

# The Role of Ideas and Identities in Shaping Economic Decisions: The Eastern Mediterranean Crisis and Turkey-Greece-Cyprus Triangle

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## ABSTRACT

The discovery of new natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean fueled the tension in the region and led to a highly complicated crisis involving multiple actors. This study adopts a constructivist approach in analyzing the political economy of the Eastern Mediterranean energy crisis by relying on the role of identities and ideas in shaping economic decisions. The historical enmity between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus is at the heart of the crisis. Thus, the study focuses on the Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus triangle to reveal the impact of Turkey's image constructed by Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, on the political-economic aspect of the decisions of Greece and Greek Cypriots. To accomplish this objective, a two-stage content analysis was conducted by filtering the official statements of Greece and the RoC from their respective foreign ministries, utilizing the keyword "Eastern Mediterranean." By scrutinizing the official discourses and documents, the analysis aims to delve into the image of Turkey held by these actors.

**Keywords:** Energy, Historical Enmity, Conflict, Constructivism, Cyprus, Identity

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## Introduction

Rationalists assume that actors seek to maximize their interests and determine their actions following a cost-benefit analysis based on material factors. This research adopts the constructivist premise that interests are not exogenously given but shaped by identities, and argues that states are reluctant to collaborate with the actors that they perceive as unreliable regardless of potential material advantages of cooperation. Thus, the study argues that the ideational factors, and Turkey's image constructed by Greece and the Republic of Cyprus<sup>1</sup> (RoC) played a significant role in the exclusion of Turkey from the regional political and economic initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2019, Greece, the RoC, Egypt, France,

<sup>1</sup> Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus and calls it as "the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus".

Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (East-Med Forum) and left Turkey aside. This study asserts that the perceived image of Turkey has shaped the components of the economic thinking of the actors involved. Despite material incentives to include Turkey in the regional cooperation, the actors did not include Turkey because of their perceptions of the country as an aggressor and unreliable partner.

There are several reasons why this study focuses on the Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus triangle. First, Turkey has maritime jurisdiction disputes, and coinciding Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claims only with Greece and the RoC. As İpek and Gür aptly state, “one should note that Turkey and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)<sup>2</sup> do not have overlapping continental shelf claims with either Israel or Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea” (İpek and Gür 2022). Without underestimating the role of other regional states, this study contends that Turkey’s relations with Greece and the RoC are the core of the impasse. The study argues that the conflict over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean that has led to Turkey’s isolation is a continuation of long-standing confrontations between Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, including the unresolved Cyprus issue- a Gordian knot and intractable conflict (Heraclides 2011)- and disagreements over the Aegean Sea. Secondly, Greek and Greek Cypriot positions are representative of those of other states in the region. In most of the joint statements published, the regional actors such as Israel and Egypt reiterated their full support and solidarity with the RoC and Greece. For example, in the joint statement following the Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the RoC, Egypt, and Greece in September 2019, Turkey’s actions were stated as unlawful, provocative, and illegal by the representatives of these countries (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019a). According to their official statements, Greece and the RoC have been the leading actors in the initiatives in the region. They are the countries that mobilize not only regional countries but also the great powers. As in the following statement, Greece claims to be a pioneer of cooperation in the region. “We have built relationships with quite a few Eastern Mediterranean countries with regard to energy issues. Greece and the RoC are at the centre of this initiative, and each time we add another country: Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. We also try to invite countries which are not located in the region, such as the US” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019b).

This study argues that the negative images historically produced due to the hostile relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus prevailed in the economic decision to exclude Turkey. Identities are shaped within historical processes and they are subject to changes but dramatic changes are rare. Government changes, leadership changes or foreign policy changes cannot be easily interpreted as identity changes (Rumelili 2014: 393). So, the study argues that Greece and the RoC frame Turkey as a constant threat in their discourses by emphasizing historically constructed images attributed to Turkey, such as being Ottoman Muslims, aggressive, and expansionist, rather than focusing on Turkey’s material capabilities. According to Heraclides (2019a: 42), the unhappy state of affairs between the parties is the product of the “imagined history of Greeks and Turks, based on chosen glories, traumas, and victimization as crystallized in their respective national historical narratives and national identities which

<sup>2</sup> Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, only recognized by Turkey and representing Turkish Cypriots.

are built on demonizing the other side.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout history, Turkey and Greece have evolved as historical enemies characterized by enmity (Alioğlu Çakmak 2019: 14). Millas (2019: 78) argues that, in the years 1821–1830, the Greeks fought the Turks to create their national state. One hundred years later, from 1919 to 1922, the Turks fought the Greeks for their independence. This is presumably the only instance in history where two nation-states are founded following successive conflicts. As a result, both sides view one another as their “historical national enemy” (Millas 2019: 78). Examining the history of Turkish- Greek relations, “the overall record is rivalry less than two-thirds of the time, with good neighborly relations comprising a third of the 100 years” (Heraclides 2019b: 3). In 1974, when Turkish troops landed in Cyprus, Turkey became the number one threat in the eyes of Greeks, namely “the danger from the East” (Heraclides 2001). İpek and Gür (2022: 12), in their recent article, elaborate on the role of ideational mechanisms and material interests in energy politics between 2010 and 2020; they argue that “the dominant conflictual security framing in the RoC and Greece’s discourse persistently translated into policy guidance through the entire period of 2010 and 2020.”<sup>4</sup> According to them, the conflictual security framework is a product of cognitive priors, lack of mutual trust that dominate the relationship between Turkey, Greece and the RoC (İpek and Gür 2022). The study reveals that mistrust and negative conflictual frames started dominating the energy issues between Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus way before 2019.

In this study, the official statements of Greece and the RoC were gathered from the official websites of Foreign Ministries to comprehend Turkey’s image from the perspective of these actors. The data was collected by filtering using the “Eastern Mediterranean” keyword among all statements, including announcements, press releases, speeches, and written statements. A total of 167 statements from Greece and 93 statements from the RoC were collected, spanning the period between January 2019 and July 2022, all containing the term “Eastern Mediterranean.” After finalizing the data collection, a two-stage content analysis method was conducted. As a first step, the statements were meticulously read and categorized based on their scope. Subsequently, “Online Utility,” a word count program, was utilized to calculate the frequency of the words used in the statements. It was assumed that the words appearing most frequently would indicate the most significant concerns. However, relying solely on counting is inadequate for capturing the true significance and portrayal of the words and insufficient for seizing their genuine meaning and representation. Therefore, in recognition of this limitation, a qualitative approach was incorporated as the second step following the frequency analysis. During the qualitative analysis, all the statements were carefully re-read to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and representation behind the counted words. Upon examining the official statements of both actors, it is reasonable to argue that Turkey’s image exhibits a notable similarity between Greece and the RoC.

The paper begins by presenting the main arguments of constructivist approaches and the methodology. Then, it scrutinizes the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean by

3 Alexis Heraclides, “The Greek-Turkish Antagonism: The Social Construction of Self and Other”, Gizem Alioğlu Çakmak and Alexis Heraclides (eds.), *Greece and Turkey in Conflict and Cooperation: From Europeanization to De-Europeanization*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 42.

4 İpek and Gür, “Turkey’s Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: Ideational Mechanisms and Material Interests in Energy Politics”, p.12.

emphasizing the feasibility studies on energy cooperation. Finally, the paper concludes by conducting quantitative and qualitative content analysis focusing on the official statements of Greece and the Greek Cypriot government.

## Identities and Ideas in Shaping Economic Decisions: Constructivism

Constructivism asserts that ideational factors, norms, and identities besides material matters have an impact on politics, and it differs from rationalism because this impact is not necessarily reducible to calculated actions (Guzzini 2000: 148). In a socially constructed world, identities, as representations of actors' understandings of who they are, signal their interests (Theys 2017: 37) and accordingly motivate their behavior. As such, identities are the basis of interests (Wendt 1992: 398) and therefore key to understanding foreign policy. States acquire multiple identities through interaction with other actors and how they interact depends "on the meanings that the objects have for them" (Wendt 1992: 396). That is, states construct each other as enemies, rivals, or partners, and proceed to share their interpretations of their respective identities. Constructivists argue that the identities of states determine whether they will interact cooperatively or conflictively with one another (Mielniczuk 2013: 1075). In simple terms, states act differently towards enemies than they do towards friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not (Wendt 1992: 396). Constructivism does not imply a radical, "ideas all the way down" idealism that completely disregards the importance of material factors. However, the meanings attributed to material factors are important to constructivism (Fearon and Wendt 2002). For example, rational approaches fail to explain why 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States (US) than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons. Without putting the situation in a social perspective, the United Kingdom (UK) would be a much more immediate threat to the US because of its geographical position, as well as its greater military force and the profusion of nuclear weapons. However, when social context is concerned, as a result of years of alliances and friendship between the US and the UK, the UK's nuclear capacity is not that threatening in the eyes of US decision-makers (Wendt 1995).

The Turkey-Cyprus and Greece triangle in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis is the embodiment of what Wendt calls "the social construction of power politics" (Wendt 1992).. Without considering its social setting, this crisis cannot be grasped. The development and intensification of crises are greatly influenced by past experiences, unfavorable perceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes about the "Other". As Kowert (1998: 118) puts it, the crisis occurred because of "who" it involved, not because of what it involved.<sup>5</sup>

Constructivist theory concerning the impact of social identities, norms, and other widely held ideas and beliefs has emerged as a key component of the International Political Economy canon over the past ten years (Abdelal 2009: 63). By recognizing the impact of ideas and identities on economic practices, Abdelal (2009: 72) mentions post-Soviet Lithuania and argues that "much as post-Soviet Lithuania interpreted economic dependence on Russia as a

5 Paul Kowert, "Agent versus Structure in the Construction of National Identity", Vendulka Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World*, New York and London, M.E Sharpe, 1998, p.118.

security threat, while dependence on the European Union (EU) was an opportunity”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, economic dependence is not a good or bad phenomenon on its own; it has different meanings according to the identity perception of the actor that states depend on. Thus, looking at IPE studies from an identity perspective is helpful. As in the case of Greece, Greek Cypriots and Turkey, historical images emerged as a result of bitter experiences in the past that shape their respective interests.

Identities, and thus interests, function as an obstacle in resolving the traditional disputes between these parties. As Kowert (2001: 281) suggests, the constructed identity is central to foreign policy choices.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, the leaders put identity-affirmation before strategic or financial benefits (Klotz and Lynch 2007: 22). In the triangle of Turkey, Greece, and Greek Cypriots, perceived images of the ‘other’ play a significant role in shaping the decision-making processes over strategic and economic decisions. The study argues that even though excluding Turkey from the energy cooperation in the region was economically costly, the parties preferred to realize high-cost alternatives due to their perception of Turkey’s image, especially among Greece and Greek Cypriots. The constructivist approach provides a sound framework for how historically constructed images affect interests, thus the economic decisions.

## Methodology

By acknowledging the causal path between identity and interest, this study aims to reveal how Turkey is framed in the official documents of Greece and the RoC between 2019 and July 2022. The statements were collected via the official web pages of the Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All official announcements, statements, and speeches were filtered using the keyword “Eastern Mediterranean” and underwent a meticulous quantitative and qualitative content analysis. There are several reasons why 2019 was chosen as the starting year of the analysis. Although bilateral or tripartite cooperation between regional actors started long ago,<sup>8</sup> the year 2019 has been the turning point in establishing institutionalized cooperation between regional actors (Egypt, Israel, Greece, RoC, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority). The East-Med Forum became the institutionalized mechanism that excluded Turkey. In November 2019, Turkey and the Government of National Accord in Libya signed an agreement on their maritime jurisdiction zones, “the clash of interests between Turkey and Greece has added to rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean region” (İpek and Gür 2022: 13-14). Also, in 2019 Turkey became very active in the region by conducting research and drilling activities. Also, a previous study analyzing Greek official statements on the Eastern Mediterranean revealed that there was a substantial increase in the number of Greek statements mentioning Turkey in 2019, arguing that Turkey became a significant concern for Greek political elites in 2019 within the framework of the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2018, Turkey was mentioned 12 times;

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6 Ibid., p. 72.

7 Paul Kowert, “Towards a Constructivist Theory of Foreign Policy”, Vendulka Kubalkova (ed.), *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, London, M.E. Sharpe, 2001, p. 281.

8 İpek and Gür conducted an analysis on how Turkish, Greek and RoC’s policy discourses differ in cooperative and conflictual frames regarding the politics of hydrocarbon resources in the EMR between 2010 and 2020.

in 2019, the number rose to 334 (Alioğlu Çakmak and Güner 2021: 58). The empirical analysis of the paper focuses on a short period (2019-2020), whereas constructivism sees identities as historically produced. Therefore, the objective of the empirical analysis is not to elaborate on identity changes but to understand how historically constructed images prevail in economic decisions over material factors.

This research employs a two-stage content analysis. First, the official statements of Greece and RoC were collected via their official websites by filtering with the keyword “Eastern Mediterranean”. In total, Greece has 167, the RoC has 93 statements between January 2019 and July 2022 including the word Eastern Mediterranean. The statements were carefully read and classified according to their scope. Then, the frequency of the words was calculated by utilizing a free online word count program titled “Online Utility”. It is assumed that the words used most frequently reflect the most serious concerns (Stemler 2000). Counting, on the other hand, is insufficient to convey the genuine meaning and representation of the words. Aware of the limitation of simple word count, a qualitative approach was also adopted as the second step following the frequency analysis. All the statements were re-read to understand the meaning and representation of the counted words. For example, in both cases (Greece and RoC), the word “Turkey” has been one of the most frequently used. However, to understand the meaning attached to the word “Turkey”, a qualitative analysis was required.

## **Conflict and Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean**

This study adopts the constructivist tenet which asserts that interests are not exogenously determined but rather shaped by identities. It contends that despite the possible tangible benefits of cooperation, nations are unwilling to work with actors they view as unreliable. The study claims that the emergence of regional political and economic initiatives that exclude Turkey are products of Turkey’s constructed image by Greece and the RoC.

The discovery of natural gas reserves in 2011 in the Aphrodite field on the southern coast of Cyprus and the Tamar (2009) and Leviathan (2010) regions of Israel led to a new conflict and cooperation prospect in the Eastern Mediterranean. The realization of new energy alternatives in the region could decrease Europe’s dependency on Russian dominance in energy production, and become a substitute for Russian gas (Shokri 2022). However, the export and the transfer of natural gas have generated significant debate due to conflictual relations, especially between Turkey and the Greek Cypriots. The transport of natural gas can be realized via pipeline and/or a liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal and Cypriot involvement is required for the implementation of the gas transfer from both fields. In both cases, any pipelines should have passed through the claimed EEZ of the RoC, implying that the Cyprus conflict is an impediment to the realization of the projects. Even though feasibility reports and several academic studies reveal that building a pipeline from Israel to Turkey and Europe is the less expensive and more feasible option for gas transfer, Turkey was excluded from the Eastern Mediterranean gas cooperation.

A floating gas LNG (FLNG) facility in Israel’s territorial waters would be more than three times as costly compared to a pipeline to Turkey and up to twice as pricey as a land-based

LNG terminal (Bryza 2013: 36). The quickest and most economical method to transport gas to Europe is through Turkey via an undersea pipeline from Cyprus (Shokri 2022). According to Winrow (2016: 436), a “subsea gas pipeline connecting Leviathan with the Turkish mainland is widely accepted as being commercially viable” (Also see Winrow 2018). The same argument is also valid for the Aphrodite field in the RoC. The investment cost of transferring gas via pipeline to Greece is around \$19.510 billion, whereas carrying via pipeline from Cyprus to Turkey would only cost \$4.780 billion. Also, ‘the net revenue that can be generated by gas via pipeline to Turkey comes out at \$69 billion, compared with \$55 billion for a pipeline to Greece and \$50 billion for an LNG plant (Gurel et al. 2013). When alternative projects omitting Turkey are concerned, developing a terminal to export gas as LNG and an ambitious plan for a pipeline connecting Israel with Cyprus and Greece, both of which have price tags of up to \$6 billion, have been ruled out as uneconomical alternatives (O’Byrne 2022). The cost of a pipeline connecting the RoC and Greece alone could reach \$20 billion due to the difficulty of building a conduit in very deep waters (Winrow 2016: 437).

Despite the high cost and technical difficulties, in January 2020, the leaders of Israel, Greece and the RoC signed the East-Med gas pipeline deal (Tugwell 2020). The project would exclude Turkey (the most obvious route for a Mediterranean pipeline) and the 1,250-kilometer pipeline will cost €6 billion and transfer gas from deposits offshore Israel and Egypt via Cyprus and Greece to European markets (Stamouli 2022). The East-Med project has been developed “to exclude and work around Turkey, illustrated by the plan for the pipeline to take a long detour to avoid Turkish waters” (Robinson and Jeakins 2019). As Grigoriadis (2014: 126) starkly put it

“while building a pipeline to Turkey, a major regional consumer with the ambition to become an energy hub, appeared to be the most rational decision from an economic point of view, this choice faced formidable political obstacles: the age-old Cyprus question and the sharp deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations over the last years.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite Turkey’s problematic relations with regional actors, the two major obstacles for Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean are the traditional deadlock in Cyprus and overlapping claims over exclusive economic zones with the RoC and Greece. These are not new developments by nature, they are the continuation of the existing problems between the parties. Turkey has perceived the establishment of East-Med “as an attempt to exclude and contain Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean” (Ünlühisarcıklı 2020). Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus thus it has claimed the EEZ. Cyprus has been divided since the intervention of Turkey in 1974 and Turkey claims that resources found around Cyprus should be shared equally by all the people of Cyprus, including Turkish Cypriots. Greece accuses Turkey of violating the sovereignty of the RoC as an unlawful actor (Alioğlu Çakmak and Güner 2021: 64). The Greek Cypriot side, on the other hand, “uses the resources as a bargaining chip, insisting that Turkish Cypriots will only be able to share in the profits after reunification occurs” (Robinson and Jeakins 2019).

9 Ioannis Grigoriadis, “Energy Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean: Conflict or Cooperation?”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXI, No 3, 2014, p. 126.

Thus, the discovery of natural resources in the Cypriot EEZ made the long-standing Cyprus dispute more complicated and decreased hopes for reconciliation. The EEZ dispute with Greece is the continuation of the traditional continental shelf problem between the two countries. To analyze the identity dimension in Turkey's exclusion in the energy cooperation, the official statements of Greece and the RoC will be reviewed in the next section. The study argues that, based on the joint statements made by regional actors several times, the Greek and Greek Cypriot positions regarding Turkey are representative of other states in the region.

## The Analysis of the Statements Statements of the Republic of Cyprus

When the official statements of the RoC were filtered and searched with the keyword "Eastern Mediterranean", 93 statements were found in total. The word "Turkey" has been one of the most frequent. It was mentioned 74 times in the official statements. President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was mentioned 10 times while referring to Turkey. The word "Ankara", Turkey's capital, was also used 17 times while citing Turkey. Turkey was emphasized in almost all of the Greek Cypriot statements about the Eastern Mediterranean.

### *Turkey as an aggressive actor*

As in the statement below, Turkey is frequently portrayed as an aggressive and unlawful actor. While doing so, by emphasizing EU membership, the RoC also emphasizes the "otherness" of Turkey as an actor threatening not only Cyprus but also the European Union.

"...we have been witnessing an aggressive rhetoric on the part of Turkey against an EU Member State, with threats of resumption of illegal actions within the EEZ of Cyprus and the creation of new, unacceptable *faits accomplis* within the fenced area of Famagusta" (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021a).

As implied in the following statement, according to Greek Cypriot officials Turkey has always been an occupier and an aggressive actor. So, a new form of aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean can be expected from Turkey.

"Over 160,000 colonists from Turkish Anatolia brought to the occupied areas, with approximately 40,000 Turkish occupying troops still illegally stationed in Cyprus. Forty-six years after the Turkish invasion, Cyprus is experiencing anew Turkish aggression, this time extending to the sea surrounding Cyprus" (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020).

### *Turkey as an unlawful actor*

Turkey was accused of illegal activities 30 times throughout the statements. As can be noted in the following statement, the alleged illegal actions of Turkey were emphasized together with claims of revisionism and Turkey as an actor who destabilizes the whole region.

"... I also informed my colleagues about the illegal actions of Turkey, both in the fenced area of Famagusta and in the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus, which



are manifested within the framework of Ankara's revisionist and destabilization policy in the wider region" (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b).

The claimed illegality of Turkey's actions is not limited to the dispute over the EEZ. The traditional Cyprus conflict is one of the sources of the perceived image of Turkey as an unlawful, aggressive, and destabilizing actor. In addition, Turkey is accused of changing the demographics of the island of Cyprus by sending people from mainland Turkey to Cyprus. This act is recognized as an activity of colonization by Greek Cypriot officials.

### ***Turkey as Neo-Ottoman***

In the following statement Turkey is associated with the neo-Ottoman identity, referring to its allegedly aggressive characteristics.

"Turkey's employment of gunboat diplomacy, its aggressive neo-Ottoman vision, its belligerence against rule of law must alarm the international community that needs to respond in a coherent, firm manner to Mr. Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian, erratic behavior" (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b).

Here, the Ottoman referral is significant in understanding how historically constructed images effectively shape the interests of the actors involved. According to Greek Cypriot officials, Turkey is an actor ready to revive the Ottoman past; thus, its expansionist aspirations threaten the harmony among "peaceful", "like-minded" countries. Turkey as an actor relying on force (referring to the term gunboat diplomacy), is not an actor to be included in the strategic diplomatic initiatives in the region, and thus, should be excluded from economic cooperation as well.

### ***Turkey as a Provocative actor***

One of the most frequent characteristics associated with Turkey is being provocative. The word provocative was mentioned 10 times, and the word provocations is used 7 times to address Turkey. While describing Turkey as a provocateur, other negative qualities are also included. Turkey is associated with being inclined to provocation, and being expansionist, unlawful, and aggressive. Cooperation with an actor with such negative qualities is not very likely. According to the Greek Cypriot statements, even in difficult times, Turkey as an opportunist actor acted unlawfully to realize its ambitions.

"In these challenging times for the international community due to the coronavirus pandemic, when countries have for the most part come together to fight a common enemy, Turkey has opted to take advantage of the situation, further escalating its provocative, illegal actions" (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020).

Turkey's otherness is also emphasized by indicating the like-minded nature of the states in cooperation. The term like-minded is frequently mentioned in the RoC statements to

emphasize the similarity of identities and norms among the partners. “... As opposed to how Ankara behaves, we remain fully committed to regional cooperation that upholds International Law and the principle of good neighborly relations and together with all like-minded partners in the region...” (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021c)..

## Statements of Greece

Turkey, with 1064 occurrences, is the most frequent word in the Greek official statements. Most of the time when Greek officials talk about the Eastern Mediterranean, they emphasize Turkey. The word “illegal” with 124 instances is the most frequently occurring word, thus Turkey is *characterized as an unlawful actor*.

### *Turkey as an aggressive actor*

Turkey’s perceived image as an aggressive actor is very frequently linked to revisionism in Greek official statements. According to Greek officials, Turkey has acted as a revisionist and aggressive actor in the region on many occasions. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias stated as follows:

There is an important element that is always present in the crises around our region, and this is Turkey. Turkey has invaded Syria, Turkey has invaded Iraq, Turkey has sent jihadists into Libya and now Turkey is also present in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey is becoming the disruptor of stability in our region” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020a).

Similarly, the official statements of Greece very frequently portray Turkey as a troublemaker. According to Greek officials, Turkey is isolated due to its incorrigible problematic characteristic and has several problems with multiple actors as indicated in the following statement of Foreign Minister Dendias:

“What’s the issue? Is the case with Syria misdirecting us? Not at all. On the contrary! It shows that Turkey has a modus operandi. It is a troublemaker by creed. It’s not only doing it against the Republic of Cyprus, it’s doing it against all of its neighbours. Wherever there’s trouble, Turkey’s there! Get it?” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019c).

In the statements, Turkey’s problems with other countries are frequently mentioned to reinforce its identity as the “problematic” and “troublemaker” actor. As put by several constructivist scholars, the constructed identity is very prominent in foreign policy making because the leaders occasionally place identity commitment over strategic or financial gains (Kowert 2001: 22). Emphasizing Turkey’s identity as a problematic actor also helps justify excluding Turkey from economic and political cooperation.

One of the most prominent identities attributed to Turkey is being an agonistic and belligerent actor. According to Greek statements, Turkey is an irrational, unlawful, and unreliable actor as also indicated in the following statement: “...In contrast with Turkey,

which is an unreliable partner making irrational claims and is occasionally prepared to infringe the rules for its own benefit” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022a). According to Greece, “Turkey is a peculiar partner, which does not hesitate to break the rules, and it often pursues markedly revisionist policies” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022b).

### ***Turkey as unlawful actor***

As illustrated in the following statement, Turkey’s drilling activities and EEZ claims are presented as illegal. Turkey is portrayed as an aggressive and threatening actor who destabilizes the region.

“We talked about the situation taking shape due to Turkey’s provocative and illegal actions in the region. From Libya and Cyprus to Iraq and Syria, Turkey is the only country that is opening military fronts everywhere. It is the only country threatening its neighbours with war if they should choose to exercise their legal rights” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020b).

### ***Turkey as Neo-Ottoman***

One of the most significant and emphasized characteristics attributed to Turkey is “Ottomanism” and being the protector of Islam and Muslims. There is a strong emphasis on Turkey’s Muslim identity in the Greek official statements, and this identity is associated with revisionism and aggressiveness. As seen in the following statement, Turkey’s consolidated identity as a successor to the Ottoman Empire is underlined and portrayed as the source of its revisionist policies. Ottoman identity, revisionism, aggression, and Islam are often used together in Greek statements. Greek Foreign Minister Dendias stated that “...Nobody wants an isolated Turkey, an aggressive Turkey. Nobody wants an Islamic neo-Ottoman Turkey...” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022c). According to him, “Turkey continues to shelter the Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>10</sup> It is implied that with its Islamic identity, Turkey is trying to revive the Ottoman Empire and that it follows revisionist policies in the name of protecting the Muslims in the region. One of the instances of associating Turkey with Ottoman identity and aggressiveness is seen in the following statement: “...We will not cease calling upon Turkey and Turkish society to join this achievement, leaving behind Ottoman swords and neo-Ottoman ravings...” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020c).

The constructed image of mad “Ottoman Muslim Turks” with swords trying to expand their territory by expelling Orthodox Greeks is internalized by Greek decision-makers and associated with Modern Turkey. So, they revise their policies accordingly by expecting threats from neighboring Turkey. According to the Greek official statements, while Greece is pursuing a peaceful policy focusing on regional cooperation, “Turkey is pursuing a completely different

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10 Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias’ Statement Following His Meeting with His Counterparts from Cyprus, Egypt and France”, 19 November 2021, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/minister-of-foreign-affairs-nikos-dendias-statement-following-his-meeting-with-his-counterparts-from-cyprus-egypt-and-france-athens-19112021.html>, (Accessed 27 July 2022).

divergent agenda, a neo-Ottoman agenda. It tries to turn the wider area into a zone of influence” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022d).

### *Turkey as a Provocative actor*

The words “provocations” (78 times) and “provocative” (75 times) are also very frequent in the Greek official statements. The constructed image of Turkey as a provocative actor is emphasized to reveal that Turkey does not comply with international law, and that it spoils the peaceful atmosphere in the region as indicated in the following statement: “Turkey’s unlawful and provocative actions do not have a negative impact only here in Cyprus. They force another major rift in regional peace and stability” (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021c).

## **Conclusion**

The discovery of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean led regional actors to engage in political activism over sharing resources that promise a significant economic value. Studies focusing on the feasibility and cost analysis of gas transfer in the Eastern Mediterranean claim that a pipeline through Turkey is economically viable and technically feasible. However, Turkey is excluded by regional actors, primarily due to the activism of Greece and Greek Cypriot governments. Conflictual relations between Greece, Turkey, and the Roc has been at the core of the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean.

This study, within the constructivist framework, claims that images and identities which are socially constructed through interaction, determine the interests of the states. In the case of the perceived image of Turkey by Greeks and Greek Cypriots, deeply embedded beliefs, popular narratives, and historical memory all contribute to the negative image of Turkey. The Greek and Greek Cypriot political elites’ unfavorable perception of Turkey as an aggressive, illegal, revisionist, provocative, destabilizing, and spoiler actor shape their economic choices. Despite the possibility and potential economic benefits of gas cooperation with Turkey, they exclude Turkey because of this negative perception. IPE is a field that typically considers material factors as the basis of decisions. Yet, decisions are not taken in a vacuum but in a social context, and by actors whose identities and interests are shaped through their interactions with others. Constructivism, which focuses on social interactions rather than merely cost-benefit analysis and material dimensions, presents a noteworthy alternative approach for IPE assessments.

Regional crises are often seen as a reflection of a state’s foreign policy and attitude toward other countries, and they can profoundly affect how states are perceived. Constructivism, with its focus on ideational factors, thus offers a significant framework for examining how states make decisions and behave during times of crisis. While rationalist accounts tend to focus solely on material interests, the constructivist approach provides an understanding of how social and cultural factors shape and influence economic and political decision-making and behavior. Especially in times of crisis, constructivism helps us to analyze underlying factors that contribute to the escalation of conflict and regional crisis.

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