

Impact of The Energy Issue on Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean Policy

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Abstract

Energy and its security is one of the most important issues in making of a foreign policy. Seeking of alternative energy resources and having their own share, stirred the Eastern Mediterranean with the discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves. The fact that Turkey is highly dependent on energy resources, that its consumption rates are increasing year by year, and that it aims to be the energy hub that transfers energy to Europe, has also led Turkey to want to be part of the energy equation that is emerging in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although the parties to this equation excluded Turkey. Turkey took some actions in the region, but it is not enough plus after Covid-19 Turkey stopped its actions, and recently it shifted its interest mainly to the Black Sea in terms of energy. In this context, this thesis aims to answer the question of what Turkey should do in the Eastern Mediterranean. And concluded that she needed to take actions to better her relations with the regional actors-states and non-regional actors that had a part in the equation. Turn the current situation of exclusion otherwise and use the disagreements between those actors to her advantage. Also, continue her activities of drilling and research in the Eastern Mediterranean that she initiated before, but shift to the Black Sea.

Keywords: Continental Shelf; delimitation; eastern mediterranean; exclusive economic zone; energy security

INTRODUCTION

Energy and energy security has always been very important topic in the international relations since the current society deeply needs the unrenewable fossil energy resources in every aspect of the life and they are being scarce. Actors in the system, nation states, seeks to have control of those sources, which eventually leads conflicts and aggressions between those actors. Recently Eastern Mediterranean has been in the center of the attention, due to; its newly discovered hydrocarbon reserves starting from the 2000's which could be the answer to many states concern and insecurity with the dependency on exporting countries, regarding to the notion of variety as Churchill answered to the question of how to secure energy back in the day. And of course, the East Mediterranean's never changing strategic location that is making the region highly important throughout history was another important factor.

As for Turkey, her actions in the region had been limited to the Cyprus issue between Turkey and Greece. Turkey was and still is highly dependent on the energy resources that has coming from mostly Russia and Iran and had lack of variety. So those newly found resources could solve its insecurities over energy. Although the newly emerged energy equation, with the founded energy resources in the region, excluded Turkey. In 2011, when GCASC opened her block/ parcels in her so-called economic zone to bid and not acknowledging Turkey's and TRNC's (Turkish Republic of Cyprus) existence and rights in the region, Turkey started to pay more attention over East Mediterranean and its Hydrocarbon reserves, and as a result maritime issue (Continental shelf, EEZ's). This made Turkey become more aware/sensitive over the region and make her take action in the Eastern Mediterranean in scope of the maritime boundaries and rights (drilling and exploring of the under-water reserves namely hydrocarbon reserves).

This thesis paper aims to analyze the Turkish foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region starting with 2011 to current time. And finding an answer to what sort of foreign policy method in the region Turkey could fallow to maintain the position that she seeks. In that regard a through literature review on the subject firstly going to be done. This literature review would be in a chronological manner to show how the studies build up and the views changed with the developments occurring in the region. At first the literature would be

summarized briefly with a chronological order and then, it will -as it is also mentioned before- be reviewed and compared to see the changing views. After that, this thesis as a theoretical background firstly discusses over what is energy and what is the so-called energy security and its place in the making of a foreign policy since taking control over it in Eastern Mediterranean is the reason of conflict. the following chapter will be mentioning/showing the geography: questions of: where the Eastern Mediterranean Sea is and what are the surrounding countries are? In the later chapter the historical and current importance of the region will be defined. With that information clarified about the region than this study will dive in the hydrocarbon reserves which leads to the current state today. Those reserves, their names, amounts will be stated, while mentioning 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf and 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention that defines the “exclusive economic zone”, “continental shelf”, “maritime boundaries”. And then specifically Turkish foreign policy that has been followed over the Eastern Mediterranean since 2011 to current state will be addressed by some actions that she took in the region diplomatically and strategically. Following those actions, their critics will be made; criticize the foreign policy approach has been followed by government which is fundamentally makes itself isolated and singled out in the region, then addresses what should be done from now on what kind of diplomatic and strategic maneuverers that she should take. And then concludes.

RESULTS

This study evaluated the Turkish foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean starting with 2011 to current time. And find an answer to what sort of foreign policy method in the region Turkey might consider to follow to maintain the position that it seeks. To understand the foreign policy strategies -which is strategies and principles followed by the governments in their interactions with the other states and/or international organisations- Turkey followed in the Eastern Mediterranean; this study used Energy security used as a theoretical background since the developments occurring in the region directly related with the energy and energy and its security being one of the most important components that is forming the foreign policy strategies.

In the last decade Turkey experienced one of the fastest growths in energy demand among the OECD countries, second to China whereas its dependency to the imported energy resources also arisen. İpek says that it is increased form 67 % (in 2002) to 75 % by 2014. (İpek, 2017, p. 174) Although there was a rapid growth in the energy demand Turkey stood dependent onto the same energy suppliers as before and do not resort to diversification method between 2004 to 2014. (İpek, 2017, p. 174) And at the current time Turkey's main gas sources are Algeria, Qatar, Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Nigeria where Russia and Iran still take the lead. (Öğütçü, 2012, p.2) In 2005 Turkey mostly imported her energy resources (specifically natural gas) from Russia with 66 % and 16 % from Iran which was a large sum. Not surprisingly Turkey faced with difficulties when gas imports cut; due to technical issues and increasing domestic consumption in Iran and gas crises between Russia and Ukraine, in the winter of 2006. (İpek, 2017, p. 174) As we can see from this example; Turkey is very insecure regarding to not having appropriate energy reserves to handle her growing energy demand. And an interruption to her energy imports will affect her gravely. (Bilgin, 2010, p.82) Also, another problematic issue is that; her current energy resource mix which is mostly based on fossil fuels and excluding renewable energy resources. (Bilgin, 2010, p.83) Being aware of this Turkey also try to develop foreign policy strategies to diversify energy resources and find alternative solutions. In that regard hydrocarbon reserves that found in Eastern Mediterranean like all the other riparian and non-regional states, arouse Turkey's attention. Those resources can provide Turkey's 572 years of natural gas that she needs according to the consumption data of 2010. (Yaycı, 20221, p.26) Also it should have mentioned that as an energy strategy Turkey considering and being aware of its geopolitical advantage, present itself as an energy hub between Russia, Caspian (supplier) and EU, world market (demanding part). (Bilgin, 2010, p.84) In that context Turkey focused on pipelines that could fulfil this objective. One of them was the TANAP project signed between governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey in 2012 that could transport natural gas coming from Russia to Europe with the extensions of TAP (Trans-Atlantic Pipeline). Turkey first started the flow of natural gas through this pipeline to Europe in December 2020. (ETKB, n.d.) As a contrast to that Europe also proposed a natural gas pipeline EastMed, which connects gas fields coming from Levantine basin at Cyprus to the Southern Europe over Greece. (Baconi, 2017, p.9) Turkey did not included

in this pipeline project (that predicted to start in 2025) as a transit line, therefore the energy equation. Which consists of Greece, Israel, Crete GCASC and as a result EU. Indeed, this pipeline is directly a result of the discovered hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely Aphrodite, Zohr, Leviathan, Tamar. Being excluded was against Turkey's energy security strategy of being "energy hub in the region". And knowing the fact that those basins around Cyprus and Levantine had high potential that would possibly decrease their dependence to the Russian energy pushed Turkey to finally focus on the Eastern Mediterranean. From this point on Turkey's interest in the region regarding to her concerns in energy strategy -which is securing it diversification and making herself energy hub by her geographical location- manifested itself by continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone issues around Cyprus. Since those maritime zones determined by international law, defined how those recourses can be exploited and who had the right to do it or/and give another state or international company right to do it in her behalf. And so, Turkey started to conduct some action in that regard starting from 2011. On 21 September 2011 Turkey signed an agreement on continental shelf delimitation with TRNC then on 22 September 2011 TRNC' council of ministers gave TPAO to operate-manage hydrocarbon reserves around the island. On 27 April 2012 some other licensed areas were added that she gave before on 22 September 2011. (Yaycı, 2021, p.161-162) And with the license that TRNC gave to the Turkish TPAO, Turkey started seismic surveys in those areas. Those areas were overlapping with the GCASC declared MEB. GCASC signed bilateral agreements to delaminate her EEZ (firstly on 17 February 2003 with Egypt then on 17 January 2007 with Lebanon and lastly on 17 December 2010 with Irreal) and opened those parcels-blocks in it into bid/tender from 11 February 2012, without acknowledging TRNC and Turkey regarding to her TPAO licensed areas. Those are 2'nd 3'rd 8'th and 9'th parcels-blocks which have by GCASC licensed to ENI (Italian energy company), TOTAL (French energy company) and KOGAS (Korean Energy Company) to make researches-explorations and drilling starting from 19 September 2011. (Yaycı, 2021, p.135) So saying Turkey's declaration of her delimitation of continental shelf with TRNC on 21 September 2011 and actions following that -as it mentioned above- was the starting point of the conflict in the region over maritime boundary rights as a response to her exclusion in this energy equation. Following her delimitations with TRNC, on 12 March 2013 Turkey

declared to United Nations her continental shelf as: starting from 32°16'18'' east longitude and following the median line between Egypt-Turkey and staying in between 028° east longitude. And the western limits beyond 028° east longitude would be decided with the related states' participation to an agreement in line with the international law. And from June 2018 Turkey started her seismic research activities in her claimed areas with Fatih drill ship. And following year she sailed her newly recruited drill ship Yavuz. While those two vessels making drilling activities Barbaros Hayrettin Paşa and Oruç Reis continued seismic researches. (See figure below) (Stratejik Ortak, 2023) Although her drilling activities reflected as illegal action by the states backing GCASC. Examples can be given as: EU stated they gravely concerned by Turkey's announced intention of drilling activities within the EEZ of Cyprus and that being said, it was an illegal action (On 4 May 2019). Which is also seconded by US on 5 May 2019 and France on 7 May 2019. Turkey in this regard, as it has mentioned in a presentation made in Brussels by Çağatay Erciyes in 27 May 2019 (Ambassador Director General for Bilateral Political & Maritime-Aviation-Border Affairs) publishes in the official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that: she will continue her surveys and drilling activities in her continental shelf determinedly where Turkish government granted the Turkish Petroleum (TPAO) licence areas (by TRNC) in 2012. And GCASC should acknowledge and include TRNC as the equal partner of the island regarding to decision making process on hydrocarbon reserves and/or stop their unilateral activities over it. Otherwise, Turkey will protect TRNC's rights as well as hers. Although Turkey and TRNC had already been excluded and their rights not acknowledged from the energy equation in Eastern Mediterranean. It has due to foundation of EMGF (East Mediterranean Gas Forum) in early 2019 by seven members: Italy, Greece, GCASC, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Palestinian Authority. Its purpose is to; serve as a forum for bringing together gas producers, consumers, and transit nations in order to establish a shared vision and a systematic, structured policy dialogue on natural gas (Erdoğan, 2021, p 89). Thus, not including Turkey in this forum meant that; parties that forming it did not consider her as a transit nation, a coastal/riparian state that has a say in what happening in the region. Although Turkey's steps-actions to secure her position in East Mediterranean was intact. She and Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) signed an agreement in November 2019 defining the boundaries of the continental shelf and the

Turkish and Libyan EEZs with a borderline in the Mediterranean Sea that is roughly 30 km long. (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88) The Turkish-Libyan agreement was indeed a wise strategic choice that fundamentally altered the region's energy situation. For Turkey, the agreement contains three crucial aspects: First Turkey established its western and southern borders in the Mediterranean and changed from being a demurrer to a nation that bases and upholds its claims on a solid legal foundation. (Erdoğan, 2021) Second, Turkey stopped a possible agreement from being signed against its interests between the Libyan GNA and the GASC, Greece, Israel, and Egypt. (Erdoğan, 2021) Third, Turkey has repeatedly demanded that actions be taken in accordance with international law, whose main principle is that states with coasts on closed or semi-closed seas must cooperate with one another in order to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations. (Erdoğan, 2021) With this agreement, Turkey demonstrated that it would not ignore *fait accompli* (done deal) policies by Greece, the GASC, and Egypt on maritime issues that directly affect its interests in response to the coastal states' attempts to ignore its exclusive rights in the Mediterranean. (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88) Regarding upcoming delimitation agreements and anticipated disputes over maritime zones in the Mediterranean, two articles are of utmost importance. If any resource is discovered in the area extending from one party's EEZ to the other party's EEZ, the parties may form agreements for the purpose of cooperatively exploiting potential resources, according to Article 4(2) of the Turkish-Libyan maritime delimitation agreement. Second, in accordance with Article 4(3), before coming to an agreement, a party must inform and negotiate with the other party if discussions about the delimitation of its EEZ begin. (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88-89) By signing this agreement, Turkey and the Libyan GNA made it clear that any future partnership or agreement would be subject to negotiations between the two parties. Turkey and Libya were at conflict with other coastal states as a result of the deal. Along with France and Cyprus, Egypt and Greece regarded the agreement "null and void" and claimed it threatened regional stability. Given that it completely ignored the existence of the island of Crete between the shores of Turkey and Libya, Greece referred to the agreement as "geographically absurd." (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88-89) Roughly eight months after the Turkish-Libyan maritime agreement was made, Greece and Egypt agreed on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction. It is clear from the agreement that Turkey's maritime territorial claims were being blocked. The Turkish Foreign Ministry deemed the

agreement "null and void," (Like how her agreement with Libya found "*null and void*" by France, Greece, Egypt, GCASC) claiming that Egypt and Greece do not have any maritime borders with each other. (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88-89) Moreover, Turkey reported to the United Nations that the Greek-Egyptian agreement's demarcated area was located on Turkey's continental shelf. The agreement caused a rise in tensions as Turkey renewed her exploration operations and naval deployments. (Erdoğan, 2021, p 88-89)

Also, when hydrocarbon reserve discoveries happened between 2009 and 2012, Turkey's relations with Israel had deteriorated significantly and repeated efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue under UN auspices had failed to generate a breakthrough. (Öğütçü, 2012, p.1) Turkey's relations with Egypt also deteriorated with the coup happened in 2013. And, her relations with Israel worsened with the "*Mavi Marmara*" happened in 2010. So, in short, she did not have good relations with the key regional actors specifically Cyprus and Israel since the discoveries and new energy equation created turns around them. Plus, with US which is not a regional but a global actor that is in the energy equation. Likewise, Cyprus being the ally of EU and a member state. This worsening of the relations) be traced back to shifting foreign policy behavior of Turkey. The shifts on the Turkish foreign policy behavior tainted her neutrality and in the eyes of Euro-Atlantic alliances, with the recent events, her taking side against them. Also, using harsh rhetoric in favor of the nationalistic public opinion by the government (AKP) for the coming elections, resulted damage her long hard-earned western alliances. Which eventually resulted an equation where Turkey being excluded, and Turkey being isolated in the region.

In that context the result of this study's research question mentioned above as follows: firstly, Turkey might consider doing would be; eliminate her state of isolation in the region and promote her relations with the regional actors, most importantly with Egypt and Israel. Then possibly, carry Libyan agreement-accordance further, make diplomatic attempts towards Syria, Lebanon, and other regional actors-countries and as for the front against her. As Özekin argues that those actors that are building the front are already conflicted within themselves so Turkey may use that as an advantage by using Lebanon- Israeli disputes or disputes between Israel and Arab World, relations with Israel and Egypt related to Muslim Brotherhood policy, thus USA's and Russia's differentiations.(Özekin, 2020,

p.41) To change the equation in the region that excludes Turkey, she could take concrete steps; Turkey might extend the Libyan-Turkish agreement- in accordance with EEZ by also initiating it with other riparian states (Syria, Egypt, GCASC, Greece, Libya) as well and declare it in the United Nations. And explain to Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel's government authorities and public, by doing so their maritime zones will also enlarge so they will also benefit from it. And might point out that especially the EEZ agreement with Libya and Egypt are important because; median line between Anatolian and African shores with those states will change all equations that are existing. Finally, Turkey should restart her drilling activities in the Ester Mediterranean perpetuity and seek international partners to produce energy from the East Mediterranean basin's resources

DISCUSSION

In this study Impact of the Energy and its security in Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean policy was examined. In that regard, foreign policy, energy and energy security concepts and their interlinked relations to each other were defined in detail. Foreign policy is strategies and principles followed by the governments in their interactions with the other states and/or international organisations The primary objective is to safeguard and promote a state's national interests in international arena meanwhile keeping stability, peace, and prosperity. In that regard, foreign policy of a nation state shaped by economic, geopolitical, ideological, and other factors. And -likewise current state of Turkey- it can be often influenced by domestic politics and public. When it comes to states interest; in a realistic perspective gaining power and ensuring security can be count as the most significant factors. States will be wanting to form and follow foreign policies that secure those national interest. When it comes to the national security which is the most primitive and important notion for the nation states "energy" is an important component. As for the concept of energy security, the common definition in todays developed world is; "availability of the sufficient supplies at affordable prices" Yergin says. (Yergin, p. 70-71). And he adds; different states/countries interpret this concept's meaning for them differently. For example, states that are exporting energy, mainly focuses on the way of preserving the security of demand for their exported energy, because in the end it is makes the most of the government's revenues. On the other hand, for the developing countries' interpretation of

the energy security: concern (that creates this insecurity over energy) over how changing prices in energy will affect balance of payments. It can be said that; in international society where unrenovable energy recourses such as oil, natural gas and in the context of this thesis hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, are remarkably important and a key part of the international and national economy and trade. Therefore, the national states that did not have their own resources or not being self-sufficient bound to depend on other national state's already existing resources that they have control and monopoly over. In that kind of situation, as how Churchill also back than mentioned; the firs and the best solution would be diversification of those imported energy resources as much as possible, meaning not depending on solely on one option rather to have many alternatives as possible. Because energy exporting countries are bound to abuse their power that they gained from their resources if they are only option. In such a world of interdependence security of the states will be depending on how they manage their relations with each other and those interactions will define the context of their foreign policy. (Yergin, p.82) With those been said such as the interdependence between foreign policy making and energy security (as it is an issue of national security). Also mentioning ensuring it by diversification. It can be argued that states wanting to search for new resource that can multiply the alternatives or even having their own share of energy resources is inevitable and it is what we are facing in East Mediterranean today. And that is what exactly happening for Turkey as well, the issue that forms her current Eastern Mediterranean policy.

CONCLUSION

The Eastern Mediterranean -as it is today- always been an important region that harbored and captured interest of ancient civilizations, empires, and states. While the reasons changed-evolved over time, the interest over the region itself stayed still. As it has mentioned in the chapters that evaluating historical and current importance of the region; the importance coming from being a strategical location, that gave control over transportation and trade routes. Although that being intact, with the discoveries of energy resources in the region that the society deeply needs, it gained another importance namely energy security. Since most of the nation states in the international arena did not have their

own energy resources and those energy resources that society mostly dependent on are unrenewable ones it made energy importing states insecure. The question arise that whether sufficient energy resources could be available at affordable prices. As Churchill states back in the eve of WWI that question relied on variety. And for the states that exporting energy and have control over energy market making sure they stay that way. In that regard discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean opened a new door of opportunity to the states in the search for diversification to not rely on one and be at its mercy but secure their incoming energy with potential suppliers or even better resources that they themselves have control over. What happening in Eastern Mediterranean, all those conflicts and tension, has also coming from this notion. Since Europe, US likewise Turkey highly dependent on the resources coming from middle eastern and Russian energy market. And historical events such Arab oil embargo in 1973. The pressure on Europe being highly dependent on Russian energy resources. Those events made actors in the region want to have control over those newly discovered hydrocarbon reserves in Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey is one of the states that have this notion, and she also is a coastal/riparian state. But because of her late inclusion (since earlier she was mostly focused on the Black Sea region regarding to the energy and her attention being taken with the Southern Cyprus's hydrocarbon finds and opening them into bid to international companies where she did not take consideration TRNC's rights and eventually mirrored it to Turkey), isolation in the region and worsened relations with the regional actors she excluded from the energy equation that emerged in the region. And her rights in the region tried to be ignored. Nevertheless, Turkey took some important actions against the block against her, she took strategic maneuverers such as delimitation her continental shelf with Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and get licensed blocks form her to start research and drilling. Declaring her continental shelf to UN, making an agreement on EEZ with Libya. And in every opportunity uphold her rights coming from international law against the actors (mainly Greece, GCACS, regional actors and non-regional actors supporting them). Although recently it seems Turkey withdraw from Eastern Mediterranean but rather focus on possible energy resources that could be retrieve from Black Sea. Yes, the Covid-19 that occurred made every actor in the energy equation of Eastern Mediterranean turn their focus on how to cope with this pandemic and for a time Eastern Mediterranean regarding to energy security was not the hot topic as

before. However, with the Ukrainian -Russian war and EU backing Ukrainian side with the fear of possible interruption of energy resources made the region and the possible pipeline project more important. Turkey should not turn its back to the region because it is not just an of energy issue for her but there is also another dimensions of sovereignty and locking up to narrow limits maritime boundaries determined by declared EEZ's breaching her continental shelves by GCASC backed by EU and regional actors as Israel, Egypt. So, as it has mentioned before Turkey might consider to; eliminate her state of isolation in the region and promote her relations with the regional actors, most importantly with Egypt and Israel. Then carry Libyan agreement-accordance further, it could initiate diplomatic attempts towards Syria, Lebanon, and other regional actors-countries and as for the front against her Turkey should use Lebanon- Israeli disputes or disputes between Israel and Arab World, relations with Israel and Egypt related to Muslim Brotherhood policy, thus USA's and Russia's differentiations, against each other to divide the front and use it on her behalf. To change the equation in the region that excludes Turkey, she might consider extending the Libyan-Turkish agreement- in accordance with EEZ by also making it with other riparian states (Syria, Egypt, GCASC, Greece, Libya) as well and declare it in the United Nations. And explain to Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel's government authorities and public, by doing so their maritime zones will also enlarge so they will also benefit from it. And it should be pointed out that; the EEZ agreement with Libya and Egypt are important because; median line between Anatolian and African shores with those states will change all equations that are existing. Lastly, Turkey might consider restarting her drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and bring other regional countries to contribute drilling and distribution of the existing oil and gas resources. By doing this, Turkey will benefit hugely from these recourses economically. While these efforts will contribute regional prosperity, also enhance Turkey's strategic importance in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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