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Geopolitics and Energy Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean

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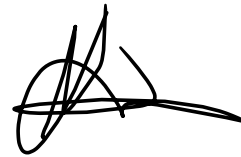
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

2.1 The Eastern Mediterranean Actors

2.1.1 Eastern Mediterranean - An overview

2.1.2 Greece

2.1.3 Cyprus

2.1.4 Turkey

2.1.5 Israel

2.1.6 Egypt

2.1.7 Lebanon

2.1.8 Syria

2.1.9 Palestine

2.1.10 Libya

2.1.11 Jordan

2.2 External Actors

2.2.1 European Union

2.2.2 United States

2.2.3 Russia

3. Energy (in)security in the Eastern Mediterranean (here I put the term of energy security by 2-3 sources)

3.1 Alliances and Cooperation Opportunities towards energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean

3.1.1 The Union for the Mediterranean

3.1.2 Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum

3.1.3 Trilateral Partnerships

3.2 Energy Infrastructure plans in the Eastern Mediterranean

3.2.1 Gas Infrastructure

3.2.2 The EastMed Pipeline

3.3 Regional Conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean

3.3.1 Regional Conflicts and the Law of the Sea

3.3.2 Existing and Potential Regional Conflicts

4. Future outlooks: Cooperation or clash?

5. Conclusions

References

Abstract

The Eastern Mediterranean is and always has been a region steeped in rich geopolitical history. In the recent years its significance and status have augmented enough that it is now considered a highly important regional theater. Combining Europe and the EU with North Africa and the Middle East, its location alone is enough to consider it a major hub for trade and economic development. The recent discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves have only added to the area's importance, not just for the neighbouring regions and the countries located in it, but potentially at an international level.

At a time of deep energy crisis that impacts the entire globe, the diversification of energy sources has become even more imminent, giving the Eastern Mediterranean countries the opportunity to take advantage of their newfound resources and potentially rise economically and politically, especially in the regional level and secondly at a global one.

Nevertheless, the Eastern Mediterranean region consists of countries with different backgrounds, culture, history, varying stages of economic development and it also comes with many conflicts between neighbouring states.

For the region to achieve a higher status and manage to rise and become a major regional energy player, both for exporting and for transporting energy resources such as natural gas, a certain level of collaboration is needed. For this to materialize, not only do the countries of the area need to all be at the same table of negotiations, but major international players, such as the European Union, need to be involved as well in order to ensure that the common interests are being promoted and the regional conflicts are being pushed aside in the name of progress and economic prosperity.

Even though the new discoveries of energy resources are of pivotal importance to the area and its progress, energy on its own could not be enough to promote prosperity and stability in the region, however, it has proven to be a good starting point for closer collaboration between the regional actors and for the promotion of new initiatives, infrastructure projects. With such a volatile state in terms of geopolitical developments in the region and globally, time will tell how the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean will handle the changes and whether they will opt for closer collaboration or further conflict.

1. Introduction

When studying international relations and history, we can understand that in each historical period, there was a reason behind each war, each cooperation, each important power move. Whether it was land, wealth, prestige or influence, there was always a factor that weighed in; natural resources. As our modern world continues to increase its needs in terms of energy and resources, it is only logical that these factors will weigh in even more when it comes to alliances and conflicts in the years to come. Natural resources are becoming more and more scarce as the years pass, making many analysts and academics claim that the natural resources and energy will be at the epicentre of international relations or that they have already been for a while now. Energy security, interdependence, independence and sustainability are some of the terms that define the modern world and the different current regional systems and subsystems around the globe. One of these regional arenas is the Eastern Mediterranean; an area that has been of great interest as of the last years as far as geopolitics, energy issues and power plays between neighbour states are concerned. The geopolitical significance of the Eastern Mediterranean is indisputable and has been documented since ancient times. Situated in the Eastern Part of the Mediterranean sea, this region constitutes a bridge linking not only the East to the West but also the North to the South. Being described as the crossroads between 3 continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, the region is highly important for international trade as billions of worth of cargo pass through these waters everyday and it is also a cultural hub presenting an opportunity to bridge cultural differences, promote cooperation and achieve regional stability.

Unfortunately even though the region presents a lot of prospect, it has also been the center of many crises, both historically as well as in recent years. The events of the Arab Spring in various countries, the rise of ISIS, the Syrian civil war, the Taliban uprising, the refugee crisis and the economic crisis in many of the region's countries are only some of the incidents that affected the area negatively.

Besides the aforementioned incidents, there was one more occurrence recently that was undoubtedly the most important in terms of geopolitical significance: the newfound reserves of hydrocarbons in the region. With energy and natural resources expected to be items of luxury in the future, when the new reserves were detected, all of the eastern Mediterranean countries wanted to get a piece and some of them did not demonstrate their will in a peaceful way. Third parties, such as the European Union and big international players such as the US, Russia and China also showed an increased interest in the region.

In this paper we will map out the Eastern Mediterranean and its countries; demonstrate the geopolitical and energy issues connected with the region; analyse the various bilateral or trilateral partnerships and in the end attempt to make a forecast for the future and whether the new geopolitical and energy interest in the region will result in deeper cooperation or if it will lead to more intense conflict.

In the second chapter we will present a short analysis from a geopolitical and energy perspective of the various countries of which the Eastern Mediterranean region consists and also of other actors that they do not belong in the Eastern Mediterranean region, but they either have a direct interest and close correlation with it or they deeply affect the region's future.

In the third chapter we will present the various energy and geopolitical developments in the region, analyse the different partnerships and initiatives that are related with

geopolitical and energy issues, such as the EastMed Gas Forum or the trilateral partnership of Greece, Cyprus and Israel and lastly we will introduce all the latest ongoing or future energy projects that exist in the region.

In the fourth chapter, by taking into consideration what was presented in parts one and two, we will attempt to make a prediction of what the future holds for the Eastern Mediterranean region and what needs to be done in order to ensure the region's stability, security and prosperity. In the end we will present our conclusion that derived from all the aforementioned parts of the research.

2. The Eastern Mediterranean Actors

2.1 The Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region that can be described as the crossroads of North and South, East and West. Situated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, it constitutes the meeting point between Europe, Africa and Asia/ Middle East.

With its geopolitical importance being undisputed at the regional level, the various developments in the region over the last years have shown that the incidents taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean have a spillover effect in other parts of the world. One example of that is the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis that followed and is still ongoing, which affected not only Europe which is in the close proximity, but also spiked the interest of other international actors such the United States. We can therefore go as far as saying that the regional system of the Eastern Mediterranean, is of high international interest.

When we talk about the Eastern Mediterranean in geographical terms, we essentially talk about the Eastern Half of the Mediterranean Sea. By this definition the countries that are included in the region are: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. To these countries we could add the self declared "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" and Gaza. There are also some countries that have gained an "honorary" status that include Palestine and Jordan. (Litsas&Tizampiris, 2019, p.38). The EU could also be included in the region as two of the countries that the Eastern Mediterranean consists of, Cyprus and Greece, are EU members and therefore there are direct EU interests and EU policies at play.

In the last decade there have been a lot of incidents that have made the international community pay more focus on the Eastern Mediterranean region. These incidents can be broadly divided into 3 categories:

1. Issues of national or international security
2. Geopolitical issues
3. Energy related developments.

In the first category we find issues that are related to the national security of a country that belongs to the region of the Eastern Mediterranean or an issue of international security that also affects the region.

The Syrian civil war that started in 2011 is one of the incidents that shook the region. The civil war did not affect only Syria and its neighbours, but any country in the proximity. The subsequent refugee crisis in 2016, not only affected, but it even became a high importance issue of national security for some countries that had to deal with an influx of refugees, such as Greece and by extension, the entirety of the European Union.

In the second category we encounter issues connected to territorial and geopolitical disputes such as the bilateral tensions between Greece and Turkey, Turkey and Cyprus caused by the exploration of hydrocarbons in the Mediterranean Sea and the disagreements about the declarations of an Exclusive Economic Zone.

In the third category we can include bilateral or regional agreements with a focus on energy such as the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, large discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves and infrastructure developments related to energy such as the EastMed pipeline and the LNG hub in Egypt.

In the next part of this research we are going to review each country of the Eastern Mediterranean and the third countries that have direct interests in the region and focus on the developments that have affected each one in terms of national developments, geopolitical issues and energy developments over the recent years.

2.2 Greece

Greece has always been an important player in the Eastern Mediterranean since ancient times. Its position is of great geopolitical importance as it is connecting Europe, Asia and Africa. Greece also is of great value to the European Union and NATO, for strategic and diplomatic reasons. As of the recent years, another valuable aspect of Greece has come into light; this of a possibly powerful player in energy security and energy diplomacy. Taking advantage of its geographical position, Greece wishes and strives to play a major part in order to secure energy connectivity and achieve energy security, two key goals that are desperately needed by the EU and of course, by Greece itself.

While the EU is trying to considerably decrease its dependency on Russian energy resources, Greece is unleashing its diplomatic weapons and tries to contribute to the cause by enlisting new allies and establishing new partnerships. Over the last decade and with more tenacity over the past five years, Greece has taken initiatives and has formed many bilateral, trilateral or multilateral agreements, like the ones with Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, hosted events and forums and has been part or leader of many diplomatic actions, especially by extending their diplomatic play to some of the Gulf countries. For these initiatives and agreements we will talk more on chapter 3. Furthermore, besides the alliances and diplomacy, Greece has also invested in major infrastructure plans in order to increase its energy security and connectivity that will not only benefit the country, but also the region and the EU. The LNG terminal in Revithoussa and the LNG storage and regasification unit (FSRU) in Alexandroupoli are the two main assets that Greece has towards contributing to the aforementioned goals. The Revithoussa LNG terminal is one of the 28 that operate today in the wider Mediterranean region (DESFA ,n.d.) and the only one in Southeast Europe. The terminal has helped reinforce security of supply and the transmission for both local and international use.

The Alexandroupolis Independent Natural Gas System (INGS) comprises an offshore floating unit for the reception, storage and re-gasification of LNG and an onshore pipeline. This new structure will help secure new and bigger quantities of natural gas for domestic use but also for the regional area (mainly the Balkan region) thus ensuring energy security to an extend as well as contribute to the connectivity of Southeast Europe to the rest of the european energy system and market (gastrade, n.d.).

The only thing standing in Greece's way of becoming a leading regional player and taking advantage of its position and resources is Turkey. The constant disputes over natural resources and the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf of Greece is obstructing the country's actions in two ways. Firstly, the frequent invasions of Turkey in Greek territory does not allow Greece to freely focus their funds and efforts on their goals regarding energy and more importantly, the stability of the region. Secondly, the absence of delimitation in the Aegean sea is obstructing the Greek authorities to explore and exploit the reserves of hydrocarbons in the area. Subsequently, the instability in the region is obstructing the flow of much needed foreign investments; investments that Greece needs and counts in order to flourish as a regional leader and major energy player in the Eastern Mediterranean.

2.1.3 Cyprus

Cyprus is an island state located in the South Eastern part of the Mediterranean and it is also the EU member situated closest to the Middle East. Based on its geographical position alone, its geographical importance both as a member to the EU and NATO but also for domestic reasons, is evident.

Even though Cyprus could have been the epicentre of trade, strategy, and diplomacy, the 1974 coup and the overtake of the Northern part of the island by Turkey, has destabilised the country and has made it difficult for the Cypriot state to make unilateral decisions in order to promote its own development and prosperity; at least not without waiting for some form of, usually aggressive, response from Turkey. Nevertheless, during the past decade Cyprus has been trying to gain a more proactive role in the region and strengthen its international and financial standing through forming a number of agreements and making itself attractive for foreign investments (Tziarras, 2019, p.66-67).

This shift in policy, from a reactive and inactive stance to a proactive one, happened for a number of reasons. The most important of those reasons was the discoveries of hydrocarbons in its EEZ. In the late 2000s Cyprus started its first explorations in its EEZ, by granting a licence to the foreign energy company, Noble Energy. In 2011, the company announced the discovery of hydrocarbons in the area. Later in 2011, the Aphrodite reserve was also discovered in the Cypriot EEZ, close to the Israeli Leviathan reserve. In 2012 more licences were granted by the state to foreign energy companies to carry out explorations offshore (Tziarras, 2019, p.13).

One of the main events that made Cyprus comprehend its challenging geopolitical situation better and made it assert a more proactive role in the regional system, happened in 2018. Early in that year, the Italian energy company, Eni, announced the discovery of a large deposit in Cyprus, named Calypso (Tziarras, 2019, p.13). On the 8th of February 2018, the Saipem 12000 vessel issued by Eni, was stopped by Turkish military vessels while it was on its way for drilling in the Cypriot EEZ. Later in 2018 and in 2019 Turkey launched its own drilling vessels in the waters of northern Cyprus.

These events made it clear to the Cypriot governments that the threat of Turkey was very real and imminent and it was blocking both of their primary goals: national security and energy security. In order to face the threat of its neighbour, Cyprus has decided to turn to diplomacy and alliances. In the past decade the Cypriot governments have been part of many bilateral, tripartite and other agreements, has engaged in forums and events and has also reached out to countries who were once close allies of Turkey, such as Russia. Furthermore, by engaging foreign companies in the efforts for exploration and drilling for hydrocarbons in its waters, it's building economic partnerships and should these efforts be blocked or threatened, these companies but also the countries where these companies are from, would stand in Cyprus' side to defend their economic interests.

In conclusion, Cyprus is a country with a complicated history and a complex territorial situation due to the occupation of its north by Turkey. With its neighbour posing a constant threat to both its national and its energy security, Cyprus has and will continue to pursue international and regional support from the other eastern Mediterranean countries, in order to balance this threat and reinstate itself as a powerful and important player in the regional system.

2.1.4 Turkey

Turkey is one of the most important players in the Eastern Mediterranean. Located in two continents, Europe and Asia, and having access to the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Middle East makes it a pivotal country from a geopolitical viewpoint. If we add energy into the mix of Turkey's advantages, the country becomes even more important since it constitutes a connection point; a transit country to link rich in resources countries such as Iraq and Russia with energy dependent players such as the EU.

For years now Turkey has been trying to take advantage of its geographical position and establish itself as a "hub" country, thus forming strategic economic partnerships both with countries rich in energy that need to transport their energy products and with mainly importing countries in dire need of said energy products.

To this end, Turkey has taken on many energy infrastructure projects to both justify itself as a transit country and to meet its rapidly growing domestic demand. Turkey's main pipelines can be seen in map 1.



(map 1, source: Climate Scorecard)

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) starts for Azerbaijan and connects the Red Sea with Europe. (Kenderdine, 2018, p.70). The Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), links Turkey with Italy through Greece, thus connecting the country with South and Western Europe. The Turksteam brings gas from Russia and connects it with Southern Europe. The Bluestream Pipeline is also an important asset as it brings large amounts of gas from Russia into Turkish territory and it also transports 35% of Russian gas exports, making it a powerful asset to hold.

These pipelines without a doubt raise Turkey's geopolitical status. By being a transit country, many countries depend on Turkey to either transfer their oil and gas or receive it. The EU in particular is highly dependent on Turkey's being a hub country, especially regarding the TANAP pipeline that is introducing Azerbaijani gas, a much needed diversification from the Russian gas that the EU is so dependent on. With Turkey wanting to be part of the European Union for so many years, having the Union depending on their pipelines for their supply of oil and gas, Turkey has the opportunity to not only see energy as an asset, but also as a tool to achieve some of its goals.

Furthermore, energy for Turkey is not only an important component for national, foreign and economic policy, but it can also be translated into a sovereignty issue. Since 1974

when the Turkish occupied the northern part of the Cyprus island, Turkey has been exhibiting revisionist foreign policy signs regarding the demarcation of maritime borders with Greece and Cyprus. Especially after Cyprus' efforts to explore and exploit the resources in its waters, Turkey raised the matter of resources and energy to a national security priority.

Turkey has ongoing issues regarding the delimitations with Turkey and Greece, which directly affects any exploration efforts made by these two countries in their waters.

Regarding Cyprus, Turkey is the only country that recognises the de facto state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and does not recognise the internationally accepted state of the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) in the south. Based on this, the Turkish government does not only consider illegal the drilling and exploration initiatives taken by ROC in its EEZ, but it also believes that the TRNC has legitimate rights in Cypriot waters and subsequently, to the natural resources residing in these waters (Evagorou, 2020, p.118- p.121). In order to both block the ROC's efforts and to promote the interests of the TRNC, the Turkish government has even used force, as seen from the incident of the ENI vessel in 2018.

As far as Greece is concerned, the two countries have been at odds about many issues for decades now. The main causes of friction between the two neighbours in the recent years have been the Cyprus problem, which has been ongoing since the 1970s and the demarcation of the maritime borders in the Aegean. Turbulence in the East Aegean Sea is a frequent phenomenon, mainly due to violations of the maritime borders of each country leading to close call hot events. The issue of exploration and exploitation has also been in the centre of the problems between the two states and Turkey has also stated that any attempt of Greece for exploration or exploitation of resources in the East Aegean would constitute casus belli. Hence it is evident that Turkey views the issues of hydrocarbons in the Greek and Cypriot waters as a matter of national security and perceives any effort by the two countries to take advantage of their resources as a direct threat to Turkish sovereignty (Tziarras, 2019, p.118).

Besides Greece and Cyprus, Turkey has seen its relations with its neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa to deteriorate year by year. Turkey's relations with Israel have been turbulent since the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. Even though the two countries finished their negotiations in 2016, their relations remain problematic, especially due to Turkey's amicable policy regarding Palestine. Turkey's relations with Egypt have also been tense since 2013, when Turkey questioned the authority of president Al- Sisi and asked for the release of former Egyptian president ,Morsi, from prison. The relations of the two countries are also on the fence due to the fact that they are supporting opposing sides in the recent Libyan civil conflict.

From all the aforementioned we can understand why Turkey is one of the most complex players in the region, both energy and geopolitically wise. Turkey's pristine geographical location and its energy infrastructure is of high importance to the EU and the exporting states. At the same time its territorial disputes with Cyprus and Greece and its deteriorating relations with others neighbours (Egypt, Israel) has forced the four states to form various partnerships, both for energy and for military reasons in a form of balancing Turkey's actions in the region. In an effort to gain a partner in the region, Turkey chose to cooperate with Libya in 2019 by forming a bilateral maritime and military agreement which was deemed illegal by Egypt and is not recognised by the majority of the world, sparking even more tension between the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean.

2.1.5 Israel

Israel is one of the most controversial players both internationally as well as in the regional system of the Eastern Mediterranean. Israel is a Jewish country located in the Middle East and has faced numerous problems with its neighbours ranging from frequent wars during the second half of the 20th century to turbulent economic or diplomatic relations.

As far as energy is concerned, Israel was a state that was battling energy insecurity from the moment it was established. With its diplomatic relations with its rich in resources Arab countries tarnished, Israel had to attract foreign help and investments and boost its diplomatic relations with the Western states in order to ensure energy stability. Even in its early years and during the Arab oil embargoes in the second half of the 20th century, Israel managed to secure its energy imports by using the Haifa oil refinery, one of the most important energy and financial assets of Israel, as leverage. (Indahl, 2021, p.72) All in all Israel's energy policy before 2013, was more focused on establishing the country as a transport and refining hub for oil and gas in order to prove itself an important player in the international energy market. The "hub" aspect was integral to the country's energy policy and diplomacy due to the lack of resources for covering the domestic needs.

The major turnaround for Israel's energy policy took place in 2009. In that year the American company Noble Energy discovered the Tamar field with estimated reserves of 282 billion cubic metres (bcm) (Moran et al, 2016, p. 59). One year later the Leviathan field was discovered with almost twice the estimated reserves. In 2012 and 2013 two smaller fields were also discovered, the Tanin and Karish fields.

After the discovery of the aforementioned fields, and the first flow of gas from the Tamar field taking place already in 2013, the Israeli government changed their attitude towards energy policy. With every aspect of national resources being scarce, Israel adopted a protectionist approach when it came to its natural resources. (Indahl, 2021, p.74). Its first and most pressing priority regarding the newfound reserves was to satisfy the growing domestic demand, since for the first time this meant that it would not have to be completely dependent on imports and deals with Western and Arab energy exporters.

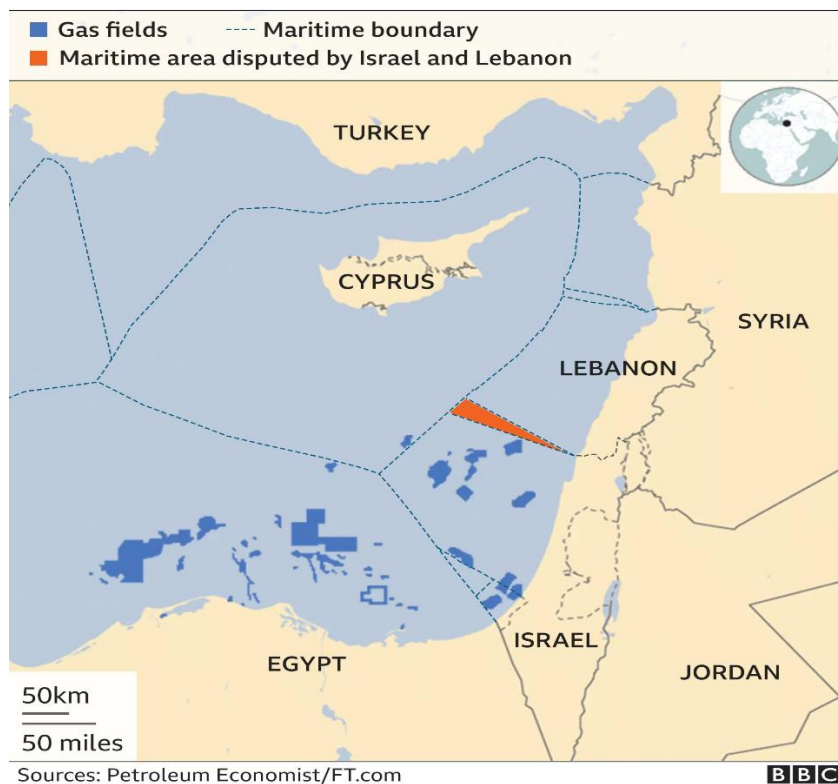
Once the Israeli government felt that their newly discovered gas would be sufficient for domestic use for the following 30 years, they quickly sought to achieve commercial partnerships with neighbour states. A little after 2013, Israel signed agreements with Jordan and Egypt, in order to export gas to both countries with the help of the company BG International, through the Iduku LNG terminal in Egypt. There are also plans for the construction of undersea pipelines in order to secure the supply of gas for both countries which have seen their demand grow rapidly over the last decade. By ensuring these regional commercial partnerships, Israel has really updated its diplomatic and energy status in the area, giving a chance to review its relations with its neighbours while at the same time ensuring revenue by its energy exports and keeping 60% of the gas findings in order to satisfy domestic consumption.

Besides purely commercial partnerships, Israel also changed its diplomatic approach with regional players. Its close cooperation with Cyprus and Greece which started intensely after 2016 is a prime example of how Israel traded its secret, leverage based partnerships with countries such as Iran and Great Britain, and opted for open, multi-level, regional cooperation which would prove benefactor from a geopolitical, energy, economic and even military aspect. (Indahl, p.75).

Even though these new partnerships with Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus and Greece and its long standing alliance with the US have indeed raised Israel's regional status, there are many problems to be tackled both internally and externally.

Internally the ongoing turbulence and potential conflict with non-state actors, Hamas and Iran backed Hezbollah, makes national security an issue as much in 2022 as it was in the early years of the Israeli state. (Indahl, 2021, 71). The Hezbollah threat is especially important to Israel as it not only affects the internal stability of the state, but it also directly affects its relations with the neighbouring state of Lebanon, where it is based. Externally, as far as national security is concerned, Israel seems to have less to deal with compared to previous decades. One of the external issues that directly affects Israel's energy security and prosperity is the demarcation of its EEZ. With so many natural gas reserves discovered in its waters, and especially after the discovery and beginning of exploitation of the large Leviathan field, it was only natural that regional problems would arise. Both Palestine and Lebanon are contesting the boundaries of the Israeli EEZ, claiming that they have rights to the reserves with Lebanon actually enlarging the claims in 2021. The fields and the claimed waters can be seen in the below map (Lovatt, 2020).

Israel-Lebanon maritime border dispute



(map 2, source: BBC)

All in all, Israel's post 2013 policy in regards to energy has been a mixture of protectionism and regional cooperation. Its priority is to ensure the flow of gas to the domestic market by exploiting its reserves and its secondary focus falls on the commercial agreements with Jordan and Egypt and its growing cooperation with other regional actors such as Greece and Cyprus, and by extension with the EU, in order to establish regional stability and close cooperation regarding all matters of regional security.

2.1.6 Egypt

Egypt has been one of the most important countries in the Eastern Mediterranean since ancient times. It has strong geopolitical value and it is pivotal for international trade since 12% of all global trade goes through its Suez Canal. It also has an 8% share of the global energy trade as of 2019 and it aims to raise it to 15% by 2040. (Reuters, 2022) Besides being a key player in global trade, Egypt is also one of the main players in the Eastern Mediterranean as far as energy production is concerned. Egypt was the first of the Mediterranean countries to discover hydrocarbons and to exploit them. The first discoveries of natural gas in Egyptian territory date as back as the late 1960s, the construction of the gas grid started in the mid 80s and the first LNG products were exported in 2004. (Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company, n.d.) It is evident from the above that Egypt is the most experienced player in the Eastern Mediterranean when it comes to natural gas and it also has the infrastructure and the foreign investments to support large production and export of natural gas products.

Even though Egypt started very ambitiously by building its natural gas infrastructure and focusing on export strategies with its LNG infrastructure and pipelines towards Jordan and Israel, it all started to fall apart in 2011. The events of the Arab Spring and the consequent economic instability, the constant rising of domestic demand and the terrorist attacks on the pipeline in Sinai, caused the government to pause the exports of natural gas and many power stations switched to oil. (Butter, 2020). The foreign companies that operated in Egypt were also reluctant to continue their intense cooperation with the country. From being a potential big exporter, Egypt found itself importing gas from Israel, which had by then made the discovery of various reserves in its territory.

The point of the big turnaround for Egypt's energy policy came in 2015. During its explorations, the Italian energy company Eni, discovered the Zohr field in Egyptian waters, close to the maritime border with Cyprus. Zohr turned out to be the largest discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean with reserves around 850 million bcm. In late 2017 Eni was already able to bring the first gas from the Zohr field online. (Karagianni, 2021) Quickly all the other natural gas operations and projects, old and new, were resumed. The Idku LNG terminal was operational again and the Damietta terminal is expected to start operating again soon.

Furthermore, Egypt is looking to create meaningful and prosperous commercial partnerships with its neighbours in order to fulfil its ultimate goal of becoming the main hub for LNG operation in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has already signed agreements to buy gas from Israel's largest fields and it has also signed a deal with Cyprus in 2018 for the construction of an undersea pipeline which will bring gas from the Aphrodite field for liquefaction. (Karagianni, 2020)

Fresh discoveries are also being made, with Eni announcing the most recent one in 2020, the field Bashrush, close to the Nile Delta. (Butter, 2020). More exploration and drilling operations are also expected to take place in the Gulf of Suez and a new LNG terminal is expected to be built in the Gulf. (Karagianni, 2020) These new discoveries and infrastructure plans as well as the various agreements will undoubtedly assist Egypt in establishing itself as a hub for LNG.

Besides the commercial agreements and deals with its neighbours in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt has also tried to form diplomatic partnerships and alliances. Most notably, after Turkey's and Libya's illegitimate agreement regarding the delimitation of their EEZ, Egypt signed an agreement for partial delimitation of their EEZ, essentially showing to the world which side of the region it wants to align itself with. (Karagianni,

2020) Egypt is also a founding member of the EastMed Gas Forum, the headquarters of which are in Cairo.

In conclusion, Egypt started strong making its first natural gas discoveries in the late 20th century and building its LNG infrastructure already in 2000. Even if the Arab Spring constituted a setback for the country's energy development and diplomacy, Egypt managed to bounce back after the discovery of the large Zohr field and it's on its way to becoming a natural gas hub for the region.

2.1.7 Lebanon

Lebanon is one of the less active countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. It has had a slower development regarding energy issues as well as regarding its cooperation with its neighbours. Historically Lebanon has been highly dependent on fossil fuels and according to the latest reports of the International Energy Agency, the country was dependent on oil by 90% in 2017. Even though the country may have options to diversify their energy use, the internal issues it faces hinders it from becoming a major energy player in the region.

It is estimated that Lebanon may have large gas reserves, even higher than those of its neighbours, Cyprus and Israel, however the big energy companies that were so keen on investing in other eastern Mediterranean countries, have reservations regarding Lebanon. The civil war that ended in 1990, left the country with a crippling economy and a practically non-existent infrastructure. The severe economic crisis that drowned the country in 2019, also makes Lebanon less appealing for foreign investments.

Another issue that constitutes an obstacle both for the attraction of foreign investments and the exploration for natural resources, is the ongoing dispute with Israel over the delimitation of their EEZ in Lebanon's south border. Due to the multiple discoveries of natural gas reserves in the Israeli waters, the dispute with Lebanon was rekindled as the country claims that part of the rich in resources territory is Lebanese.

Until Lebanon's economy recovers and until negotiations start between Lebanon and Israel regarding the delimitation of their EEZ, it is unlikely that any major exploration and production endeavours will take place in the country. For now it seems that Lebanon will either stay dependent on fossil fuels coming from either its allies in the Gulf or from natural gas as a form of diversification, through the Arab Gas Pipeline from Egypt.

2.1.8 Syria

Syria had historically been one of the major players in energy production in the region. The country is rich in both oil and gas and has a huge production capacity. However, the civil war that broke out, halted all of the energy related developments. In the past years, with the conflict slowly settling, Syria is trying to pick up where it left off before the civil war and enhance its role in the region, as an important player in terms of geopolitics and energy.

While Syria has potentially rich reserves in its waters in the Eastern Mediterranean, what it lacks is the foreign investments for exploration and exploitation projects as well as the construction of the energy infrastructure. The sanctions that the United States had imposed on Syria are still deterring foreign companies from investing in Syria and the fear of a possible second internal conflict also constitutes a deterring factor. So far the

only country that has signed contracts with Syria for exploration and exploitation of natural resources is Russia, which has already helped the country modernize the infrastructure and built the last part of the Arab Gas Pipeline which supplies Syria with Egyptian Gas. (Asseburg et al, 2018, p. 31)

However rich Syria might be in resources and even though the civil war might be over, the aftermath of the conflict and the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for Syria to find trusted allies that are willing to invest and dedicate their expertise and capital in a still unstable country.

2.1.9 Palestine

Palestine even though it is not recognized by the United Nations as a full-fledged state, it is recognized by the vast majority of the countries and it is considered a member of the Eastern Mediterranean countries. The Palestine Authority (PA) is a member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and thus a member of any energy diplomacy developments and discussions regarding the region.

One of the main problems that hinder any Palestinian efforts to energy production and exploitation, is the lack of connection between the Palestinian territories. The Gaza strip and the West bank do not currently have the status of a common state and they are unable to make any major united decisions regarding energy related issues.

Moreover, the Gaza strip which has proven natural gas reserves in its waters, namely in the Gaza Marine field, the authorities in Gaza are unable to explore and exploit their resources. The pressure and the blockade from Israel poses an obstacle for any foreign countries to get involved in the Strip's issues. However, Palestine seems to have found an ally in Egypt, which seeks to achieve its status as the major hub country in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Palestinian Investment Fund and the Egyptian Natural Gas Holdings (EGAS) company signs the agreement which will help build gas infrastructure and transfer it to Egypt for liquefaction. (Reuters, 2021)

Even though this seems to ameliorate Palestines chances in entering the energy game in the region, Egypt also signed an agreement with Israel for building a pipeline to transfer gas from Leviathan to its plants which will go through Palestinian territory thus making Israel's hold of the territory concrete.

Whatever actions may take place regarding Palestine's energy development, until the territorial issues between Palestine and Israel are resolved or at least until they enter proper negotiations and Palestine can be properly recognised as a state by the UN, no real prosperity will be achieved.

2.1.10 Libya

Libya is a country that has had the attention of the major international players for years. The events and the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Qaddafi regime and its fall and most importantly the recent war have had consequences not only internally but also for the region of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Prior to the civil war which broke out in 2011, Libya was a major exporter for oil and gas and 95% of the country's revenue was dependent on these resources. (RCREEE, n/d) But as was the case for Syria, the production was halted in the time of crisis and the needs of Libyan people have increased dramatically. While Libya has significant prospects of becoming again an exporter and could also contribute to EU's efforts for diversification of supply due to proximity to the continent, the Libyan state is still extremely unstable.

The country as of now is still divided and has two leaders. The UN and local organisations are actively trying to facilitate the election process which was supposed to take place in December 2021 and was postponed to June 2022 due to the state's instability.

Regarding energy developments, Libya, and more specifically the UN backed Government of National Accord (GNA) managed to stir the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean region by signing a maritime agreement with Turkey, which besides drawing marine borders it also included energy deals between the two countries. However, until Libya has a stable and legitimate government through elections, no major developments can be achieved. All the countries of the region are patiently waiting for the outcome of the elections in order to decide whether they will treat Libya as a close ally or a potential threat. Whatever the outcome may be, once Libya has a stable government, it is more than likely that all exploration, exploitation and infrastructure projects will pick up as many foreign, mostly European firms are ready to invest millions in the country, as it is evident by the investments that TotalEnergies has already made in order to help the country with its renewable projects. (TotalEnergies, 2021)

What remains to be seen it's whether Libya will side with Turkey or with Egypt after its elections, as these two countries are the ones most invested in the country's conflict and have openly backed opposite sides and they both have direct energy interests in the area: Turkey for further supply to satisfy its domestic needs and increase its maritime borders and Egypt for exploitation of natural gas and establishment of its hub status.

2.1.11 Jordan

Even though Jordan is not an Eastern Mediterranean country in strict geographical terms, its proximity to the region and its close relations with its neighbours and involvement in regional affairs, grants it the status of an Eastern Mediterranean country. Energy resources are extremely scarce in Jordan and thus the country is extremely dependent on imports of fossil fuels. As of 2018, Jordan imported 94% of its oil and gas. (Abu-Rumman, Khdair, 2020) The main problem with Jordan does not rely only on the fact that it's a net importer of resources, but the lack of diversification in its suppliers. This focus on one or two suppliers for oil and gas has rendered the country's energy security extremely vulnerable to the region's and the suppliers' crises.

Regarding oil, Jordan was heavily dependent on Iraqi and Saudi oil. The war and the internal instability in Iraq made it extremely hard for Jordan to maintain its commercial relations with the country as the disruption of exports and increased prices due to the conflict could not satisfy the increasing demand. Saudi Arabia even though has proved to be a reliable supplier for oil, there were many instances where the prices went up or where Saudi Arabia had specific demands from Jordan such as the cost of TAPLINE in 1984. (Alshwawra, Almuhtady, 2020)

As far as natural gas is concerned, until 2011 Jordan was only getting its gas from Egypt through the Arab Gas Pipeline. However the event of the Arab Spring in Egypt disrupted the large flows of gas towards Jordan, leaving the country struggling to meet its energy needs. Now that Egypt has picked up its gas operations and exports, Jordan continues to rely on Egyptian gas imports.

Even though resources are scarce in Jordan's territory, the kingdom is one of the most attractive middle eastern countries for foreign investments. Jordan is one of the most stable countries in the eastern mediterranean and the Middle East regarding its politics and its economy. In the last decade Jordan's energy policy has shifted and taken a more internal focus. The Kingdom plans to upgrade their grid and rapidly increase their

percentage of renewable energy in order to be more self-sufficient. They also plan to focus on the production of shale oil with the aspiration to cut down on their imports. These changes in Jordan's energy policy in addition to the stability and general development of the country, has attracted a large amount of foreign investments as the major international players see Jordan as a stabilising factor in the Middle East. Jordan doesn't have the same aspirations regarding energy as some of its neighbours. Its plan for the coming years is to establish itself as a hub and leader in the region for renewable energy and advanced technologies, hoping to also form partnerships with neighbours who also plan to include renewable sources in their mix.

2.2 External actors

As the Eastern Mediterranean continues to rise in the global arena and establish itself as an important region, both in geopolitical and in energy terms the direct interests of the biggest international players continue to rise as well. The biggest external players with interests and involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean region are the European Union, the United States and Russia. All three of those actors have interests of geopolitical and energy nature.

2.2.1 European Union

The European Union is the only third party that not only has direct interests in the area but it is also part of the area. Two of the Eastern Mediterranean countries, Greece and Cyprus, are members of the EU. This means that European policies directly affect the region as they directly affect its two members and any developments and complications directly affect the EU as it directly affects Greece and Cyprus.

Besides the EU's geopolitical and strategic interests for stability and prosperity in the region, the Union also has increased energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially after all the major regional discoveries of the last 20 years, which could constitute additional sources of supply for Europe's large energy needs.

As it was stated by the European Commission in 2014, the main goals of EU's long-term energy policy can be summarized in the below points: "the establishment of a competitive and integrated energy market; the reduction of external dependency on particular suppliers by diversification of energy sources; the acceleration of the Southern Gas Corridor; the transition to a low carbon economy; the coordination of national energy policies over energy mix or energy infrastructure towards a common foreign policy; and the increase of indigenous production, as well as the development of energy technologies and infrastructure" (European Commission, 2014).

According to the Energy Union which was formed in 2015, its primary goal is the "diversification of Europe's sources of energy, ensuring energy security through solidarity and cooperation between EU countries". With diversification being the primary goal of the EU's energy policy, it is evident why the Eastern Mediterranean and its gas reserves are so important to the Union. Currently the EU is heavily dependent on Russian gas which represents almost 1 third of the European gas supply.

With Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022 the EU's response regarding the energy imports was swift. A deal was struck with the United States in March 2022 for LNG imports to the EU which will be equivalent to 10% that was previously supplied by Russia and the plan is to supply the EU with 50 bcm per year (BBC, 2022). As the President Von der Leyen said "We want, as Europeans, to diversify away from Russia towards suppliers that we trust that are friends and that are reliable." She noted that the

ultimate target of 50 bcm per year "is replacing one-third of the Russian gas going to Europe today. So we are right on track now to diversify away from Russian gas."

The interest that the EU has in the region is also evident through the various initiatives it has undertaken in order to promote stability in the region. All the member states are part of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an intergovernmental forum which includes the EU and the Mediterranean states and promotes cooperation and the implementation of projects and initiatives. The EU also launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, which includes its neighbours to the east as well as the south. Through the ENP various projects have received funding in the neighbouring countries and the focus on energy stability and climate change related actions has also increased over the last years.

Lastly, the EU is also an observer in the EastMed Gas Forum, a fundamental instrument for dialogue and cooperation regarding natural gas developments in the area and has also openly supported initiatives (such as the Eastmed Pipeline) for bringing eastern mediterranean natural gas to Europe.

In sum, the European Union's primary goal regarding energy policy and energy security is the diversification of supply sources. Besides the United States, the Mediterranean in general can be a trusted and relatively cheap area of supply for the EU. The newest developments regarding natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean have presented a new opportunity for the EU to find stable partners such as Egypt and Israel and the EU has and will continue to support, fund and cultivate cooperation and commercial initiatives with the region in order to reach its goal of decreasing the dependence on Russian gas.

2.2.2. United States

The United States has always taken an interest in the Mediterranean and in the Eastern Mediterranean region in particular. Its proximity to the Middle East and the relative stability of the region has led the US to seek strategic and military partnerships with Eastern Mediterranean countries due to the geopolitical importance granted by their location.

The US has been actively cooperating with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean either through NATO, since Turkey and Greece are both members or through various initiatives and alliances it has formed. One of the closest allies the US has in the area is Israel with which it cooperates in both economic and military issues and its stability is a priority for the US.

The US has sought to enhance its relations particularly with European countries and the European Union. In 2019 the US Congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act which will fortify US relations with Israel, Greece and Cyprus and will ensure an increased US engagement in the region. The Partnership Act also mentions the creation of a US-Eastern Mediterranean Energy centre. The US has also started participating in the meetings of the tripartite partnership between Israel, Cyprus and Greece and has supported the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, in which it has an observer status. (Salem, 2021)

These actions of energy and security diplomacy carried out by the US and the focus on European and Eastern Mediterranean countries have an ultimate goal of minimising Russia's energy influence and dependency in the region. Given the recent events with the war in Ukraine, the US has identified a major window of opportunity for taking a large part of the energy pie in the region, by not only supporting projects and countries which

will help with Europe's diversification of resources, but also actively becoming a big energy player in the region.

To this end, the US and the EU signed a deal in March according to which the US will provide Europe with 50bcm per year, reaching 10% of the gas that was previously supplied to the EU by Russia. Furthermore, many American companies are involved in exploration and exploitation procedures in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as ExxonMobil in Cyprus' fields, and significant US investments have been made in the region in order to support gas and renewable projects, both in order to decrease Russia's energy power in the area but also the increasing economic expansion strategy of China (Aka et al, 2021, p.16).

In sum, the US have built strong multilevel partnerships with Eastern Mediterranean countries (Israel, Greece and Cyprus) and have been involved in various initiatives and forums promoting stability and development in the region. The US engagement in the area is expected to only become more rigorous since the new sanctions and the deteriorating relations of European and major Mediterranean states with Russia, leaves the US with much room to cultivate its influence over the region.

2.2.3 Russia

Russia and the Eastern Mediterranean region do not seem to have any direct links at first glance. Russia doesn't have any direct interests in the region and its energy developments do not seem to faze the country since it already has vast reserves of natural gas and it is at the top of the suppliers worldwide.

However, the Russian Federation has major indirect interests in the area. The Eastern Mediterranean is one of the regions where the US and Russia go head to head for influence and partnerships. The most prominent example where the two superpowers had an indirect conflict over influence was the Syrian civil war, where after Trump's decision of withdrawing US forces, it essentially gave Russia a "free pass". Russia also has military involvement in Libya, another fragile state of the region. (Katz, 2021) Besides Syria, Russia has also got its sights on Turkey, a country that constitutes one of the biggest destabilising factors in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara's latest disputes with Europe and the US have brought it closer to other actors such as Iran and Russia. Their cooperation in Syria and the deals that Turkey struck with Russia for the procurement of military equipment has not been well perceived by neither the EU nor the US as Ankara seems to be neglecting its NATO status and facilitates Russia's engagement and influence over the region (Litsas, 2020). With the US imposing sanctions on Turkey and with the EU continuously putting on hold Turkey's request for membership, the Russian-Turkish relationship could become even tighter. (Katz,2021) Even though the Kremlin has sought more close partnerships with countries that have taken an anti-Washington stance at times (Turkey, Libya, Syria), Putin has also tried to establish diplomatic and economic bonds with many Eastern Mediterranean countries. Using soft power to reach more countries has proven quite effective as we can see that Moscow has friendly relations with most of the Eastern Mediterranean players, thus securing a part of influence in the region without having to heavily invest in it. These friendly relations could and some have already been impacted by the recent war between Ukraine and Russia. Russia was quick to disapprove of any states that were openly against the recent events or that sent help to Ukraine (such as Greece). The EU's decision to diversify its sources and cut back on Russian gas imports has also put a strain on the relations between Russia and EU members in the region. Since the Eastern Mediterranean is an important area energywise, given its discoveries in natural

gas and its rapidly developing infrastructure for LNG and transport, it is possible that a major natural gas exporter such as Russia, will start seeing the region as a threat, since Eastern Mediterranean gas could provide an alternative to the Russian one.

3. Energy (in)security in the Eastern Mediterranean

Since the late 20th century and particularly after the oil crises and the embargos, energy has been gaining importance and becoming part of every country's national security. Even though there is no uniform definition of energy security we can extract the main pillars of energy security from the most acceptable energy security definitions.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) defines energy security as "the uninterrupted availability of energy resources at an affordable price". The United Nations add two more aspects in the definition and include the variety of sources and the quantity and thus they define energy security as "the continuous availability of energy in varied forms, sufficient quantities and at affordable prices".

The approach that different countries have towards achieving energy security depends on whether they are rich in resources or dependent on imports. Rich in resource countries seek to maximise their energy production, secure their domestic supply and increase their imports, as we saw from the example of Egypt. Countries that are low in resources tend to rely on alliances and strong partnerships for their security of supply and also invest on infrastructure or technical knowledge in order to become powerful energy players, as we saw from the examples of Greece and Jordan.

As energy is becoming a vital part of the national security of every country, energy and resources themselves can become either a tool towards tighter cooperation or they can constitute reasons of conflict and even *casus belli*. In the next chapter we will portray some examples in the Eastern Mediterranean region where energy has presented as a cooperation opportunity, some examples where resources have led or could lead to conflict and lastly we will present some of the major energy infrastructure plans in the area and how these have contributed towards energy security or if they have endangered it.

3.1 Alliances and Cooperation Opportunities towards energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean

In the past decades there have been a lot of efforts at the regional level for closer cooperation and coordination of actions, both in the form of organisations and forums and in the form of bilateral or trilateral agreements.

As the region of the Eastern Mediterranean gains momentum and international attention, its stability is of pivotal importance to third parties such as the United States and the European Union which has prompted the two to get involved in regional initiatives, participate in forums and also create spaces where cooperation towards regional stability can flourish.

The constant changes at a regional level, the discoveries of hydrocarbons and the international developments, have also motivated the Eastern Mediterranean actors to form partnerships and alliances with other parties that share the same interests. There have been many agreements and partnerships over the past few years in the region, either of solely economic nature or stronger alliances that have sparked multilevel cooperation.

3.1.1 The Union for the Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental organisation which comprises all the members of the European Union, the Mediterranean countries and

some countries that do not belong in the Mediterranean region geographically, but they have close relations with the area such as Jordan and Mauritania.

As it is officially stated by the Union “UfM’s mission is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of projects and initiatives with tangible impact on our citizens, with an emphasis on young people and women, in order to address the three strategic objectives of the region: stability, human development and integration.”

One of the most important sectors that the UfM is taking action on is Energy and Climate Change. In order to combat climate change and rising temperatures the Union for the Mediterranean is actively helping countries in the region increase their diversification in resources and augment their percentage of renewables in their energy mix.

With the SEMed Private Renewable Energy Framework “SPREF” is helping with the financing and the technical development of renewable projects in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon and Tunisia. Especially in Jordan, a country in dire need of renewable energy due to its lack of natural resources, the UfM has helped with the launch of Tafila Wind Farm which generates 3% of the country’s electricity and helps with Lebanon’s goal to act as a hub of renewable tech in the region.

3.1.2 Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum

The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) is the newest organisation in the region. It was founded in 2020 by Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, France, Jordan and Palestine. Its purpose is to enhance cooperation among stakeholders in gas resources in the area and between them and European consumers. (Butter, 2020)

Although the Forum was primarily established in order to bring closer gas producers and consumers and to facilitate the financing of gas projects and the distribution of eastern Mediterranean gas towards the European market, the EU’s decision to become carbon neutral by 2050 has put a halt to investments on gas projects. The European Investment Bank is currently in the process of drastically limiting lending for natural gas projects as part of the broader European decarbonisation strategy. (Butter, 2020)

Nevertheless, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum has proved extremely effective in terms of cooperation and diplomacy which seems to be quite beneficial for the region, even without the European investments. The EMGF is one of the few regional cooperation organisations that has both Israel and the Palestinian Authority as their members. (Wojnarowicz, 2019) It also brings Israel closer to some of its Arab neighbours such as Egypt and Jordan, hence facilitating their cooperation and diplomatic relations even beyond gas related projects.

Furthermore the EMGF has gained an important status in the region and it is seen by major international players as a tool towards achieving regional stability and development. For this reason both the European Union as well as the United States have asked and currently hold an observer status in the Forum and take part in the meetings and events. The participation of international players in Forum’s discussion solidifies the international support for both the EMGF and its individual members and thus the independent alliances that have formed between the countries of the Forum. The EMGF, besides an organisation aiming at the stability and cooperation in the region, also presents a clear alliance between certain states. Even though the Forum was open for memberships to other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria were not included in the meeting in Cairo that founded the Forum in 2020 . (Kalehsar, 2019) Thus the EMGF could also be conceived as an anti-Turkey

alliance. This conception was bolstered when the Forum included in its list of areas of cooperation the angle of regional security and military drills were conducted in Cyprus. (Lovatt et al, 2020)

Even though the EMGF has helped with cooperation and diplomatic efforts in the area, the exclusion of Turkey from these efforts, has resulted in the latter striking back. One example is the Turkish- Libyan maritime agreement, a bilateral agreement signed between the two mediterranean countries, who are not part of the EMGF and are looking to form an alliance of their own in order to balance the scales. Given the two evident blocks that have formed in the region, it is highly unlikely that all the countries in the eastern Mediterranean region will ever form a coalition, but the EMGF has managed to gather both EU and regional members and align their initiatives in the energy sector and towards regional security.

3.1.3 Trilateral Partnerships

Amongst the shift of many bilateral relations and regional dynamics that took place in 2010s and mainly Turkey's deteriorating rapports with Egypt and Israel, new alliances and partnerships arose in order to bridge the gap of regional cooperation that the Turkish diplomacy left behind it in the area.

Two of those partnerships are of pivotal importance in the region as they have managed to increase cooperation in both the fields of energy development and regional security. These two partnerships are the trilateral alliance between Cyprus, Greece and Israel and between Cyprus Greece and Egypt. The four countries are involved in many cooperation initiatives of both bilateral and trilateral matters as well as through the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.

Regarding the trilateral partnership between Cyprus, Greece and Israel, the three states chose to form this alliance in order to pursue their common energy interests with the construction of the Eastmed Pipeline which would bring Israeli and Cypriot gas to Europe through Greece. However their fields of collaboration were expanded and today cover a plethora of regional issues.

As it was stated in their Joint Declaration on December 7, 2021 "Trilateral cooperation between Israel, Greece and Cyprus represents a center of joint interests connecting Europe, Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Our shared values provide a solid and enduring foundation for our partnership, in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law."

Energy remains the main focus of the partnership, however the constant occurrences of instability caused by Turkey has prompted the partnership to also address security and sovereignty issues. As stated in the declaration "Israel, Greece and Cyprus view the energy sector, and in particular, natural gas and renewable energy, as a solid foundation for cooperation in the region, based on international law, including the law of the sea and the respect of all states to exercise their sovereign rights in their respective EEZ/Continental Shelf. We express the importance of respecting sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean sea and to preserve the stability in this region."

Regarding the trilateral partnership between Cyprus Greece and Egypt, the first summit of the three countries was conducted in late 2014. According to the declaration of the first meeting of the partnership "cognizant of the immense challenges to the stability, security and prosperity of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the need for a concerted and collective response, have met in Cairo, Egypt, on November 8th, 2014, to effectively tackle these challenges to nurture our tripartite cooperation ever stronger for the years to

come, building on the significant progress achieved so far.” (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014)

In the declaration of the first summit it is also important to note that the three states also stressed out the importance of the new hydrocarbon reserves that were discovered at that time as well as the need to delimitate their maritime zones while respecting the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The three countries also highlighted how the respect of sovereign rights is of pivotal importance, mentioning the recent, at the time, violations of Turkey in the Cypriot EEZ.

This last part is of great significance, especially if we consider the bilateral relations between Turkey and Egypt in 2014. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the relations between the two countries had been strained since 2013, when the Turkish president failed to recognise the new Egyptian president, al-Sisi, and demanded that the previous president, Morsi, be released from prison. Egypt’s response was swift by forming this tripartite partnership with Greece and Cyprus, the two countries in the area that face serious issues with their Turkish neighbour, already in 2014 therefore choosing its allies and forming a united front against Turkey.

In their latest Trilateral Cooperation and Coordination Summit on the 19th of October 2021, the countries stated in their declaration “We welcomed the signing of the agreement for the establishment of a trilateral electricity interconnector between the grids of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. This project strengthens our economic cooperation and enhances the security of energy supply, not only of the countries involved, but also of Europe, as it will create a highway for the transmission of significant amounts of electricity to and from the Eastern Mediterranean.” Regarding energy related developments they stated “We expressed our desire to continue strengthening our cooperation, through a series of agreements, on the exploration and transportation of natural gas; we remain convinced that the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves can serve as a catalyst for regional stability and prosperity. In this regard, we once again welcomed the adoption of the statute of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).” On other issues, they addressed once again the Cyprus problem, the Turkish- libyan agreements and they stressed how important a closer cooperation between Egypt and the EU would prove for key developments in the area.

3.2 Energy Infrastructure plans in the Eastern Mediterranean

Before the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean area, the regional energy infrastructure was not particularly advanced. Most of the countries were, and some of them still are, depending on oil imports from the Arabic states thus the majority of the energy infrastructure in the area consisted of oil refineries and pipelines systems for import and export of oil.

The exploration and exploitation of oil reserves in the area started in the second half of the 20th century, with Syria being the largest producer and exporter in the region. Israel and Jordan also made efforts for oil exploration and production, with less success than Syria, though both of the countries were able to keep their production and their refineries running until recently (EIA, 2015).

The energy prospects of the eastern Mediterranean region changed completely after 2010. During these years, multiple discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves, notably natural gas reserves, were found in the region, with the U.S. Geological Survey estimating that over 122 trillion cubic feet of natural gas could be found in the Levantine basin. (EIA, 2015) These estimates along with the rigorous exploration and exploitation initiatives

mainly carried out by Cyprus, Egypt and Israel, completely changed the region's energy prospects and aspirations.

Over the last decade, during which more explorations of natural gas reserves have come to light, many players in the region have started to focus on gas infrastructure by building new or updating old facilities. Below we will analyse the gas infrastructure, both pipelines and LNG and other facilities that operate in the area.

3.2.1 Gas Infrastructure

a. Pipeline Systems

The Eastern Mediterranean as we have established from the previous chapters, has become an important area regarding the production of natural gas and it is particularly significant for Europe not only because it presents as an alternative source for Europe's increasing demand for natural gas but it is also one of the major routes from where resources are transported to the large European market. As a reference, in 2019 35% of the European Union's natural gas was transported through the area. (Tziarras et al, 2019, p.12) Natural gas is transported in two ways: either through pipeline systems or after its liquefaction and its transportation by ship.

The natural gas pipeline system that is of utmost importance to the EU is the Southern Gas Corridor. This complex natural gas value chain consists of three pipelines: the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCPX) which crosses Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) which crosses Turkey and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) which crosses Greece, Albania and Italy.

The Southern Gas Corridor is extremely important to all players: producers, customers and crossing countries. For Azerbaijan it is a huge opportunity to direct its gas from its reserves in the Caspian Sea to the large European market. For the crossing countries, Georgia and Turkey, the transportation through their territory proves a significant source of income. Lastly for Greece and Italy and the rest of the European countries that the gas is directed to, it is a chance to diversify their gas supply and take a step closer to security of supply and ultimately, energy security.

The pipeline system of the Southern Gas Corridor is expected to grow even more and direct the natural gas from the Caspian Sea to even more countries. Greece and Bulgaria will be linked by the Interconnector Greece Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline which will direct gas from TAP. The Trans Adriatic Pipeline will link Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina through the planned Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP). (TAP official website) Besides the already proposed and planned connections, this vast pipeline system offers the EU and the rest of the European countries the chance to connect to a reliable source of natural gas with a connection plan which is economically viable, an aspect which is often rare when it comes to natural gas infrastructure.

b. LNG Terminals

Besides pipeline systems, the other type of gas infrastructure that is equally important is the LNG terminals. There are two types of terminals: export and import terminals. At the export terminals the natural gas is transported to the facility by pipeline and the gas goes through the liquefaction process and it takes its liquid form. After the liquefaction it is transported mostly by sea to LNG import terminals. At these terminals the LNG is

offloaded and held in cryogenic tanks until it is re-gasified. After its return to gaseous form, the natural gas is again transported by pipelines. (eia, 2022)

The transportation of gas in its liquid form constitutes an economically viable and very effective alternative to the construction of costly gas pipelines. Especially in the Mediterranean Sea and by extension to our region of interest, the Eastern Mediterranean, this option is far more cost effective, given that the transportation costs are also lower, due to the proximity of the countries. For these regions, many countries in the area have invested in the construction of these facilities.

Egypt has the strongest LNG presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It has two facilities, the Idku and the Damietta facilities. As Egypt has enough natural gas to satisfy its domestic needs, following the discovery of the Zohr field, both of these facilities are focusing on export. Israel is also sending Egypt its surplus natural gas for liquefaction as of 2020. Egypt and Cyprus have also made agreements for the construction of a subsea pipeline which would bring the gas from the Aphrodite field for liquefaction. (Robinson, 2021)

In Cyprus, a large LNG terminal is being built, the Vasilikos terminal, and is expected to be completed and operational in 2023. (GEM, 2022) In Greece the most important LNG facility is the Revithousa terminal, west of Athens, which has a strong storage and regasification capacity. Another facility is currently being built in Alexandroupoli which is located in northern Greece and it will be a floating terminal. The FSRU in Alexandroupoli will be linked to a pipeline system and will transport gas to Bulgaria through the IGB and to Serbia and North Macedonia.

Both types of gas infrastructure are of pivotal importance to the area. The already existing pipeline system provides a secure and reliable supply source which also helps the EU and the other countries in the area diversify their sources and import gas from the Caspian Sea. The LNG terminals further help with the diversification and gives additional economic and development opportunities to other natural gas producers in the area, such as Egypt and Israel, which, if transport only relied on pipelines, would not have the chance to export their products with the same ease.

3.2.2 The EastMed Pipeline

The EastMed Pipeline is one of the most ambitious energy infrastructure plans in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The idea started in 2017 when Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding “to explore the possibility of the construction of a natural gas pipeline linking Leviathan to the European markets”. In 2018 officials of Greece, Cyprus and Israel announced that they were ready to sign an Intergovernmental agreement in order to move forward with the construction. (Tziarras et al, 2019, p.18)

The project was undertaken by a joint venture between Edison SpA and DEPA International Projects S.A. called IGI Poseidon S.A., which is also part IGB pipeline that will connect Greece and Bulgaria. According to IGI Poseidon, the pipeline will be 2,000km long and will have an annual transport capacity between 11 and 20 bmc. Some of the benefits stated by the company are: the “direct connection between Europe and Israeli sources avoiding transit risks” and the fact that it is “in line with Europe's mid-term strategy, the project leads the way for offshore hydrogen transportation”. The fact that the pipeline also has capability of hydrogen transportation, makes it more appealing as it will also prove very useful towards the carbon neutral goals that have been set for the next decades.

At first both the European Union and the United States openly supported the pipeline project. For the EU this pipeline presents a much needed alternate source of gas in order to achieve even a small percentage of diversification from Russian natural gas, on which the Union is heavily dependent. The United States has long supported any opportunity that would limit the imports of Russian gas from Europe. The US Ambassador in Israel was actually present in some of the meetings concerning the pipeline and stated that this project was “of great importance for the stability and prosperity of the Middle East and Europe”. (Stamouli, 2018)

The main problem regarding the EastMed pipeline remains the same as every major infrastructure plan and it is the issue of funding. The project is estimated to cost 6.2 billion euros and many years of difficult construction, given that it is a subsea pipeline. (Litsas- Tziampiris, 2019, p.8)

The European Union, even though extremely interested in the project, cannot fund such a type of infrastructure as it is clearly stated that the EU cannot finance constructions of pipelines. (Stamouli, 2018). The United States on the other hand firmly supported the project in 2020, under the Trump Administration. The support from the US was considered highly optimistic as American support for a project always draws more investors and gives a sense of security of investment.

However in January of 2022, the Biden Administration announced that they will be withdrawing their support for the project. They stated that they want to focus on renewable projects from now on and they still strongly support the integration of electricity grids, that can be powered by both gas and renewable energy sources, between the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. (Krasna, 2022, p.3)

Even though the decision of the United States to withdraw their support for the Eastmed Pipeline seemed like a catastrophic turn for the project, the Russo-Ukrainian war that broke out in March 2022 changed both the geopolitical and energy reality in the European and Eastern Mediterranean region. The war and the financial sanction that were placed on Russia has pushed the EU more than ever to diversify its resources of natural gas. The EastMed Pipeline was brought once again to the attention of the EU and they are thinking about reviving and supporting it, both politically and financially, as a way to gain an additional source of natural gas. More support from the EU towards the pipeline project is not unlikely since the European Union already conducted a pre-feasibility study on the pipeline and has included it in its fifth list of projects of common interest. (DEPA International Projects, 2020)

But even if the European Union actively revives and supports the project, the lack of investors and the high technical costs remain. The Eastern Mediterranean region is still considered a high risk area. The Syrian civil war, the terrorist attacks on energy infrastructure and pipelines in the Sinai area and elsewhere as well as the ongoing disputes between states are some of the factors that deter investors from financially supporting the EastMed pipeline project. (Krasna, 2022, p.3)

Many experts have concluded that a much more viable option, both technically and financially, to link the eastern mediterranean gas with the European market would be a pipeline from Cyprus to the north of Turkey which would connect with the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Southern East Corridor. However, Turkey's behaviour and aggressive stance towards its neighbours has made regional cooperation difficult on many levels. (Litsas- Tziampiris, 2019, vii)

At this point it is important to highlight that however improbable the completion of the EastMed pipeline is at the current moment and even though there are other alternatives that have been proposed, the project still holds a tremendous symbolic power.

The prospect of the construction of the EastMed pipeline managed to form bilateral and trilateral ties between Greece, Israel and Cyprus. Their friendly relations and cooperation in the energy sector has been the first step of a broader and firmer alliance and the field in which they cooperate has expanded to include even regional security and joint military exercises. Egypt has also strengthened its ties to Greece, Cyprus and Israel and the four countries seem to form a front opposite to Turkey's unilateral behaviour in the eastern Mediterranean region.

In conclusion, the EastMed pipeline is an overly ambitious plan, the infrastructure of which would need a lot of technical expertise and foreign investments in order to be constructed. Nevertheless, the alliances that have formed through the talks for the construction of the pipeline are far more important than the project itself and the cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel is helping to achieve regional security in the region. Furthermore, the current war in Ukraine and the disruptions in the supply of Russian gas is raising the possibilities of the EastMed Pipeline to be considered as a viable option.

3.3 Regional Conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean is a multiethnic and multicultural region. It combines countries from three different continents, Europe, Africa and Asia and involves some of the most ancient civilisations and countries. Throughout the centuries and also during modern history, these states have had a variety of relations with each other varying from wars and occupation to complete indifference and close friendship.

As we saw from the previous chapters, in the Eastern Mediterranean region there have been many alliances, partnerships and cooperation initiatives in the past years. Nonetheless, as the energy prospects of the region grow stronger each year, by both discoveries of hydrocarbons as well as infrastructure opportunities, the tensions have also been building up between some regional players that seek to seize or maintain a competitive advantage in regards to energy security and development.

3.3.1 Regional Conflicts and the Law of the Sea

Most of the conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean region derive from issues about the delimitation of maritime zones. The lack of delimitation or issues regarding the delimitation of maritime zones between neighbouring states can cause disputes over the claims of new hydrocarbon reserves or arguments regarding the exploitation of said reserves.

There are four zones that are of interest according to the Law of the Sea and that are related to the Eastern Mediterranean:

- The territorial sea (measured from the baseline seaward, the breadth of which may not exceed 12 NM)
- The contiguous zone (adjacent to the territorial sea and may not extend beyond 24 NM from the baseline)
- The continental shelf (adjacent to the territorial sea, not only distance dependent)

- The Exclusive Economic Zone (adjacent to the territorial sea and may not extend beyond 200 NM from the baseline)

There are two methods that can be used for the delimitation of the maritime zones: the normal baselines method and the straight line method. The normal baseline method determines the baseline as the low-water line. The straight line method can deviate from the normal baseline if the coastal state has geographical peculiarities (e.g. Norway), but must never be drawn “in such a manner that they cut off the territorial sea of another State from the high seas or an exclusive economic zone”. (Kastrisios, Tsoulos, 2017, p.3) Especially of interest for our region of interest are the notions of the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). According to UNCLOS the continental shelf “comprises the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance”.

The EEZ is an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea that shall not extend beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. According to UNCLOS in the EEZ the coastal state has “sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds”.

From the above terms and the rights that are explicitly mentioned in the UNCLOS, we can understand why the delimitation of the continental shelf and the EEZ is of utmost importance for the states of the Eastern Mediterranean. Lack of delimitation or disagreements between neighbouring countries regarding the delimitation can have serious consequences as far as the energy related developments in the area are concerned.

Many of the tensions and the regional conflicts that are present at the moment in the eastern Mediterranean region are linked to the delimitation of maritime zones and the subsequent rights of exploration and exploitation of natural resources that derive from it. In the following chapter we will review some of the main regional conflicts that exist nowadays in the area which are affecting directly or indirectly the energy related developments.

3.3.2 Existing and Potential Regional Conflicts

a. The case of Turkey

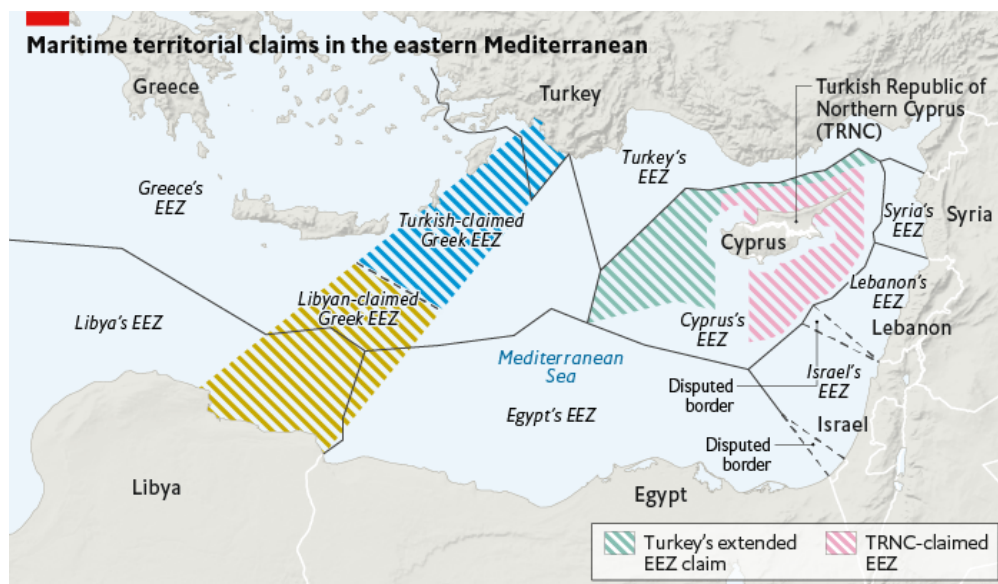
One of the oldest disputes in the region is the one between Greece and Turkey. Greece was once part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years until it obtained its independence in 1830 (Britannica). The Greco- Turkish rivalry is dating back to these times and even though it’s considered a “frozen conflict” there are occasional flare ups that disturb the regional peace and worry not only the immediate neighbours, but the whole of Europe. The main reasons for turbulence between the two countries can be summed up in the following: 1) disputes over the boundaries of the Greek territorial waters and mainly

regarding the islands in the eastern Aegean, 2) disputes over the ownership of certain isles and even islands, 3) disagreements regarding the delimitation of their Exclusive Economic Zone in the eastern Mediterranean and 4) the Cyprus crisis. Turkey also raises the issue of the demilitarisation of certain islands and isles in the Aegean sea that also needs to be addressed. (Dalay, 2021, p.1)

The maritime disputes and the frequent flare ups and hot incidents in the Aegean sea are not only disturbing the peace and cooperation in the region but also hinders the energy related developments in the area. The possibility of a threat of another hot incident from Turkey's part is making Greece's development in the energy sector move at a really slow pace. Even though it's estimated that hydrocarbons reside in the Aegean sea, foreign investors and energy companies are reluctant to get involved with the exploration for those resources so as to avoid getting caught up in the crossfire between the two neighbours.

The two countries have entered negotiations numerous times over the past years, more than 60 meetings between 2002 and 2016, albeit with little to no success. (International Crisis Group, 2021, p.1). The talks however reached a hiatus and tensions flared up especially during late 2019 and 2020.

In November 2019, Turkey signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)193 with the Government of National Accord (GNA) of Libya. According to the MoU the two countries decided on a single boundary line for the delimitation of their continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zones. The line proposed however is cutting straight through Greek waters and it's depriving the islands of Crete, Rhodes, Kasos, Karpathos and Kastellorizo of their right to their continental shelf as it can be seen from the below map. (Tsitilakou, 2021, p.53) Even though the MoU has not been ratified yet and it has been deemed illegal by many, it is still adding fuel to the fire of the unresolved issues between the two countries.



(map3, source: The Economist)

Things only got worse in the summer of 2020 when the Eastern Mediterranean experienced one of the longest escalations in over 40 years. In response to the MoU between Turkey and Libya, Greece signed a maritime accord with Egypt. Turkey was quick to respond by sending a seismic research vessel close to Kastellorizo and further escalating the chain of events. On the 12th of August the tensions reached their peak

when two frigades collided in the eastern Aegean. This new round of tensions sparked the immediate response of others players as well, with the French president reinforcing military presence in the Aegean sea and the UAE joining Greece for military exercises. (Bloch, Saber, 2021)

In 2021 Greece and Turkey resumed their exploratory talks sparking up the hope of a bilateral solution to their maritime disputes. However a solution seems to be way far into the future as the fourth point of disagreement between the two players, the Cyprus crisis, is far from being resolved.

The Cyprus crisis began in 1974 when the Greek Junta staged a coup with the aim to unite Greece and Cyprus. The Turkish military then invaded the island and ended up occupying the Northern part of Cyprus and subsequently declaring it a sovereign, independent state named the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. (International Crisis Group, 2023, p.3) This state however is only recognised by Turkey and therefore has no rights under the auspices of international law.

With the recent discoveries of hydrocarbons off the coasts of Cyprus, Turkey claims that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus also holds sovereign rights regarding exploration and exploitation. To this end, Turkey has repeatedly sent drilling ships off the Cypriot coasts and has also tried to hold off exploration vessels from other countries, as we have seen from the Eni incident in 2018. (Bloch, Saber, 2021)

Turkey has been trying to establish itself as a major regional player in the Eastern Mediterranean by adopting an expansion policy. The Turkish policy regarding the maritime borders and the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is fully aligned with the Blue Homeland doctrine. According to this doctrine, Turkey should not be confined to Anatolia and should expand in the Mediterranean and assert itself as a major naval and military force in the Mediterranean sea. (Dalay, 2021, p.6)

Turkey in this search for regional power and sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean stands almost alone. Once really strong, Turkish-israeli relationships have deteriorated over the last decade, especially after the open support of Palestine from the former. The Turkish-egyptian relations are no different, since Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and for the former Egyptian president. This way the Turkish state has managed to alienate two of its immediate neighbours, Greece and Cyprus, and two of the most important players in the region who also hold resources and energy infrastructure in their hands.

Most experts argue that the development of the region is dependent on whether Turkey's rivalries with its neighbours get resolved or not. Turkey is undoubtedly one of the major players in the Eastern Mediterranean and its cooperation with the other states is of pivotal importance for the stability, regional security, full exploration and exploitation of the region's natural resources and collaboration for new energy infrastructure. However slim the possibility for Turkey's cooperation seems to be after all the recent events, especially with Cyprus and Greece, the International community and most of the EU remain optimistic towards Turkey's attitude in the regional theatre and although they condemn some incidents, they continue to push for cooperation.

b. The case of Israel

Israel has created rivalries in its region since its creation as a state in 1947. Both the way that the Israeli state was created as well as the numerous cultural differences Israel has with its neighbours has led to numerous tensions and conflicts in the region. The history of the Jewish people and the Arab-Israeli wars and constant threats from its immediate neighbours has led to Israel being heavily militarised and being always on alert.

One of the largest enemies of the Israeli state throughout the last century has been Egypt. However since their reconciliation in 1979 things between the two neighbours have been peaceful and during the last decade their relations have gone even further by signing energy deals and by entering the EMFG and taking part in alliances with Cyprus and Greece.

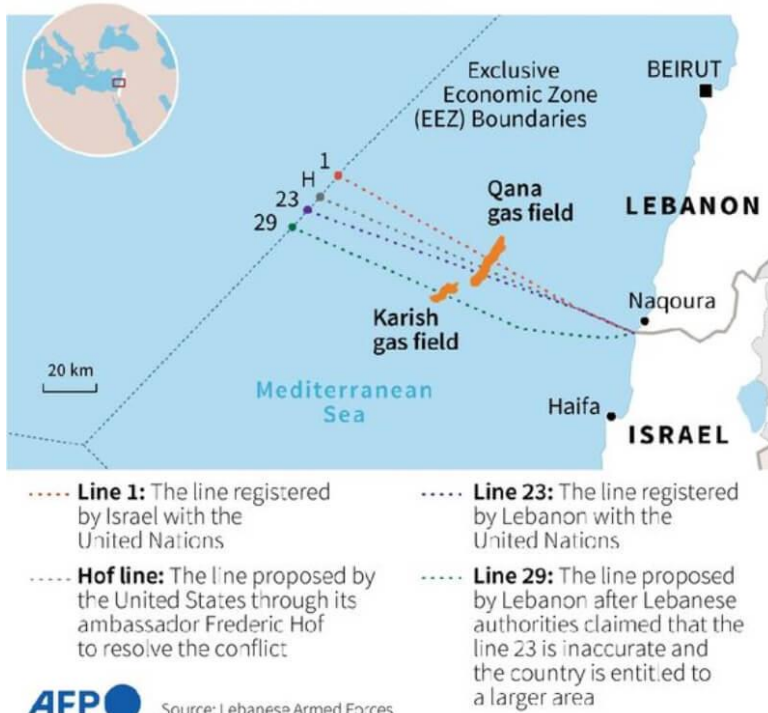
As of now, Israel's biggest causes of turmoil are Turkey and Lebanon. Regarding Turkey, until 2010 their relations were close and could be considered almost an alliance. In 2010 Israel prevented an attempt that was made to break the Gaza blockade and 10 Turkish citizens were killed in this incident. Even though there were attempts to normalise their relations again, Turkey-Israel ties never reached their former level and they continue to be civil but distant. Turkey is not making it easy from its side since the president is openly supporting and financing the Palestinian Authority and Hamas and has views to unite the Muslims, as we can see from their attempts to revive the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. (Wojnarowicz, 2019) However unlikely it may be for any hot incidents to occur between the two countries, there would be immense room for cooperation in the energy sector between Turkey and Israel; a scenario that also seems very improbable.

As far as Israel's relations with Lebanon are concerned, things are a bit more complicated. After the 6 day war, Fatah's leader, Arafat, decided to move its base to southern Lebanon along with the PLO that gained a special status in the country. For more than two decades, terrorist strikes were carried out from the southern Lebanese border towards Israel. The constant back and forth between Israel and the Lebanon based Organisations reached an all time high after Israel invaded Lebanon two times, one in 1978 and one in 1982. The second time Israeli forces managed to get all the way to Beirut, thus threatening the whole country. It was after the second invasion that Iran's Revolutionary Guards established the Hezbollah organisation in Lebanon. (Reuters, 2022) After 22 years of occupation, Israel left southern Lebanon in 2000, but the attacks and constant conflict between Israel and Hezbollah continued.

In the past decade, the situation has been relatively quiet, even though Israel is still on alert and Hezbollah has been gaining political ground in Lebanon. As of today, the biggest cause of conflict between the two countries is the issue of their maritime borders. The dispute started in 2009 with the discovery of the Tamar field and intensified in 2010 with the discovery of the Leviathan field. While Israel claims that the fields are entirely in its territory, Lebanon contests that there is an overlap in the borders. The fact that the two countries have no official land border since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the establishment of a Blue line by the UN, makes it all the harder to define their maritime zones (BBC, 2011).

One of the biggest developments regarding the maritime dispute between the two states took place in October 2022. On the 27th of October 2022 the US brokered an agreement regarding the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon. According to the recent agreement the two states should use Line 23 as their border.

The maritime border dispute between Lebanon and Israel



(map 4, source: Lebanese Armed Forces)

Line 23 gives the opportunity to both countries to explore and exploit the Qana and Karish fields respectively. However, Lebanon seems to have taken the short end of this deal. While Israel will have full rights over the Karish field, part of the Qana field falls under Israeli territory according to Line 23. Israel will be compensated for its part of the Qana field by the energy company that will take on the exploration and exploitation of the field. Since the French company TotalEnergies has been licenced to operate in the Qana field, according to the recent agreement Israel is mandated to reach an agreement with TotalEnergies prior to an agreement being made with Beirut. Lebanon has been in an extreme political and energy crisis for the past two years. Even though this agreement could help with its energy independence and security on some level, it might spark more issues. On the one hand the Lebanese political world has had deep rooted corruption and could manipulate the earnings of the exploration of the Qana field. On the other hand Hezbollah, which is losing ground and support internally, could take advantage of the situation with Israel to spark more outrage and push back the agreement. (Hussain, 2022)

4. Future outlooks: Cooperation or clash?

As we have seen from the previous chapters the region of the Eastern Mediterranean is a complex but very promising area for both the regional players but also for external actors. Its geography, relevant stability and richness in resources have made its importance rise more than just the regional level. Despite the huge potential that the region holds, its development will depend on whether the coming years will be marked by cooperation and prosperity or conflict.

There are many destabilising factors in the broader region of the Eastern Mediterranean on a geopolitical level. Turkey's relations with Greece and Cyprus are characterised by many as the most important destabilising factor in the area. The turbulence between the three countries has been ongoing since the Turkish invasion in Cyprus in 1974. During these 50 years the situation has been a roller coaster, ranging from no contact at all, to exploratory bilateral talks to hot incidents in the Aegean Sea and off the coast of Cyprus and numerous threats of escalation of the conflict.

Though Turkey only poses an imminent threat to Greece and Cyprus, it also constitutes a problem for other states in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Egypt and Israel have also had strained relations with the Turkish state. Even though their relations can by no means be characterized as hostile, the lack of their cooperative nature hinders the overall development of the region, hence poses an obstacle for the individual progress of Egypt and Israel as well.

For a long time Turkey has been using "gunboat diplomacy" in order to deal with its neighbours, keeping most of them at arm's length and neglecting the forging of real and close alliances. (Alaranta, 2021) For the first time in decades we can see Turkey shifting its foreign policy to truly integrate the "zero problems with neighbours" approach by making moves to re-approach old allies.

In January of 2021, Turkey entered once again the usual exploratory talks with Greece, after a 5 year hiatus, a step that showed to the international and the regional community that Turkey was looking to somehow make amends for the hot incidents in the Aegean Sea in 2020. No major events have been reported since then, but during the summer and autumn of 2022, both Turkish and Greek officials have been using some harsh rhetoric and making bold statements. The leaders of both nations are facing elections soon, so they are using the Greek-Turkish conflict to raise their domestic appeal and gain support. The results of the elections that will be held soon will be a significant factor that will help determine whether the next term will be marked by more flare ups in the Aegean Sea or by further exploratory talks and cooperative spirit.

One of the major signs of Turkey's "zero problems" policy became evident in late November 2022. After years of low to zero contact between Turkey and Egypt, a handshake was witnessed between the Egyptian president Al-Sisi and the Turkish leader Erdogan on the sidelines of this year's World Cup in Qatar. (Reuters, 2022) It was also reported by the Turkish foreign minister that the two nations might resume full diplomatic relations soon and even re-appoint ambassadors. They are also said to begin having talks about a variety of issues including energy, military and regional issues mainly focused in the north Africa region.

This change of heart in Turkey's foreign policy is directly linked to its domestic situation that has been deteriorating especially in the past 2 years. Inflation levels keep rising reaching 40%, the Turkish currency, the lira has plummeted and shortages of basic goods have been affecting the whole population. (Pollock, 2022)

Turkey's internal economic crisis has made it clear that it can no longer proceed with unilateral actions in its neighbourhood. The United States have been less supportive of Turkey and have even imposed sanctions and the help it received from Russia is no

longer viable given the latter's war with Ukraine. Turkey has turned for help to the gulf players, Saudi and UAE but help from both of these countries comes with certain conditions: make up with their allies in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Israel, Greece and Egypt. (Pollock, 2022)

The results of the elections in both Greece and Turkey later in 2023 will help clear the air regarding which policy the two states will opt for: hostility or cooperation. Both countries have used harsh rhetoric as far as their foreign policy is concerned so as not to appear weak in their pre-election period, but their real stances in terms of bilateral relations will be evident after this time. (Diakopoulos, 2022)

Besides Turkey's behaviour and its policy regarding its relations with its neighbours, there are many other factors that affect whether the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean will shift towards clash or peace. The unstable landscape in Libya and Syria, the immigration crisis and constant flow of refugees towards Europe, the ongoing energy and economic crisis on a European level and the war in Ukraine are just some of the peripheral factors that directly affect each country of the region separately and as a whole.

External factors, such as the EU, the United States, Russia and China also will play a definitive role on whether the next step for the Eastern Mediterranean area will be conflict or cooperation. The EU is currently in a major economic crisis as an aftermath of the war in Ukraine, so European states have reasons to be invested in maintaining the stability in the region given that it is a possible secure supplier of resources for them. Russia has managed to establish its presence in the region by supporting the Assad regime in Syria and it is to be expected that it will be also involved with any energy developments the Syrian state will choose to pursue. Russia is also linked to Iran and therefore tied to Lebanon and Hezbollah even in a less direct manner. Russia also indirectly affects the region, as the consequences of the war in Ukraine have deeply impacted Europe as well and it has generally changed the power dynamics in the continent which, up until now, was considered safe and conflict-free.

The US have been less active in the region recently, but are still maintaining their soft power and influence in certain countries. The United States' main issue in the area is to keep the lion's share of influence. With Russia dealing guns to Turkey and maintaining close ties with Syria, the US need to make sure that their interests are well secured through their allies and partnerships in the region. For this reason they have already put sanctions on Turkey for the guns purchases from Russia and they have warned Egypt of similar sanctions if they proceed with a deal with Russia as well. The US have also raised an alarm to Greece and Israel, one of closest allies in the region, over port partnerships with China. (Yegin, 2020)

Even though China has no military interests in the area, the economic value that the Eastern Mediterranean region can provide to the Asian state is far too big. For this reason, China has grown its presence to the region over the past years in the form of port partnerships and numerous investments in various countries of the area.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is growing and intensifying each year and the Eastern Mediterranean plays a key role in it as it constitutes the key entrance to Europe, the Initiative's final destination as indicated also on the map below.



(map 5, source: Silk Road Briefing)

For this reason, they have invested heavily in the Port of Piraeus in Greece since 2006 and in 2019 they managed to get Italy on board the BRI, ensuring an entrance into the European market. (Novo, 2019)

Although the US have also made some investments in the region (e.g., the 2.3-million-dollar investment in the port of Alexandroupoli in Greece), American financial presence in the area seems to be declining the last years, with the latest evidence of that coming in January this year when the US backed out of the EastMed Pipeline. There is some expected tension to be seen between US and China over influence in the region, but the probability of this tension to be presented in something other than financial and investment terms, is highly unlikely.

In conclusion, there are many factors which will determine whether the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean will shift towards peace or conflict. There are many players that have high stakes in the area, both the countries that are geographically part of the region, as well as the major global powers. However, it is unequivocally vital for the area that the differences between the countries in the region, namely the relations of Greece and Cyprus with Turkey, need to make a turn for the better. Restarting the talks between parties is a major step towards stability, but peace is still a long way ahead. The international institutions, as well as the regional ones, such as the European Union, also need to step up and assist to achieve regional stability.

5. Conclusions

The Eastern Mediterranean is a highly complex and dynamic region and its significance seems to be rising year by year. The area is important as much regarding the geopolitical situation as it is for the energy developments that have been going on in the last decades. These are the developments that have granted the area its dynamic nature as with each development and discovery in the area, the whole region is affected, dynamics are shifted and new threats, as well as opportunities, are being created each year.

From an energy point of view, the newly discovered hydrocarbon reserves in several of the countries situated in the region are of pivotal importance both for the individual advancement of each country separately as well as for the region as a whole. These discoveries will prove to be an important factor of revenue for the states that own and have the rights to exploit them, but the neighbouring countries can benefit as well, either from acquiring resources with less transport costs (e.g. Egyptian gas flowing towards Jordan) or by building infrastructure to introduce themselves as transit countries (e.g. Greece and its LNG terminals).

The energy developments have the potential to establish the Eastern Mediterranean region as one of the most crucial regional players in the world. With the European Union having the need to diversify its supply and having a steady demand, the players in the region could step up and secure a way into the European market. For this to happen however, there needs to be a safe and stable geopolitical environment that nourishes such development.

Most of the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean collaborate with each other, either by being multilevel allies (e.g. Greece and Cyprus), or by having bilateral and trilateral agreements of economic and overall cooperative nature (energy agreements between Israel and Egypt, trilateral agreement between Greece, Cyprus, Israel). Most of the regional players are also part of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) which gives them the chance to exchange ideas and propose initiatives for the area and provides a safe and open environment for fruitful dialogue and cooperation.

As of 2023, the major destabilising factor in the region seems to be the state of Turkey. With ongoing conflicts with two of its neighbours (ie. Greece and Cyprus) and strained relations with more players in the region (ie. Egypt and Israel), the Turkish state has demonstrated time and time again an unwillingness to cooperate. In the last two years, however, there have been some developments to reinstate some of its relations such as the contact between the Turkish and the Egyptian presidents in Qatar and the new start of exploratory talks between Greece and Turkey. Although these developments seem promising, until concrete steps are made either within cooperation in the energy sector with its neighbours or resolution of at least some of its geopolitical issues with other players in the region, Turkey's cooperative stance cannot be solidified. Many believe that Turkey's involvement in the EMGF could present as a sign of good faith from its participants and serve as a way to mellow Turkey's stance, but until the Turkish state shows sincere intentions of cooperating with all of its members, it's highly unlikely to retain a membership.

Besides Turkey there are other destabilising factors in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The unstable political situations and overall climate in Libya and Syria affect the region as a whole as their neighbours are also impacted by their internal developments and also hinders their chances of actively cooperating and taking part in any plans for the development of the area.

Israel is one more country that poses a threat to the regional stability in the area. With its maritime conflict with Lebanon and the decades long conflict with Palestine, many of the

countries in the area are and will remain hesitant to cooperate closely with the Israeli state. However, with Israel being one of the strongest and well established economies in the region, economic cooperation will always be a viable option and with the new discoveries of hydrocarbons, cooperation on an energy level as well seems to be both feasible and necessary.

All in all, even though the Eastern Mediterranean is a relatively stable region that presents numerous opportunities for growth, there are many destabilising factors. The energy developments and the discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves in many of the coastal countries, could serve either as a lever for closer collaboration or as reason for conflict. For the above to be used as a means towards stability and prosperity, the international actors as well as the third parties with immediate interests in the region, namely the EU and the US, should step up and actively take part in any efforts that could help resolve both ongoing conflicts and issues as well as potential ones.

In conclusion, the Eastern Mediterranean is and will continue to be an important regional player in the area, due to both its geographical and geopolitical importance as well as the energy developments and discoveries that have taken place in the last decades.

Whether the region will steer towards prosperity or conflict, is heavily dependent on both the countries themselves, the third parties involved in the region as well as the extremely unstable global economic climate.

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