitisation of Energy in Bilateral Relations**

Energy relations with "Russia are important cases of securitisation for a number of countries in the region. Russia's energy relations with its near neighbours, in essence, are rooted in the Soviet era, when all the Soviet republics were tied together by a network of gas pipelines fed by Russia (Newnham, 2015). This historical fact is still strong for many post-Soviet republics and this makes them, both energy suppliers and customers, heavily dependent on Russia. This provides Russia with a market and with the political power to influence its near neighbours. Russia has managed this legacy to control the market and pipelines, as well as other energy facilities, and maintain its position as the main energy actor in neighbouring countries, and thereby exercise political leverage" (Akgül, 2019:98). Where it cannot control them, it aims to bypass them or works hard to ensure that these countries cannot find alternative routes (Nygren, 2008; Newnham, 2011).

The perception of “Russia towards these countries, therefore, plays a salient role in its policies. According to this notion, if the customer or transit country is a friend, such as Armenia, Russia considers energy a normal political issue, and so tends to sell resources at relatively cheap prices, and contributes to these countries’ energy infrastructures with subsidies that Newnham (2011:140) defines as ‘petro-carrots’. However, if the relationship is one of animosity, Russia tends to use ‘measures such as punitive price increases and demands for debt payment’, and if it is a country that it depends on for energy transportation, such as Ukraine, it seeks to diversify its routes and cut off the resources of the transit country; approaches that Newnham (2011) calls ‘petro-sticks’. However, this has led to its reliability as a supplier being questioned more widely (Feklyunina, 2012). These examples illustrate that Russian energy power over its neighbours either consolidates cooperation in bilateral relations or deepens conflict where energy has become a threat. Securitisation of energy is an inevitable outcome of this latter approach” (Akgül, 2019:99).

Furthermore, “security of energy is another important issue for Russia in terms of the secure transportation of resources to markets. From a Russian perspective, energy security refers to ensuring secure routes to its customers, ‘security of demand’, and therefore it feels threatened by nearby countries, needing to control them in order to control these routes (Kirchner & Berk, 2010). This is because, in terms of its geographical location, although Russia borders on two of the world’s major energy importers, the EU and China, in some cases it needs transit countries. However, in the case of the EU, the present transit countries have unfriendly relations with Russia and, therefore, this risks its supply. As a result, it has taken steps to secure dominance over the pipeline infrastructure in the BSR and the Caspian Sea region in order to prevent dominance by the West over these regions” (Akgül, 2019:99).

For other countries in the region, “being faced with energy disruption and Russia’s use of energy as a political weapon has led them to consider dependence on energy from Russia as a security issue (Stegen, 2011). From the perspective of securitisation theory, in the case of Ukraine, Russia is perceived as an existential threat to its energy requirements, as it believes that Russia intends to use its resources as a tool to punish itself due to its non-Russian political stance (Newnham, 2013). The perception that the energy supply is insecure, to the extent that Russia is involved, leads to political action. In the case of Ukraine, such actions include the diversification of suppliers and the use of its geopolitical importance in energy transportation as a tool for getting political support from its Russia-dependent EU counterparts” (Akgül, 2019:99-100).

In the case of Russian-Ukrainian energy relations, “the relationship between the two sides was relatively stable until the Orange Revolution. Russian-Ukrainian political relations had been at their closest, and energy was one of the main driving forces of bilateral relations. For years Russia kept gas prices reasonably low (at about \$50 per thousand cubic meters), and also allowed Ukraine to buy even cheaper natural gas from Turkmenistan through the Russian pipeline system (Newnham, 2013). Moreover, the first Russian ambassador in Ukraine under Putin was the former Prime Minister and head of Gazprom, Viktor Chernomyrdin (Nygren, 2008). Russian energy supply to Europe travels mostly through Ukrainian territory, making the country one of the most important energy corridor countries in the world, because, at one point, more than 80% of Russian gas was transported by way of Ukrainian territory” (Akgül, 2019:100).

Following the Orange Revolution, “the energy relationship deteriorated as part of the general worsening of relations between the two countries. The 2006 and the 2009 energy crises occurred, when bilateral political relations were at their lowest and mutual mistrust was at one of its highest points. In 2006, the Russian energy giant Gazprom announced price increases for Ukraine from \$50 to \$230, and Ukraine refused to pay this price (Pirani et al., 2009). This amount was out of Ukraine’s price range. One of the aspects of energy security is to ensure resources at reasonable prices, because when a supplier dramatically increases energy prices, this leaves countries politically and economically in a difficult position, and substantial bilateral tensions deepen. Although on the Russian side it was often stated that there were economic reasons behind this activity (Percival, 2008), the most widely-accepted explanation is its intention to punish Ukraine due to its non-Russian policy activities (Stegen, 2011; Newnham, 2011). According to this understanding, the above-indicated change in the political atmosphere in Ukraine and its anti-Russian attitude led Russia to play the energy card and use economic sanctions (Newnham, 2013). In this sense, Russia curtailed the natural gas supply to Ukraine for three days, while still planning to transit gas to Europe through Ukrainian territory. Kyiv’s reaction was to divert these gas volumes for its own consumption. Until the two sides found a solution for this crisis, a number of European countries had to face disruption in gas supplies, which called into question the reliability of Russia as a supplier and prompted them to find alternatives (Percival, 2008). The 2009 gas crisis occurred when the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine was completely halted for two weeks (Pirani et al., 2009). As a result of these two crises, it can be argued that the disruption of energy supply has had serious political and economic consequences, as well as implications for security” (Akgül, 2019:100).



As can be clearly seen, “changing the nature of the bilateral relationship had a profound impact. The two crises, with regard to Ukraine, illustrate its overt dependence on Russia. This is because, even though it was technically possible for Ukraine to obtain gas from Turkmenistan, there is no direct pipeline system and all imports pass through Russia and the effective control of Gazprom (Chifu, 2010). Ukraine had to pay 10% more than other customer countries, such as Germany, and this seriously affected its economic development and public peace (Newnham, 2013). Moreover, Newnham (2011) states that Ukraine has realised its mistake in believing that Russia depends on it more than it depends on Russia. This is because Russia has questioned the reliability of Ukraine as a transit country, and the new target of the Russian political elite was to decrease their dependence on Ukraine by means of alternatives, such as the Nord Stream through the Baltic Sea and the proposed South Stream and later the TurkStream through the Black Sea” (Akgül, 2019:101). Russia’s annexation of the Ukrainian Black Sea peninsula of Crimea in 2014, in particular, accelerated Russia’s aim of bypassing Ukrainian<sup>3</sup> territory. The relationship between the two countries deteriorated with the annexation, and it is seriously reflected in their energy transit deals for instance. After a ten-year contract signed in 2009, in 2019 the two sides agreed on a new five-year contract, including 65bcm in 2020 and 40bcm annually, from 2021-2024 (TASS, 2021). However, in 2020, Russia only transported 55.8bcm to Europe by way of Ukraine, which was the lowest volume in the last 30 years (TASS, 2021). With the completion of both the Nord Stream 2 and the TurkStream, and both operating at full capacity, Ukraine’s role in Russia’s natural gas transit appears to have been reduced dramatically.

Buzan et al. (1998:95) place energy in the economic sector, suggesting that securitisation of the economy “is exceedingly controversial and politicised”. They claim that “energy is a tradable good in the global market, which is subject to market forces. Therefore, any issue related to the subject does not pose an existential threat beyond the economic sector (Christou & Adamides, 2013). The Russian-Ukrainian case, however, illustrates that energy is rather securitised in the political sector, even though it could have consequences in the economic sector and it is therefore difficult for conflicted sides to converge; energy in this sense is not an element to bring sides together” (Akgül, 2019:103). Therefore, this situation impedes the emergence of energy collaboration and possible desecuritisation processes in both the economic and political sectors (Christou & Adamides, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> In 2015, 33% of Russian natural gas transits by way of Ukraine to the EU, which is a fall from 80% (Valdai, 2015).

### **3.2 Energy as a Normal Political Issue**

The demise of the Soviet Union “reinforced the importance of Azerbaijan as an alternative energy supplier, but its landlocked geographical location prevents it from supplying directly to the European market, and so it has to enhance relations with potential corridor countries. Due to close historical and ethnic ties, Turkey is an inevitable and reliable option, so much so that authorities even describe bilateral relations as ‘one nation, two countries’. Georgia, another option where Baku could possibly normalise energy, completes the energy transportation options for Azerbaijani exports to the European market. Energy, therefore, has a strong role in defining relations among these three countries” (Akgül, 2019:103).

Not feeling threatened by each other and “their mutual positive (inter)dependency, are among the important factors reinforcing the current circumstances in which energy is a normal political issue in bilateral relations among these three countries. They have shared the same geography for centuries and, during this time, they did not have any serious problems with each other (King, 2004). After the demise of the Soviet Union, their increasing energy demands, and their aim of diversifying suppliers as well as transit routes, have intensified the (inter)dependency (Kardaş, 2011-12). Georgia needs Azerbaijan and Turkey in order to ensure a balance against Russia, Azerbaijan needs the other two as supporters regarding its regional problems and as markets to supply, and Turkey needs the others in order to attain its goal of becoming an energy hub. As can be seen in this example, high levels of interdependence tend to favour normalised relationships in the energy sector, even leading frequently to the development of strong alliances (Christou & Adamides, 2013). Each side, in this context, has made significant efforts to ensure the stability and vitality of the other, and they have undertaken significant policy steps in this regard. For instance, during negotiations over a transit agreement for the BTC project, even though World Bank experts insisted Azerbaijan increase the price for Georgia, Azerbaijan strongly resisted the proposal and kept the price as low as possible in order to ensure Georgia’s economic viability” (Akgül, 2019:103-04), which thus increased its stability (Newnham, 2015).

Since the “three countries have reached an understanding on various energy issues, they have entered a new phase in energy cooperation, involving deeper partnership. TANAP, an Azerbaijan-proposed project, is an important example of normal politics. It is an Azerbaijan-based pipeline project, which makes it both a supplier and constructor and distinguishes it from other projects. Moreover, it is not an extension of existing projects. On the contrary, it will operate as a stand-alone pipeline (Kardaş, 2014). TANAP is a new project, initiated in

November, 2011, and formally inaugurated in March, 2014. It aims to provide 10bcm of gas from Azerbaijan through Turkey to Europe, with 6bcm for Turkish consumption by 2018” (Akgül, 2019:104), and it is scheduled to be followed by its European portion, the TAP.

TANAP is “the locomotive of Azerbaijan’s political dream, which can be seen as an asset, like a railway line. As the main supplier and constructor of the project, and defining the project as a major strategic investment, Azerbaijan’s aim is to guarantee the project’s feasibility. This is because, in these kinds of projects, no country wants to risk its project by investing in or choosing a partner country that it already has tension. Therefore, it wants a country or countries that it has close relations with politically and which it trusts the most. The selection of supply routes by way of pipelines is an important political issue, because this infrastructure can tie producer, customer and transit countries into a relationship of (inter)dependency. Choosing Turkey as the main partner of this project, where the pipeline build will be the longest, as well as Georgia, illustrates the positive dynamic behind trilateral relations. Moreover, Turkey holds a 30% share in the project, moving it beyond its customer and transit roles, to being significant in upstream and midstream (Kardaş, 2014). In this climate, it is possible to claim that there is a strong connection between TANAP and normalisation” (Akgül, 2019:104-05).

### **3.3 Desecuritisation of Energy**

Bilateral energy relations between Russia and Turkey occurred during the Cold War while the countries were on opposite sides. This might be explained by the perception of energy as being vital for their political survival, as well as economic development. It should not be surprising that the convergence of interests between the two countries started with an energy agreement in 1984, which facilitated the current rapprochement (Özbay, 2011). The agreement included a twenty-five-year trade agreement between Gazexport and BOTAŞ, which was signed in 1986, and a natural gas flow, which started in 1987 through Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria, called the ‘Western Line’ (Özbay, 2011).

The “two countries have had complex energy relations since then, however. These problems have affected the way they perceive each other and the way in which energy intrudes into the relationship, whether as a security issue or otherwise. For instance, throughout the early 1990s, Russia and Turkey had clashing energy interests, principally through competition over the transit routes for Caspian resources to the European market (Demiryol, 2015). This is because Turkey, with BTE and BTC, chose Western countries and alternative energy suppliers as energy partners, rather than Russia. It took an active role in these projects, aiming to bypass the role of Russia in energy transportation of Caspian and Central Asian resources and to supply

the European market (Kardaş, 2011-12). Russia responded to these activities by raising new projects that bypassed Turkey. For example, the Russian desire to bypass the Turkish Straits for the transport of oil” (Akgül, 2019:111), led to the development of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis link, connecting the Bulgarian Black Sea coast with the Greek Aegean (Torbakov, 2007).

Although “Turkey remained committed to projects backed by Western powers and Russia responded immediately, Turkey also increasingly developed a more cooperative relationship with Russia in order to meet its energy needs. It attempted to increase its bilateral energy dialogue and so agreed to the construction of the Blue Stream project in 1997. In parallel with their political ties, the current situation can be defined as multi-dimensional, ranging from exportation, transport, pipeline infrastructure and, more recently, nuclear energy” (Akgül, 2019:112).

In 2014, “in his visit to Turkey when TurkStream was declared, President Putin expressed the final version of bilateral energy relations, stating that, ‘We consider energy an important area in our bilateral cooperation. *Our relations in this sector have reached a truly strategic level*’ (Kremlin, 2014). As can be seen from this speech, energy has a positive influence on bilateral relations. Energy has turned from an economically significant issue into a strategically significant issue” (Akgül, 2019:112).

Furthermore, one might rightly think that the “two countries are not *sine qua non* partners for each other, meaning that they do not depend on each other strongly, because geographically they have other options. This is because Russia and Turkey are both close to other energy suppliers and customers and thus could easily decrease their dependence on each other. For instance, in the case of a possible supply disruption, Turkey could substitute its demand from Azerbaijan, Iran or Iraq, while in the event of an abrogation of the agreement Russia could substitute its supply to European or Asian countries. However, as occurred in the nuclear power plant example, Turkey is increasing its dependence on Russia, even though it has many options” (Akgül, 2019:113).

This act “might explain the positive nature of mutual perceptions, in particular in the energy sector. The two countries have inherited mutual mistrust and antagonism from their ancestors, and so constructing an energy partnership is expected to be quite a difficult task. Surprisingly, energy is actually one of the main elements that have changed these historical perceptions. Starting a dialogue with each other, and particularly Russia’s changing perception towards its own transit countries, such as Ukraine and Georgia, has allowed Turkey to undertake

a new role in Russian energy politics. According to Gvosdev & Marsh (2014:303), Turkish partnership in the energy sector “is seen as a way to enhance Russia’s energy links with core European markets by bypassing transit states in Eastern Europe, so it does not threaten Russia’s interests in closer ties with Europe”. This approach transforms Turkey from a formidable rival for influence in Russia’s near abroad into a partner, while Russia has become less of a threat to Turkey. This also ensures that Turkey perceives Russia differently, which often means a partner who it, nevertheless, has to retain balance with. In the context of this issue, although Turkey depends heavily on Russia, in order to protect its own energy security, it has not promoted defensive energy policies with the aim of a decrease in its dependence on Russia, as Poland or the Baltic States have done. On the contrary, as in the case of the nuclear power plant and the TurkStream, it has increased its dependency” (Akgül, 2019:113-14).

In light of these assessments, “the energy relationship between Russia and Turkey has a non-conflictual structure, because although there is the potential for a security threat (such as Turkey’s participation in non-Russian projects), their own ambitions overcoming threat perceptions and making the perception of energy a desecuritized rather than securitized issue. Energy, in this case, provides the basis for a rapprochement between two historical enemies and, therefore, it supports the process of desecuritisation in bilateral relations. The development of improved and multi-dimensional energy relations indicates the desecuritisation of energy in bilateral relations” (Akgül, 2019:114).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The BSR “consists of major energy producers (Russia and Azerbaijan), transit countries (Turkey, Georgia, Greece, Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria and Romania), and customer countries (Georgia, Armenia, Greece, Turkey, Moldova, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Romania). As a natural corridor for energy, the BSR is geographically located between other well-resourced energy suppliers and energy customers. The BSR is a major junction of supply routes to Europe from Russia, the Caspian basin and other producing countries in the East. Therefore, energy is one of the salient determinants of the BSR’s importance. This has also led regional countries to find opportunities to interact with each other, as well as with non-regional actors due to the transportation and supply of energy resources” (Akgül, 2019:138).

The BSR also includes countries which are both economically and politically weak and strong. This “imbalance greatly affects the security of the region, leaving open the potential for tensions between countries. Moreover, historical suspicions and threat perceptions are some of the dominant features of intrastate relations. Given these conditions, it is unsurprising that

regional relations are often securitised rather than desecuritised by countries in the region. Although, for these countries, securitising their relations with each other is the most preferable option, other countries have close relations and tend to diversify their cooperation in different areas, in which issues are perceived as low politics” (Akgül, 2019:137). Desecuritisation brings transformation in bilateral relations from competition to a convergence. In this complex atmosphere, energy is perceived as both a political tool and a stabilising factor for regional countries.

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**Peer Review:** Externally peer-reviewed

**Conflict of Interest:** There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

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