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Department of International & European Studies

MSc in Energy, Strategy, Law and Economics

DIPLOMA THESIS

‘Cyprus: a new, evolving energy center or possibly hub for the European Union in the Eastern Mediterranean’

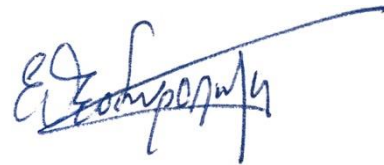
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PIRAEUS, March 2022

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Effie Theodoropoulou', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Effie Theodoropoulou

Preface & Acknowledgments

In memory of Stefanos Georgiou from Limassol, to whom this study is dedicated.

This Diploma Thesis was conducted as a part of the requirements of the postgraduate program “Energy: Strategy, Law and Economics” of the Department of International and European Studies of the University of Piraeus.

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Abstract

This study in a multi-disciplinary approach tries to shed light on the significance of the Eastern Mediterranean, as a unique regional subsystem, ‘hosting’ an enviable, yet perplexed energy matrix, ‘levitating’ between frictions and cooperation among various actors. In particular, the initial stimulus for the research was Cyprus, a small island, overburdened with one of the most resilient international conflicts, still unresolved, which due to its geostrategic importance and its natural mineral wealth, among other things, has the potential to become a new energy center or even possibly a hub for the European Union in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (i.e. EMME). Hence, the methodology was tailor-made based on the above-mentioned needs as a blend of analysis and synthesis of sources, alongside classic international relations theories. The specific methodological tools have showcased that Cyprus is an emerging energy player moving towards an integrated regional gas infrastructure, having as a national priority, for the time being, the LNG monetization pathway- combined with other options -, that the Cypriot EU identity is a valuable asset, that Cyprus -in the post-pandemic era- will be a venerable actor within increased infrastructure interconnectivity, paving the way for an integrated regional infrastructure building capacity, as well as, actively involved in the energy transition. Lastly, they spark a broader discussion on energy-related effective policies, adaptable to the region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (i.e. EMME), which needs to cooperate closely in three domains in order to tackle climate change and achieve swift energy- transition: firstly, in new zero-carbon energy sources- based system (i.e. namely solar and wind power), secondly, in climate adaptation (i.e. water –stress in urban areas or in the agricultural sector) and thirdly, in terms of economic competitiveness in a green, digital, innovation-driven economy.

Key words: Cyprus, energy center/ hub, East Med pipeline, Euroasia/ Euroafrica interconnector, EMGF, EEZ, trilateral cooperation, monetization pathways, securitization, energy transition

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Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region with enormous potential for resource development, offering a substantial diversification alternative to Europe. In addition, it is a regional subsystem overburdened with geopolitical friction and territorial disputes. Within this context, Cyprus, a country with rich natural resources, as the only EU member-state in the region, adjusted to the EU regulatory- system, has the potential to become a trading hub, based on the appropriate infrastructure, facilities, gas trading platforms, price transparency, market liquidity and market culture, while benefiting from the relevant EU support, through the energy security package. In specific, Cyprus' potential to be upgraded and become a strong energy player is reliant, mainly, on three factors: first, on its geostrategic position, second, on its European identity and thirdly, on its commercial spirit, which is in accordance with the EU regulations. Such a development could be beneficial for the entire region, since a more effective natural resources' exploration would be fully realized. Its' natural gas monetization strategy, via various pathways, is dependent, among other things, on its domestic affairs and its conflictual relations with Turkey. Cyprus should adopt a national plan adaptable to the international markets, which will unleash the investment potential of its resources. Moreover, Cyprus should implement a series of synergies with Israel, Egypt and with other actors so as to discover new monetization pathways and reassess its hydrocarbons' program, whose offshore gas resources presuppose a combination of factors (i. e. geological, commercial, export, political etc.) in order to achieve an equilibrium between domestic and export production.

In particular, the LNG option, based on the sufficiently large quantities of Cyprus, which justify the infrastructure expenditures, is a reasonable strategy of long- term viability and it is viewed as a 'survival', a national and economic strategy for Cyprus and not just as a mere project. If this pathway is governed with vision and purposefully it could transform Cyprus into an energy center or possibly even a hub. Yet, the so- called gas card should not be overrated. Apparently, the hydrocarbons are considered to be an important shaping factor for the Eastern Mediterranean, which can stimulate stability and prosperity or fuel disputes. It is an imperative, therefore, to transform current challenges into opportunities and view the economic interests as a catalyst for deescalating tensions and generating interdependencies. Apart from the popular multilateral cooperative- schemes that are gathering momentum in the region, a new mechanism of joint exploitation and transport of the natural resources is needed, which- if combined with realism and political will- could alter the physiognomy of

the entire region. Hence, regional cooperation is a prerequisite for energy security and prosperity. Similarly, regional stability will be achieved only if each actor gets a fair share of benefits from the regional natural gas trade. The EU, on its part, could incentivize stabilization of the region through the natural gas discoveries' exploitation and focus on the promotion of the green energy- cooperation, which does not provoke territorial disputes and it is attractive to investors. Undeniably, joint- energy synergies could unequivocally facilitate regional peace, while energy policies have the potential to launch significant geopolitical partnerships, able to mitigate disputes and fortify a well- grounded basis for long-term economic development in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within this context, a settlement of the Cyprus' problem could facilitate Cyprus to manage its natural wealth through best practices. Consequently, it is understandable that if all regional actors, including Cyprus, wish to prosper, energy aspirations should be viewed as 'a window of opportunity' for cooperation and not confrontation.

As regards the methodology, the general scientific methods for synthesis and analysis were implemented in the study. At the level of the common logical scientific research methods, practical emphasis was given to generalization methods for formal logic-deduction and induction. In addition, while assessing sources, the comparative method was actively involved. Lastly, classic theories of international relations were, also, used as a methodological tool to approach the emerging energy issues, while shedding light on the political rhetoric of foreign policy and providing arguments that can lead to effective policies.

Chapter 1. Energy in the Eastern Mediterranean

1.1. The New Eastern Mediterranean: an energy region in the making

The Eastern Mediterranean is emerging as one of the most significant areas in current global affairs, encompassing all the necessary features as a region to become ‘the epicenter’ of international attention. The enormous, newly discovered natural gas reserves in the region can transform the dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean countries. The area has, therefore, the potential to become a major energy source for Europe, which could lower the continent’s dependence on Russian and Algerian energy imports (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019).

Energy issues act as a ‘focal point’ in the Eastern Mediterranean, provoking cooperation or conflict and the recent partnership- initiatives, which are gathering momentum in the form of extended cooperative schemes (i. e. trilaterals, quadrilaterals, etc.) could further enhance the regional stability and prosperity (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019).

In specific, the interest in the region, as a natural gas resource base, commenced when Israel realized its first large-scale natural gas discovery in 2009 (Ratner, 2016).

Successive discoveries undertaken in Israel (Leviathan), Cyprus (Aphrodite) and Egypt (Zohr), have showcased that energy is the principal currency of the region. In 2020, it was confirmed by the United States’ Geological Survey (USGS) that the Levant basin has a vast potential in energy resources that could be up to an additional 122 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered natural gas resources or up to 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable- oil (Ratner, 2016).

Be that as it may, a downtrend has been observed in the exploration of the hydrocarbons and some projects have been delayed due to financial constraints, attributable to the current international gas and oil prices and to the hesitancy of various companies to invest in such demanding areas. In this context, Europe is a reasonable market destination for the natural gas of the region, yet its natural gas production must be competitive towards other suppliers, such as Russia, Norway, Algeria, or the US (Ratner, 2016).

In addition, most of the states, in the region, either do not utilize gas, or are self- sufficient, apart from Greece and Turkey, which both rely on imports (Ratner, 2016).

The Eastern Mediterranean is, undoubtedly, undergoing major changes to its energy landscape. Energy demand, for example, is expected to rise during the upcoming years and

the new gas findings are estimated to be able to offer the essential energy supply and satisfy the demand, leading to possible future exports (Karbuz, 2018).

It goes without saying that the region's energy sector will be influenced profoundly by the physical and economic security, as well as, by the offshore hydrocarbon advancements. Accordingly, geopolitical frictions, political disputes, and territorial conflicts, occurring often in the region, combined with gloomy economic prospects, are expected to highly affect the energy trade, production and consumption, jeopardizing the materialization of several energy projects (Karbuz, 2018).



Figure 1. Maritime claims and energy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Source: (Ruhe & Millner, 2022, p.3.).

In other words, the exploitation and export of the aforementioned resources will have to confront many challenges, (i. e. including the unresolved Cyprus' problem), carrying geopolitical ramifications. Notwithstanding the concerns of whether the gas findings will become marketable in a timely manner, energy as the common denominator of the region will be functioning as a core constituent of the geopolitical contest in the East Mediterranean.

Regarding whether the Eastern Mediterranean will become a regional trading and energy hub, one must underline that despite the existing energy bonanza and the EU's financial support, the region should establish a market mechanism in buying or selling gas, a pricing mechanism for the spot prices' determination, physical interconnectors, as well as, enabling market- related conditions, promoting exports, liquidity, and dominance towards other robust actors (Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016).

As discussed previously, the current energy ecosystem of the Eastern Mediterranean generates concerns regarding the countries' energy dependence, their energy prospects, the significance of the energy sector for the national economies, as well as the economic cooperation within the current economic /political context. The recent discoveries of hydrocarbons in the Levant basin are predicted to alter the regional energy equilibrium and affect both energy supply and energy security. Through the examination of specific characteristics of the states in the Eastern Mediterranean and the relevant macroeconomic indicators, the significance of energy in the economy of these states, as well as, geopolitical factors impacting the regional energy projects, become apparent. In fact, the analytical framework of the reinter state theory (i. e. arguing that the government is the principal recipient of the external rent in the economy), combined with the resource curse phenomenon, frequently encountered in countries with an affluence of natural resources, indicating an incomplete diversification process, is strongly correlated with the so- called 'energy case' of the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, this is reflected in the projected amount of interest or the concerns about foreign investments in the region, in the extent, to which the involved countries are impacted by the occurrence of political and economic changes, as well as, in the degree of their adaptability towards a continuously reforming environment (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the Eastern Mediterranean countries have improved the share of non- hydrocarbon in their GDP, but the oil sector remains, nonetheless, dominant (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

Additionally, the diversification attempts can be considered as weak or unaccomplished. As known, the instrument, which facilitates countries to diversify their economies are sovereign wealth funds, principally by investing in overseas assets. (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

However, such a strategy does not contribute to the encouragement of a state's production and economic growth. On the contrary, this tactic has reinforced the 'allocative state' versus the 'productive state'. When observing the respective governmental behaviors towards

diversification, it is evident that they all select specific sectors to invest in. Yet, to lessen their reliance on natural resources, these countries should show preference towards profitable investments. The risk then is to concentrate everything on a single sector and to engage into one sector economic model, which entails the above-mentioned limits. Promoting the diversification by placing emphasis on the private sector is, therefore, foundational. Undoubtedly, the impact of rent on the region's economy is traceable on two levels: on a national level, whereby the hydrocarbon-rich states demonstrate specific characteristics and on a regional level, whereby inter-states' relations are speeded up due to their 'attachment' to the natural resources (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

Notwithstanding the transformation of the region into a 'hub of wealth', the map of the natural resources depicts economic and wealth – distribution inequality. Apart from growth models, political hierarchies and intra- regional power relationships are impacted by natural resources, as well. Energy, in other words, reinforces alliances and cooperative networks but can also be 'weaponized' in political conflicts. Be that as it may, the energy bonanza in the Eastern Mediterranean changes the order, as new actors enter the energy market. The aforementioned new distribution represents a drastic change in the observed imbalances, reducing the gap between the energy haves and the have-nots. Countries, such as, Cyprus, for example, which has had to cope with energy shortages and political constraints, will now have to adapt to this new form of abundance, affecting its governance. Taking into consideration the past experiences might facilitate the new actors to achieve a well -balanced transition, by adjusting their economies gradually to the so-called rent sustainable, whilst safeguarding social balance and strategic prospects. Instead of relying on substantial external rent to sustain their economy or demonstrating limited interest to develop a robust productive domestic sector or even engaging only a small percentage of the population in the generation of the rent, which are all practices of 'allocation states', 'production states' should be favored, following a diversification path of their domestic economy (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

In light of the above, it becomes evident that the majority of the countries in the region are net- importers, dependent on imports so as to satisfy their energy needs, with the only exception Egypt, being an energy producer. Furthermore, these countries adopt differentiated macroeconomic routes and confront divergent challenges (i. e. competitiveness, deficits etc.) With regard to the energy projects it must be underscored that they are not only related with economic prospects but also with prospects of the global economy.

For the Eastern Mediterranean, a region with a potential to play a dominant role in global energy, challenges, such as national economic and political obstacles, frictions, regional disputes etc. should be overcome, replaced by regional cooperation and institutional organizing. Despite some domestic or extraneous factors that are still impeding the developmental processes of these countries, the improvements in the economy and the governance will be significant not only for the engaged states but also for the development and the stability of the entire region. After all, the abundance of fossil fuels in the region remains a major structural fact for the world's energy market, as well as a significant 'game changer' not only for the energy market but also for the relationships between geopolitical players (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

1.2. The EU's interest in the Eastern Mediterranean energy ecosystem

The need for EU energy security

The Eastern Mediterranean has developed as one of the new high-priority regions for EU foreign and security policy, testing the EU's strategic autonomy (Grigoriadis, 2021).

The discoveries of substantial energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, about a decade ago, have transformed profoundly the geopolitical architecture of the region and they are viewed as a 'window of opportunity' for further economic growth, less regional energy dependence, as well as, as an alternative supply possibility for Europe (Stergiou, 2017).

According to a modern and inclusive definition, coined by Professor, Benjamin Sovacool, 'energy security encompasses four elements: availability, affordability, efficiency and environmental stewardship of energy' (Mathioulakis, 2021).

In a more simplistic approach, attributable to the International Energy Agency, (IEA), energy security is the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. In such a context, the EU is deeply interested in the discoveries and the promising potential of the region and its eagerness to diminish its energy dependency has become more urgent (Günaydın, 2014).

The Eastern Mediterranean has been a high priority region for the EU and the European Commission has exhibited its interest in this regional subsystem not only because it constitutes a source of gas- supply for Europe but also due to the necessity to boost stability, security and cooperation in the development of the gas (Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016).

The prospect of a new gas export hub outspreading in the Eastern Mediterranean is, indeed, attractive to Europe (Tziarras, 2019).

Natural gas is an inseparable part of the European Commission's 'Clean Energy for all Europeans' strategy, since it is viewed as a bridge fuel, which can facilitate the transition to renewable energy (Tziarras, 2019).

Presently, the Eastern Mediterranean is an important route for the EU's natural gas and oil imports, as approximately 35% of its natural gas and 50% of its oil consumption are trafficked through the region (Tziarras, 2019).

EU's augmenting dependency on energy imports, as reflected in the relevant 'energy dependency rate', which surpassed the 60% (in 2019), has dictated the need for a comprehensible European energy security strategy (Eurostat, 2022).

According to the European Commission, EU's imports in natural gas will reach, until 2050, the amount of 335.472 Ktoe, while the natural gas gross consumption, within the EU, will be equivalent to 398 Mtoe, based on Eurostat's statistics. In addition, EU's main origin of natural gas imports is Russia (49.5%), followed by Norway (36.1%), indicating the EU's dependence and vulnerability from third countries. 'Energy dependency depicts the amount of dependability of an economy on imports to meet its energy needs and is calculated as net imports divided by the sum of gross inland energy consumption plus bunkers' (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, EU's production of primary energy was decreased by 12.1% in the past decade (758 Mtoe), mainly due to the depleted overall natural gas production and the situation concerning the exploitation of the coal fields. With respect to the international natural gas consumption, EU represents a 14.1% (BP 2020) and the natural gas demand in the EU is expected to be equivalent to 471 Mtoe until the year 2035 (BP 2015). Moreover, the European energy system is comprised of the following energy-mix structure: oil and products, 582 Mtoe, gas 398 Mtoe, renewables, 234 Mtoe, solid fuels, 228 Mtoe, nuclear, 211 Mtoe, other, 21.9 Mtoe, (Eurostat, 2022). As observed, the European energy ecosystem is discerned by specific characteristics, such as: low energy resources, high energy import dependence, high dependence on small number of energy suppliers, 27 national regulatory frameworks, ageing energy infrastructure, as well as incomplete connectivity.

Considering the above-mentioned, growing concerns on EU's dependency on energy imports and the ramifications of the gas supply disruptions to the EU, as reflected in the Russia-Ukraine dispute, in 2009, have motivated the European Commission to publish its energy security strategy, in 2014, intending to safeguard stability and abundance of energy supply, while evaluating, with stress-tests, the impact of the Russian gas imports to the European energy system. This initiative led to the formulation of the relevant strategy for the Energy Union, in 2015, focusing on climate change. As a result, the Energy Union, from which the Green Deal originates, is viewed as one of the foundational objectives and a prerequisite of the energy security context. Hence, energy security is pivotal in the outline, structure, and development of all energy and environmental related-policies within the European regulatory and political framework. Within this context, the EU maintained its interest in the Eastern

Mediterranean region, whose massive hydrocarbon reserves have become a significant ‘game changer’ in terms of broad international power balances, both in the energy market, as well as, in the inter-states’ relations among geopolitical actors (Özyavuz & Schmid, 2015).

The regional energy bonanza has been thought to lessen Europe’s dependence on the Russian supplies and is seen as a steppingstone for the Eastern Mediterranean’s transformation into an energy hub, through the effective monetization, as well as, as a viable alternative option to the Russian gas (Stergiou, 2017).

Moreover, the options of distribution of the energy flows towards the European markets are various, through the planned regional energy projects, and the gas- factories reshaping the balance of power in the entire region, which is inherently overburdened with competition and disputes (Metaxas & Hancher, 2018).

Not surprisingly, most of the energy projects in the region concern the natural gas system, which brings about wholesale price deviations and exposure to energy crisis, rendering the energy security an important challenge, addressed by diversification channels (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019).

In this context, energy independence is upgraded as a concept and it is viewed as an asset of a state’s security and existence, in a competitive regional subsystem, whereby, anew, power equilibrium is emerging, based on the new power differentials (Metaxas & Hancher, 2018).

Certainly, successful transferring of the European values and objectives in the above-described neighborhood is dependent on the promotion of the European strategic autonomy, through the instrumentalization of the EU’s various capacities and institutions. Be that as it may, the EU has been often criticized of failing to formulate a clear position on major issues or of just abetting with the interests of its member states. In addition, many doubt whether the EU could have a successful contribution to a dispute resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean’s regional crises, whilst some others assert that the EU does not have a strong voice towards those actors, who are threatening the international order and this stance negatively impacts its policymaking. Political divergence between many EU’s member – states, lack of common vision among the European Commission and some member–states on energy- related policies, are factors, which render EU a facilitator of developments, as well as a rigorous destination. All these, combined with the current US restraint- strategy applied in the Eastern Mediterranean compose, indeed, a very interesting energy matrix in the region (Syriopoulos, 2021).

In any case, energy remains a powerful transformative factor on a regional level, despite the ‘default’ of the hydrocarbons to act as a catalyst for peace. Especially, the European Green Deal and the energy transition towards the renewables, represent a new era for energy geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean, since green energy could grant a framework for synergies and enhanced regional cooperative-schemes, based on a positive agenda for the entire region (Grigoriadis, 2021).

Aspects of the Energy Union with an external dimension

Energy – oriented, regulatory framework

In most of the policy- areas, including the energy sector, the EU has the tendency to adopt an international agenda, reflective of its domestic regulatory priorities. The prime example of this rules- based agenda is the establishment of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), a legal binding multilateral agreement for trade, energy efficiency, transit, and dispute resolution, which was signed, in Lisbon, in 1994, by 54 members. Notwithstanding its disappointing initial record, it regained prominence after the 2000s.

It goes without saying that the Lisbon Treaty (2008), constitutes the legal basis for the EU’s energy policies and via the article 194 of TFEU, defining the establishment, functioning of the internal market and the preservation of the environment, it specifies: the operability of the energy markets, the security of the energy supply in the Union, as well as the promotion of interconnections of the energy networks. Moreover, certain measures are determined by the European parliament and the Council regarding the exploitation of the Member States’ energy resources and their energy supply’s structure, as well as measures of fiscal nature. Nonetheless, as reflected in the Council Directive 2004/67/EC, which was perceived as the first legal attempt to ensure the security of natural gas supply, the EU had already realized earlier the necessity to address its energy security concerns. This was further corroborated by the European Council, in December 2006, which among other things, established the Network of Energy Security Correspondents (NESCO), as an essential tool for assessing geopolitical and energy-related data and a facilitator of security of energy supply. In addition, the legislative packages encompassed specific tools for the liberalization of the electricity and gas markets. The first energy package, in 1996, which aspired to liberalize the energy market, referred initially to electricity, and then also incorporated gas (1998), while the second energy package, in 2003, was followed by a third energy Package in 2009 (Mathioulakis, 2021).

In particular, the third legislative package (2009), established the creation of ACER (Authority for the cooperation of energy regulators), facilitated the cross-border trade/exchanges in electricity (i. e. reg. 714/2009), entailing enhanced competition (in national and regional level), as well as market-coupling (i. e. simultaneous allocation of both electricity and interconnection capacity). Furthermore, it included the basic principles for access to transmission networks, congestion management, balancing and introduced the so-called network codes (reg. 984/2013), whilst, at the same time, it specified the design of the electricity markets via a single market EU Target Model. The significant third legislative package, also, determined the Projects of Common Interest (PCI) (reg. 347/2013), which focused on the energy infrastructure and provided special aid/funding via the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), facilitating the promotion of the complete unbundling, as well as the functioning of fully independent transmission system operators (i. e. TSOs), both of which are essential traits of a transparent market. However, the perception of energy security changed fundamentally for the EU after the gas supply crisis of 2009, whereby critical policy tools were formalized to address the gas supply disruptions, via the gas regulation and the TEN-E regulation. The latter was viewed as a ‘vehicle’ of ensuring the interoperability of the trans-European energy networks and as a means of formulating the list of Projects of Common Interest (PCI) for the EU. The fourth regulatory initiative, the Clean Energy for all Europeans package adopted, in 2019, it marked an important step towards the implementation of the Energy Union strategy. According to Article 11, Directives 2009/72/EC, (the Electricity Directive) and 2009/73/EC, (the Gas Directive) in order for a person or persons from a third country or third countries, in a Member State, to get a permission for the acquisition of specific energy infrastructure, the Commission must assess whether such control will jeopardize the security of energy supply of the EU, the Member State’s security of energy supply or the security of energy supply of another Member State. Risk concerns involve critical energy infrastructure by non-EU actors, such as the PCI projects, since they are associated with gas or electricity interconnectors and with the wider energy-related security policy of the EU in the Eastern Mediterranean (Mathioulakis, 2021).

In specific, it must be clarified that the Energy Union’s strategy includes measures and tools intended to transfer secure, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy to the end-users, households and businesses, whilst the Energy Union’s framework comprises of regulatory instruments, tackling internal issues, as well as, issues with externalities, impacting the EU’s energy relations with third parties (Mathioulakis, 2021).

The EU's external energy relations with third parties are realized through the implementation of regulatory instruments or through the EU's engagement in the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) or in organizations like the Energy Community. The two basic regulatory instruments, serving the goals of energy security for the EU, are the provision for Third Party Access to energy networks and for Ownership Unbundling of energy infrastructure (Mathioulakis, 2021).

A third one is also the introduction of Projects of Common Interest (PCI) with the capacity to link the energy systems of EU Member States, which will be analyzed separately. All these three components of the regulatory framework, besides serving Energy Union's goals for energy security, they also upgrade the EU's resilience and autonomy and offer environmentally friendly solutions. To reduce the impact of monopolistic frameworks under which energy network's function, despite the free-market conditions associated with production, supply and consumption, the EU is implementing its regulatory assets to safeguard that the ownership and function of energy networks do not distort the free market. In particular, the Third-Party Access specifies the role of the Transmission System Operators' (TSOs), Distribution System Operators' (DSOs) and Storage System Operators' (SSOs) over the electricity and gas networks, which are obliged to bring for non-discriminatory access to the companies' infrastructure, as well as similar service to various users under identical contractual conditions. Accordingly, provisions for Unbundling stipulate a separation between energy supply and energy generation activities from the function of the transmission networks, focusing mainly on the ownership unbundling, since companies of that sort are restricted from acquiring a majority of share or to intervene into the TSO's activities so as to prohibit competition distortion by obstructing, for example, the competitors' access to the infrastructure by an enterprise, which produces or sells energy. Considering the above, it is understandable that both regulatory schemes impact the establishment or acquisition of energy infrastructure within the EU by companies from third-countries, which constitutes an externality characteristic (Mathioulakis, 2021).

In addition, it must be mentioned that MedReg (i. e. the association of Mediterranean regulators for electricity and gas), which was established, in 2007, assembles energy regulators from 24 Member -States, (i. e. 19 EU Member States and members of the Energy Community) and in cooperation with DG Energy, aspires to promote a harmonized regulatory framework in the Levantine Basin, as a key-actor of energy cooperation (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

Be that as it may, while some MedReg member countries use the afore-mentioned regulatory framework, the Mediterranean countries are not legally bound to apply the EU energy acquis. Its multiple working groups are engaged with gas, electricity, environment, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, which correspond to the respective sectors of the energy acquis, incorporated into the Energy Community. MedReg is funded by the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), namely, the financial mechanism assisting the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) countries, plus Russia. Mediterranean Energy Regulators are striving to establish, through their national energy regulators, an institutional framework for a more effective legislative harmonization (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

Undoubtedly, MedReg's initiatives are reflective of the EU's external energy policy targets and by applying a 'bottom-up' tactic it performs a self-regulatory strategy, as a self-contained regime, despite acting as a platform for wider energy- cooperation (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

Lastly, it must be underscored that one of the basic goals of MedReg's activity is to formulate independent and competent regulatory authorities in all Eastern Mediterranean countries and to utilize a regulatory scheme, embracing the principles of unbundling, third party access, etc., which were previously discussed, as central instruments for opening the European Energy Market to competition and constructing an open and non-discriminatory energy infrastructure (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

The EU's approach towards the Eastern Mediterranean, which is based on an energy collaborative scheme and a coordination model is, up to this point, successfully applied only in the electricity sector and is still absent from the gas sector (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

The EU's experience in the regulatory frameworks is evident, so far, in the principal existing frameworks, namely, the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which is involved mainly with investments, the Association of Mediterranean Regulators for Electricity and Gas (MedReg) and the Energy Community (EnC) (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

In view of the afore-mentioned, it must be underlined that the Treaty of Lisbon has upgraded profoundly the political and legal role of the EU's external relations, its diplomacy and international capabilities, which are reflected in the promotion of the European democratic ideals and market –economy principles in third- countries, in the Europeanization of third countries' legal systems, in the establishment of the European Legal Space, in its cooperation mechanisms, as well as, in its multiple externalities. Eventually, the current instability in the

Eastern Mediterranean and the interconnectivity among the regional states should incentivize EU to establish a common energy framework, connecting the Eastern Mediterranean region with Europe, as a top priority (Farah & Tremolada, 2015).

Energy Community

The Energy Community is an international institution build upon a legally binding framework for the contracting parties, which is in conformity with the European legal norms and the EU experience in energy-related issues (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

It was established via the ‘Athens process’ aiming to facilitate the integration of the regional energy markets between the European states and the third countries of the Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region (Konstantinidou, 2019).

More specifically, this Vienna -based international organization was set- up under the treaty, which was signed in Athens, in October 2005. It’s mission can be encapsulated in the following: the establishment of a stable regulatory and market framework so as to attract investments in power generation and networks, the creation of an integrated energy market with cross- border energy trade and integration within the EU market, the enhancement of the security of supply so as to reassure continuous energy supply, the improvement of the energy supply situation in the region, the encouragement of the renewable energy, the increase of energy efficiency, as well as, the development of competition and economies of scale (Energy Community, 2022).

The Energy Community came into force, in 2006, and, in October 2013, it was extended for a decade. Its principal function is the convergence of the laws of its Member States in the energy- field to assist the markets to set off in an integrated manifestation. In addition, it aligns together the states- involved to conceptualize and realize their energy- aspirations, through specific projects (Konstantinidou, 2019).

After the ratification of the above- mentioned treaty, the EU upgraded its’ presence in the energy field in the SEE region, an area with huge energy potential, a significant routes’ network, and a political interest to join the EU. On its part, the EU was pledged to achieve compatibility between EU and the region and assist these countries, through its institutional powers, to overcome their energy- related, as well as their political problems (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

Furthermore, the launch of the Energy Community was reflective of the EU's strategy to prepare the SEE countries for possible EU membership by broadening the acquis communautaire, through the adoption of the EU- pertinent regulations and directives. Its members, in return, received financial aid and access to the European energy markets. The Energy Community, which is comprised of ten Member States, three observers and twenty-two EU Member- States, as participants, is viewed as a regional actor, whose economic longevity is enhanced by the developed synergies. Its origins are traceable to the Stability Pact for the SEE (1999), a mechanism, which assisted the engaged countries to surpass their problems, post- war (i.e., in the 90's) and promoted cooperation. Evidently, the SEE region tests the transferability of the EU's reform policies in a dual way: within the EU but also towards the developing- countries of the region (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

Moreover, the Energy Community Secretariat monitors the application of the treaty and when necessary, infringements proceedings are being followed, whilst the dispute –resolution is achieved through political and diplomatic channels, rather than international jurisdiction (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

In fact, in March 2017, the specific Secretariat applied, for the first time, its strategy for establishing gas markets and encouraged the pan- European gas market integration (Energy Community Secretariat, 2018).

Certainly, the conformity towards the EU reform –model is determined by the political objectives and priorities of each state, yet the political commitments interlinked with the EU accession seem to play a significant role in the reform procedure. Also, besides the common legal framework, common market and investments are crucial for cross- border projects. Consequently, through the regional cooperation and wider synergy- schemes, the energy markets are facilitated, and new investments plans are implemented. In this context, the Energy Community can act as a facilitator towards the intensification of the investments, in the energy sector, through: the establishment of new interconnectors, the expansion of transmission capacities, the creation of generation capacities based on renewable energy sources, the modernization of the network via technological, legal or security- related progress and the increase in the volume of energy transmission, attributable to the augmentation of the domestic consumption and the entry of new consumers (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

Likewise, the Energy Community, in October 2012, developed its own energy –strategy, succeeded by specific procedures ‘governing’ the Projects of Energy Community Interest (PECI) and, later, the Projects of common interest (PCI) and managed to determine the priority corridors of trans- European energy infrastructure, while labeling the aforementioned energy- projects and detecting relevant supportive measures (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

Steps in the history of the Euro Mediterranean relations

The complex EU- Eastern Mediterranean relations, facing economic, diplomatic, security and military challenges, are viewed either as a type of opportunity for the EU or as an answer to the on- going problems of the Eastern Mediterranean. EU policies are implemented in the region through multilateral frameworks, bilateral relations, and sectoral agreements (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Due to the inherent conflicting dynamics of the region, the EU applies issue- specific policies and the relations between the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean are perceived as interest-oriented or problem –solving regimes (i. e. through energy, security, trade, humanitarian aid etc.), which are strongly interconnected (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Through the afore-mentioned multilateral schemes and bilateral agreements, the EU approaches differently the non- EU states of the region since the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrate divergent policies and differentiations. On the other hand, discrepancies are also traceable in its Member States. Seemingly, the Eastern Mediterranean’s various crises and emerging conflicts (i. e. security, migration etc.) are reshaping the EU’s priorities and are paving the way for the EU towards a more geopolitical role, rather than a regulatory one. Undoubtedly, the EU interest in the region was initially economic but nowadays the EU’s agenda is congested with security issues, as well. As previously discussed, the Lisbon treaty empowered the EU’s capabilities in various sectors, among which, the defense, through the common security and defense policy (CSDF) of Article 24. 1- TEU (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

In other words, the EU’s security role was further enhanced by the relevant EU Security Union Strategy of the European Commission, in 2020, alongside with its other, multiple identities of either hard or soft power (i. e. its trade role, its peace building role or its function as a mediator).

In view of the afore-mentioned, it becomes apparent, throughout the historical steps, which define the Euro- Mediterranean relations, that the European model (i. e. open markets, democracy, rule of law, etc.), which was ‘instilled’ in the EU treaties (i. e. treaty of Maastricht) and was depicted in the enlargement of 2004, was ‘transferred’ also in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Institutionalization of Multilateral Cooperation/The Global Mediterranean Policy

The origins of the Global Mediterranean Policy can be traced back to the European Parliaments’ resolutions of 1971 and 1973, which required a joint and coherent approach in the Eastern Mediterranean, in trade and in developmental policies to safeguard regional peace and prosperity. This joint action was corroborated by relevant bilateral agreements among states of the region (i. e. Turkey, Spain etc.) (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

After the oil- crisis of 1973, the Euro- Arab Dialogue was enacted by the EEC, as a cooperative scheme, throughout the Mediterranean and even beyond. Be that as it may, due to the unproductive outcome of the Global Mediterranean Policy, EEC’s policy was reshaped and was re-oriented towards regional projects.

The Barcelona process/ The Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)

In 1995, the Barcelona Conference launched the so-called Barcelona Process, which led to the establishment of the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). The Barcelona Process, as an initiative, is a turning point in the Euro Mediterranean relations and it is based on three pillars: reinforcement of a common area of peace and stability, establishment of a zone of shared prosperity and rapprochement between peoples via enhanced political, cultural, and human partnership (Barcelona.com Inc., 2022).

In addition, it encompasses three main ‘baskets’: political and security partnership, through the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, dialogue and conflict resolution, economic and financial partnership, through the MEDA program, free- trade etc. and cultural partnership, through the reinforcement of the civil society and the intensification of the cultural exchanges (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Later, the agenda was enriched by additional issues of concern, such as, human rights’ protection, political reforms, internal security, terrorism, and migration. The afore- mentioned initiative paved the way for the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and today the EMP is comprised of 39 members: 27 European Union member states, 3 Candidate States

(Croatia, Macedonia, and Turkey) and 9 Mediterranean Partners (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Tunisia). Libya possesses an observer status since 1999 (Barcelona.com Inc., 2022).

Notwithstanding the various themes covered, the centrality of the energy issues was highlighted, and they were approached by a twofold strategy: political dialogue on an inter-ministerial level, as well as expert dialogue among the representatives of the involved countries (Vantaggiato, 2016).

Be that as it may, cooperation did not advance, as expected, due to numerous reasons, related with lack of economic resources, trade restrictions, political impediments and, in 2003, the European Commission launched a new program for the Euro Mediterranean cooperation, called the European Neighborhood Program (ENP).

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was introduced, in 2003, with the aim of enhancing further the prosperity, stability and security between the enlarged EU and its neighbors. It was revised in 2011 and 2015 and its mission is in alignment with the rule of law, the democratic values, and the respect of human rights (European Commission, 2022).

After the revisions, the ENP was set under public consultation and its new policy, as outlined in a Joint Communication, focuses on regional stabilization in political, economic and security –related terms (European Commission, 2022).

In a similar vein, ENP's policy was further enriched, in March 2020, by the insertion of additional long- term objectives for a more resilient and inclusive future cooperation within the Eastern Mediterranean Neighborhood, in various policy areas. In February 2021, the ENP's agenda was reshaped once more, setting sustainable long- term socio-economic recovery and job creation as the key priority policy for the EU cooperation with its Southern Neighborhood partners (European Commission, 2022).

In fact, the ENP manages the EU's relations with sixteen of the EU's closest Eastern and Southern Neighbors, namely, (to the south) Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Palestine, Tunisia, Syria and (to the North) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Russia participates in Cross-Border Cooperation activities under the ENP but it is not a part of the ENP, as such (European Commission, 2022).

Its funding is achieved principally through the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI/NDICI), a new financial tool for reforms, conceived in 2007, with an allocation for 2013-2020 of EUR 15.4 billion (Bastian, 2021).

Furthermore, the ENP's new joint priorities for cooperation include the following three sets of priorities: economic development for stabilization, the security dimension, migration, and mobility. Bilateral cooperation, on the other hand, is outlined by Joint Documents (Partnership Priorities, Association Agendas or equivalent), which are formulated among the partner country, the EU, and its Member States, defining the political and economic priorities of the cooperative framework (European Commission, 2022).

Hence, it must be stressed that the novelty introduced by the ENP was the bilateral dimension towards the regional affairs and energy issues, *inter alia*, which was intended to overcome political impediments obstructing synergies in the wider region (Vantaggiato, 2016).

In other words, emphasis was placed on bilateralism by the EU through the implementation of the ENP's policies in the Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean states (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Furthermore, the ENP was not a simple re-affirmation of the Euro-Mediterranean energy cooperation but also a representation of the overall external dimension of the EU. Developments, such as the second energy package, the eastward enlargement of the EU and the Energy Community Treaty, which impacted profoundly the course of the events. Consequently, the ENP achieved two foundational policy-functions: to frame the EU boundaries, disengaging members and potential ones, such as the ECT signatories, from the states without a membership potential, while imposing, simultaneously, bilateral relations' approach over a policy with a regional outlook. Notwithstanding the regional segment of the cooperation, the discourse defining the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation was modified and acquired more economic characteristics, since it was based on the idea to extend the EU's internal market, through expansion of the ECT. The EU outsourced regional cooperation affairs to parallel, umbrella-policy frameworks to focus on its fundamental goal: the internal energy market (IEM) (Vantaggiato, 2016). Moreover, it must be also mentioned that at the outset the ENP lacked the accession conditionality, and the membership process instruments, and it was membership neutral, through an open-ended logic. The Lisbon Treaty, which imposed a value-based conditionality on the ENP agreements combined with other factors, paved the way for the modernization and alteration of the ENP, especially after 2011, which

adopted a new value- oriented approach, encouraging sector cooperation succeeded by third country engagement (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

In addition, emphasis was placed on trade cooperation, new funding mechanisms, such as, through the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as well as, on cooperation between the EU and civil society, through the NGOs. However, the ENP turned out to be unprepared to give responses to the regional problems, such as, energy and migration, viewed as sources of friction, and security concerns entered the ENP' agenda, through the security dialogue initiated by the EU, highlighting security, apace with energy and migration, as one of it's top- policy priorities.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was launched in Paris, in July 2008, through the decision of the UfM Heads of State and Government, as the continuation of the Barcelona Process, aiming to address three strategic objectives: human development, stability and integration. It is an intergovernmental institution linking together the European Union Member States and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean to enhance cooperation through dialogue and achieve the realization of projects and initiatives for the benefit of the citizens of its Member States (Union for the Mediterranean, 2022).

The UfM revised the Barcelona Process' institutional framework and established an international intergovernmental organization, bringing together the EU Member States and 15 Mediterranean countries. Especially after 2012, the UfM was involved in multiple partnerships, including more than 50 labelled projects. Its' significance as an action- driven organization with a common ambition was underscored by the EU's latest review on the ENP, as well as, through the adoption of a roadmap of the UfM, in January 2017 (Union for the Mediterranean, 2022b).

UfM's Secretariat, which is acting as an operational institution, promoting cooperative schemes, synergies, and common initiatives, was established in Barcelona, in 2010 (Union for the Mediterranean, 2022b).

It is the intergovernmental Euro- Mediterranean platform, where political decisions are taken and regional projects are being materialized with the assistance of a broad network, comprised of partners, governments, international organizations, financial institutions, civil

society, foundations, universities, and the private sector. Within its mission, the UfM Secretariat enables enhanced cooperative schemes between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East in order to realize concrete projects and achieve optimal results for the Eastern Mediterranean. Partnerships with institutions, exchange of ideas and know-how with various Mediterranean players is the cornerstone of its overall function (Union for the Mediterranean, 2022b).

In addition, it must be stressed that the UfM initiative was conceived by the former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, in 2007 and the European Council approved of the establishment of the UfM, as a follow-up to the Barcelona Process, on 13 March 2008, where all EU Member States would participate (Konstantinidou, 2019).

All the core policies of the EMP were incorporated, while the Union itself would act with complementarity towards the bilateral relations between the EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries. This entailed that any future development of the Union into a free-trade area, common market or a customs union would be dependent on the EU's bilateral relations and not on the UfM. Thus, its function is independent from the EU enlargement policy and its main financial contributor is the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) (Konstantinidou, 2019).

Moreover, it must be reminded that UfM is the only forum, which assembles around the same table all the governments of the wider region and elevates the political dialogue among its participants. Regarding the construction of the Projects of Common Interest (PCI), UfM, which is a project-oriented and not a regulatory organization, has undertaken a list of six priority areas, such as: tackling pollution in the Mediterranean, developing energy projects on the renewables, enabling Mediterranean entrepreneurship, facilitating civil protection, encouraging higher education and research, and constructing infrastructure projects (Konstantinidou, 2019).

In fact, the UfM has, until now, established 54 projects worth a total of € 5.6 billion in the blue-economy, infrastructure, youth employment, gender equality, etc. Yet, the Euro Med University Fès, in Morocco and the desalination plant built in Gaza are the organization's most emblematic projects. In addition, the UfM monitors specific energy platforms, functioning as fora of dialogue among all Euro-Mediterranean countries and various stakeholders and as enablers of energy-related synergies in the Eastern Mediterranean. These include: the UfM Regional Electricity Market Platform (UfM REM Platform), the UfM

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Platform (UfM REEE Platform) and the UfM Gas platform (Konstantinidou, 2019).

Lastly, it must be mentioned that from 2008 to 2011, France and Egypt co-chaired UfM and it was only after 2012 that the north was represented by the relevant institutions of the EU (HR/VP, Commission, EEAS) In view of the above, it is obvious that the security issues dominated the UfM's agenda, since the central idea was that 'security ensures development', national interests prevailed and, as a result, the UfM, despite the progress that it made, did not manage to fully accomplish its mission.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP)

The Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) was introduced, in July 2008, under the UfM, as one of its key initiatives, aiming to upgrade the electricity demand in the region, through a sustainable and renewable way, as well as, to establish a new regulatory framework for the green energy and the electricity exchange (European Commission, 2022b).

It is viewed as an industrial initiative targeting to set up an integrated regional electricity market across the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, fueled by renewable energy sources (RES). Defining Euro-Mediterranean Energy Relations-Chapter 2 It was a project, resembling the German industrial one, (i. e. DESERTEC initiative), aspiring to create a RES- generated electricity system in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and interconnecting them with the EU. The MSP is perceived as the outcome of the partnership between the EU and the Mediterranean states, seeking to boost the production of the solar energy in North Africa and to enhance energy efficiency. Through the exploitation of 20 GW of generation capacity from renewable energy sources on the south and southeast shore of the Mediterranean, the energy demand in the region it is expected to be tackled properly, paving the way for possible exports to the European markets. The EU would benefit from importing electricity from the region and would attain its ambitious climate goals. (Vantaggiato, 2016). As a result, this win -win situation would attract private sector investments, encourage innovation, and facilitate enhanced-cooperation. Certainly, the role of solar energy in mitigating climate change is indisputable and according to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) estimations, solar power could provide up to 25% of the global electricity by 2050 (European Commission, 2022b).

This assessment, though, takes into consideration two important parameters, the photovoltaic (PV) (i. e. on grid distributed generation) and the concentrating solar power (CSP), (i. e.

utility-scale electricity in sunny regions), whose utilization can be complementary. In addition, the EU on its part, was supportive of the MSP via the program 'Paving the Way for the Mediterranean Solar Plan', which was launched, in October 2010, as well as, through various projects, such as 'Support for the Enhanced Integration and the Improved Security of the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Market' (MED-EMIP), 'Energy Efficiency in the Construction Sector' (MED ENEC) etc., aiming to assist the development of the renewable energy production and increase energy efficiency in the Mediterranean region. The aforementioned European strategy is clearly understandable, since the renewable energy and energy efficiency is a top priority for the EU, under the Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF), which funds infrastructure investments, alongside with the European Finance Institutions (European Commission, 2022b).

It must be mentioned, also, that the drafting of the MSP master plan was prepared by the UfM and it was due to be endorsed by the Inter-Ministerial Conference, convened in Brussels, in December 2013, leaving the European footprint on the project. Be that as it may, the plan was not approved due to Spain's opposition and its demise is regrettable (Vantaggiato, 2016).

This abrupt change was attributed, according to the stakeholders of the project, to the following reasons: the 'structural shift' in the international fuel market (i. e. nonconventional fuels), the interplay between the production of electricity from renewable and conventional sources and the reduction of electricity consumption on the Northern part of the Mediterranean region. Hence, the non- fulfilment of the MSP is also ascribed to the lack of coordination among the engaged parties, especially on the national energy policies. Consequently, the grid planning was abandoned as 'a vehicle' of electricity production from the renewables in the South for its export to the North and, instead, a complex trading system, (Med-TSO13), focusing on the integration of electricity and energy systems of the two shores of the Mediterranean was adopted (Vantaggiato, 2016).

Bilateral framework

Energy trade agreements are ruled by a multi- layered system, entailing less compatibility and subordinate energy insecurity. The lack of a single international -body specialized in energy monitoring and of a single multilateral agreement encompassing any other legal energy-related document in a thorough way, is a significant deficiency of the energy governance (Konstantinidou, 2019).

On the other hand, energy economics are dominated by state-to-state cooperation, which is reflected highly in the EU's bilateral agreements with energy- abundant states. Evidently, the EU in order to tackle its energy supply vulnerability (i. e. EU is 54% energy dependent on imports) enters into Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with third countries, which is a tendency that is gathering momentum. These agreements set the basis for the bilateral economic relations and the legal framework for the development assistance to the contracting parties. Nonetheless, they do not modify the tariffs in the trade –relations towards the contracting parties. Besides the PCAs, the Deep and Comprehensive Agreements (DCA), which now replace PCAs, upon their expiration, are more elevated commercial agreements. DCAs facilitate the decrease and the elimination of tariffs in the bilateral trade relations, whilst their main target is to create a Free Trade Area (FTA) (Konstantinidou, 2019).

They are varied agreements, which reinforce the partnership to additional areas than trade, such as the sector of economy, security, energy, climate, human rights etc. Indirectly, a DCA constitutes an FTA, which may be transformed into a more merged trade cooperation within a customs union, whereby the involved parties remove tariffs, and they apply a unified external tariff towards a third country, interested in importing their goods into a customs union (Konstantinidou, 2019).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the above-described bilateral framework of these agreements is counter-productive to stimulate a prolific approximation of laws, which, in turn, will assist the establishment and operation of common projects in the energy field.

The externality of Energy Security Policy/ EU external energy policy

EU's Energy Security strategy & Energy Union strategy

Energy Security strategy

The European Energy Security Strategy is an indispensable part of the 2030 policy framework on climate and energy and in full conformity with the European competitiveness and industrial policy objectives (European Commission, 2014).

Confronting energy security issues, in a constantly evolving world, demands adaptability towards change. Therefore, this strategy might require re-adaptations due to the changing global environment and all Member States should speed up to meet the overall energy goals. In specific, the Energy Security strategy outlines the areas, where concrete actions or decisions are vital to tackle energy security issues (European Commission, 2014).

In fact, the European Energy Security Strategy is constructed upon eight pillars, equally beneficial for all Member States, which acknowledge the national energy choices and depict the principle of solidarity. They can be encapsulated in the following: speedy actions to increase the EU's capacity so as to tackle disruptions, empowering the solidarity and risk-management mechanisms in order to protect the strategic infrastructure, moderating energy demand, constructing an effectively -functioning integrated internal market, augmenting energy production in the EU, encouraging new energy technologies, diversifying external supplies and related infrastructure, ameliorating the coordination of national energy policies, while speaking with the same voice in the external energy policy (European Commission, 2014).

As analyzed earlier, after the Ukrainian crisis and the utilization of energy to yield political benefits by Russia, the stimulus for the formulation of EU's Energy Security Strategy, in 2014, and of the Energy Union Strategy, in 2015, was developed, respectively. Diversification of gas supply and gas routes through the Southern Gas Corridor due to the existing energy bonanza in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as, the implementation of LNG import terminals, constitute salient strategies for the European Commission, reflecting its externality footprint, since they are meant to impact energy partnerships with third countries, mostly Russia (Mathioulakis, 2021).

As it is expected, the energy- related infrastructure is equally essential as a multiplier of the energy diversification, namely the Projects of Common Interest (PCI), which interlink the energy systems of the EU Member States and enable the EU to attain its energy and climate goals. Eventually, these critical projects are the result of a high level- investment and of political commitment and they are undertakings of strategic importance (Mathioulakis, 2021).

Energy Union strategy

In February 2015, the European Commission released its Strategy for a European Energy Union, alongside with a communication on electricity network interconnections. Emphasis was placed on chief- priorities, such as, security of energy supply, completion of the internal energy market, continuous de-carbonization, focus on research and innovation in energy fields, as well as promotion of interconnections (Syriopoulos, 2021).

The Energy Union Strategy represents a comprehensive, holistic, and innovative way of coordinating and consolidating the energy policies of the EU and its Member States. The afore- described strategy presupposes the adoption of a new series of EU legislation, yet

many experts express their concern over the existing conflict between energy decarbonization and pipelines' construction, aiming to achieve diversification of the EU's gas supply (Erbach, 2015).

In specific, the European Commission issued its framework strategy for a resilient Energy Union, on 25 February 2015, (COM (2015) 80 final), as a constituent of the Energy Union package, which also includes a communication referring to electricity interconnections (COM (2015) 82, final) and a second one focusing on EU's actions on climate change (COM (2015) 81, final) (Erbach, 2015).

This all-around strategy aspires to achieve the foundational transformation of the EU energy system, to provide a secure supply of competitive and affordable sustainable energy for the consumers. It conceptualizes the Commission's vision of an integrated European energy system through the free flow of energy, whereby EU-wide energy markets match supply with demand, in space and in time (Erbach, 2015).

The strategy is structured around five dimensions and is comprised of fifteen action- points. The first refers to energy security, solidarity, and trust, examines the diversification of energy sources, suppliers and routes and requires more cooperation, a more dynamic European role in the international energy affairs, as well as transparency on the energy- contracts. The second dimension seeks to finalize the integration of the energy market by establishing an EU- wider energy retail market, better trans-border networks and by empowering the existing regulation. The third dimension regarding energy efficiency endeavors to safeguard the energy supply by lessening energy demand (i. e. in buildings and transportation). The decarbonization of the economy coupled with the EU's climate agenda is outlined in the fourth dimension, whereby the EU conceptualizes Europe as an international hub and global leader in renewable energy of next- generation. The fifth dimension, concerning research, innovation, and competitiveness, places its emphasis- among other things- on renewable energy and energy storage, consumer participation through smart grids etc. (Erbach, 2015).

In addition, the action -points incorporated in the strategy encompass new legislation, enforcement of the current legislation, implementation of strategies, support and financing actions by Member States, as well as the usage of external policy instruments (Erbach, 2015).

Notwithstanding the strategy's broad support by the European Parliament, there were many conflicting and diverging views on a series of topics, among which: the climate change (i. e. whether the EU should set higher RES and energy efficiency targets compared to those of

October 2014 EUCO), governance issues regarding the Energy Union (i. e. who would be in the driver's seat Commission or MS), energy security affairs, as well as, the future role of Commission (Syriopoulos, 2021).

Alongside with these topics, additional issues, such as, the inadequate number of the existing interconnections in isolated areas of the Union or the future role of nuclear energy in the energy mix etc. were discussed, while multiple stakeholders (i. e. companies, NGOs, academia etc.) submitted their proposals and viewpoints on specific aspects of the strategy. Eventually, all the actions would be ensured by a dynamic governance process, imposed by the Commission.

Undeniably, for the EU the Energy Union strategy is closely correlated with the Eastern Mediterranean, as it seeks to diversify its supply routes in order to minimize its dependence from a single supplier of natural gas and safeguard optimal supply of energy to all its consumers. The linkage between the Energy Union strategy and the Eastern Mediterranean is depicted in the following aspects: achievement of energy security through solidarity and partnership, establishment of an integrated internal energy market facilitating the free flow of energy through the EU without any barriers, improvement of the energy efficiency entailing fewer emissions, less energy dependence, development and jobs' creation, application of the Paris Agreement promoting climate change and decarbonizing of the economy, maintenance of the EU leadership in the renewable energy and encouragement of low-carbon and clean energy technologies through innovation and research, paving the way for the energy transition (Syriopoulos, 2021).

In conclusion, it becomes evident that the EU aspires constantly to establish a Mediterranean gas hub in the South of Europe in order to enable the diversification of its energy suppliers and routes (i. e. as reflected in the Fourth State of the Energy Union Report/April 2019), in accordance with the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (EU 2018/1999/24. 12.2018). The latter underlines also the significance of attaining the EU's 2030 energy and climate goals and targets, complying with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement (12. 12. 2015), adopted, in 2016 (Syriopoulos, 2021).

Securitization of the energy matters

Security, apart from the military dimension, encompasses political, economic, social and climate aspects, which are perceived as threats, according to Professor, B. Buzan. The broad

spectrum of components, which represents a state, also entails a diverse array of threats, as well as, that a state's strategic objectives are correlated with security threats. Especially the economic threat is a medium, which intends to achieve a goal, rather than jeopardize national security. Geo-economic tools, such as sanctions, tariffs, embargoes etc., are all potential threats to a state's national economy and to its propensity to employ its resources. This variety of threats leads automatically to a variety of strategic objectives, expanding from foreign policy's deterrence towards a state's institutions or from investments' deterrence towards a state's sensitive infrastructure. Without a doubt, the components indicate, also, the association of control over energy flows with national security goals and strategic objectives. In other words, by setting security above the military threats, a fundamental framework is established for energy and energy security as well, which is viewed as a component of a wider security framework (Mathioulakis, 2021).

Hence, the tools of externality in energy security accounting for the alterations in a state's dimensions of power, formulate the so-called securitization of the energy resources and energy flows (Mathioulakis, 2021).

Focusing on the Euro Mediterranean region, it is worth mentioning that energy cooperation holds a prominent position on the EU's policy agenda, within the foreign policy and security items. However, in 2003, in a document released by the European Council, outlining the European security strategy, under the title 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', which was setting the frame for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), energy dependence was only referred as concern of the EU, with no further explanations. In addition, from 2013 to 2015, the securitization agenda (i. e., 2013 Cyber Security Strategy, 2014 Maritime Security Strategy, 2015 European Agenda on Security etc.), multiplied the EU's strategic responses, which presupposed interventions, as well as military competences (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Yet, on July 2015, the Council of the EU adopted its conclusions on the EU Energy Diplomacy Action Plan, which was suggested by the EC and the EEAS, within the CFSP framework. Energy diplomacy was highlighted as a top priority and in a process of securitization the EC had drastically re-evaluated its stance towards the Euro Mediterranean region (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

In specific, the communication a 'Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy', on 25 February 2015, and the European Council Conclusions of 19-20 March 2015, acknowledged the significance of the external dimension

of the Energy Union. The EU Energy Diplomacy Action Plan, which was included, determined the following policy objectives: empowering the strategic guidance through regular high-level engagement, establishing and further promoting energy cooperation and dialogue, supporting efforts to enhance the global architecture and multilateral initiatives, strengthening common messages and energy diplomacy capacities (Council of the European Union, 2015)

Furthermore, in 2016, the EU through the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), tried to confront its weaknesses by adopting the Four- M approach (i. e. multi-dimensional, multi-phased, multilateral, and multi-level) so as to utilize its full potential (i. e. CFSP/CSDP, diplomacy, trade etc.) and tools (i. e. sanctions, funding etc.) at a regional and international level by linking EEAS and Commission's policies (i. e. the Capacity Building in Support of Security-framework and the reform of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

Moreover, the orientation of the EU towards political strategic objectives and security/defense aspects, was further reflected, in 2019, in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defense Fund (EDF), the European Peace Facility and the formulation of the Strategic Compass (i. e. in 2020), indicating a more political EU with a 'hard power' competence (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

In conclusion, as seen above, the EU's energy relations discourse with states in the Eastern Mediterranean region has shifted from the resonance it had on its initial formation, foregoing a deviating course, like the process of securitization, in a form of security- development nexus, whilst, at the same time, the urgency for the completion of the internal energy market (IEM) was perceived as an energy security measure (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

Lastly, it must be highlighted that many scholars believe that the EU was incapable to address the geopolitical challenges and instead of portraying a global leadership in the Eastern Mediterranean, it exhibited a credibility deficit, which tests, till now, the EU's actorness, in two dimensions: external sovereignty and strategic autonomy (Tziampiris & Asderaki, 2021).

The strategic value of the Projects of Common Interest (PCI)

Projects of regional significance are associated mostly with interconnectors or transmission lines. Following the EU's energy strategy, as previously analyzed, a process involving the

Projects of Energy Community Interest (PECI) were introduced, in 2014, ‘simulating’ the discussions on the Projects of Common Interest (PCI), within the Trans-European energy infrastructure regulation guidelines, indicating the priority–areas for labeling the relevant projects (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

More specifically, the Projects of Common Interest (PCI) bear strategic value both for the involved Member States and for the EU, they are based on well – prepared, long- term plans and their materialization are highly dependent on the EU’s funding. In the Eastern Mediterranean most of the PCI projects were associated with gas rather than electricity. In fact, in 2019, things changed, as through the fourth list of PCI, released by the European Commission, involving 149 projects, the majority of the projects (i. e. almost 100) were associated with electricity transmission and storage, juxtaposed to thirty two gas- projects, six smart grid deployment- related, six oil-associated and five cross-border carbon dioxide networks (Rubino, Teresa, Campi, Lenzi, & Ozturk, 2016).

In addition, on 15 December 2021, the Council presidency and the European Parliament’s negotiators achieved a provisional political agreement on the revision of the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation. In brief, the new rules for TEN-E enhance the EU’s climate goals and the green deal (Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2021).

The agreement secures that in the future, no new fossil fuel projects will be funded from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and prioritizes investments in a green and climate-neutral future. In specific, it determines the following: end of reinforcement of new natural gas and oil projects, introduction of obligatory sustainability criteria for all projects, granting a transitional period (until 31 December 2029) for dedicated hydrogen assets converted from natural gas to be utilized to transport or store a blend of hydrogen with natural gas or biomethane, (i. e. with no further EU financial assistance for such projects after 31 December 2027) and lastly permitting Cyprus and Malta to maintain one interconnection (per Member State) under construction or planning that has been granted the PCI status in order to terminate their further isolation through their attachment to the trans-European gas network (Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2021).

Apparently, balancing the role of gas against the urgent need for de-carbonization has created fractions within and between EU institutions and the dispute involves mainly the fifth PCI list (Simon & Taylor, 2021).

Regarding this debate of whether gas is a 'transition fuel' or 'hydrogen ready', the Commission's viewpoint is that some EU states need gas before exiting coal and that, if clean energy cannot be developed on a large scale, fossil gas, will still play a role in the transition from coal to zero-emission electricity (Simon & Taylor, 2021).

Currently, the PCI, which bears important strategic value in the Eastern Mediterranean, is the Euro Asia interconnector, analyzed meticulously in chapter 5. Its strategic value emanates from the fact that it highly reinforces the position of the involved parties (i. e. Cyprus, Greece, Israel) in the subsystem of the Eastern Mediterranean against the Turkish revisionism. For the EU, the specific project is an electricity supply alternative, interconnecting the Eastern Mediterranean region with the European grid. Thus, the natural gas PCI of strategic significance for the EU is associated with its potentiality to diversify the EU's gas imports and diminish its energy-dependency from the Russian gas. Such projects throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the SE -region, include: the 'Krk LNG Terminal', the 'Alexandroupolis FSRU', the 'TAP', 'IGB', 'IBS' and 'East Med' gas pipelines (Mathioulakis, 2021).

In conclusion, the combination of pipelines and LNG terminals in the Eastern Mediterranean and SE, classified as PCI by the Commission, have the capability of delivering more than 25 bcm of non-Russian natural gas to multiple regions in Europe. As these projects display more than 12% of the overall EU gas imports, they bear a strategic and geopolitical value, since by lessening the EU's vulnerability to Russian energy-associated political influence, they are becoming 'shaping-factors', impacting the balance of power in Europe (Mathioulakis, 2021).

The EU and its geopolitical actorness

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region, whereby the EU cannot provide membership, and, at the same time, its member states are not totally aligned, which both ascribe to its policy a lack of geopolitical actorness (Bastian, 2021).

Be that as it may, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in 2019, stated that she aspires EU to become geopolitical, through an interest-oriented applied approach in its foreign policy, especially in regions where the European impact is limited. In fact, the EU's weak geopolitical actorness is evident in multiple disputes, occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean, on a bilateral, regional, or global level (Bastian, 2021).

Concerted political and economic leverage of the Member States, in other words, is the missing link. Since then, the term geopolitical appeared in many official-documents. However, until now there is, still, no concrete definition provided by the Commission. As a result, the term remains ambiguous, reflected also in the EU's inaction in the near neighborhood. It is true though, that the correlation among geopolitics and the EU is a new notion, which encompasses political, economic, security, technological, cultural and energy-related aspects. Given the fact the EU is a sui generis international organization with intergovernmental and supranational- characteristics, it is quite interesting that the Commission has expressed its determination to proceed with a geopolitical approach in its foreign policy (Bastian, 2021).

Such an approach presupposes a deep realization of one's own identity and of the other actors' interests and intentions. Energy is a noteworthy example of geopolitics. Practice has shown that the EU, when providing membership or access to its internal market through an incentive- driven policy, can assert its influence on third countries (i. e. EU enlargement to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) However, in the MENA region EU cannot offer membership and can only impact the region when its Member States have aligned policies and speak with one voice. In February 2021, the High Representative and EU Commission Vice President, Josep Borrell, acknowledged EU's necessity to upgrade its strategy in the region, while issuing the new agenda for the Mediterranean, aspiring to create a green, resilient, digital world. The specific agenda is in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the European Green Deal. Nonetheless, due to the dissimilarities of the countries in the region and the EU's Member States different interests, no consistent approach has been applied, depicted also in the discrepancy among the money spent and the impact of the EU's investment (Bastian, 2021).

Without a doubt the various crises in the region have corroborated EU's incompetence in setting high targets and achieving consensus among its Member States on issues, requiring a common approach. Consequently, EU has not managed to promote stability in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and its impact is restricted. On a bilateral level, for example, the EU has not mediated in the historical dispute between Cyprus and Turkey, namely the Cyprus problem, for three reasons. First, the problem is communicated within the UN frame, in alignment with the international law and UNCLOS. Secondly, Cyprus and Greece are Member States, and are likely to receive the EU's support, while Turkey is not. Lastly, there is disaccord between France and Germany on how to confront Turkey. On a regional level, the discoveries of new gas reserves have created geopolitical frictions in the region, whilst

the new energy and military cooperative frameworks that emerged, have transformed profoundly the subsystem of the Eastern Mediterranean. On a global level, the EU's role is further perplexed due to various crises (i. e. Turkey's revisionism, war in Libya and Syria etc.) and it has been proven extremely difficult to exert its impact. In conclusion, for the EU to acquire a geopolitical role, a common political perspective is needed, as well as, an integrated approach, with no unilateral action from its Member States, to be projected in the Eastern Mediterranean (Bastian, 2021).

The new agenda 2030

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was initiated, on 25-27 September 2015, by the UN Summit, in New York, and is aimed at ending poverty in all its forms. The UN 2030 Agenda envisages a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality, and non-discrimination. In the same vein, sustainable development is at the core of the EU. Each EU initiative seeks to enhance citizens' quality of life, on a healthier planet, for a sustainable future. Among many global challenges, the EU's top priority sustainability- challenge for the upcoming decade is to disassociate its economic development from environmental degradation and to reduce the social inequalities. In addition, the EU is pledged to fight for a green and inclusive economy, setting high standards for sustainability transition. In this context, the EU and its Member States are directed towards the delivery of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in Europe and across the world, having positioned the SDGs at the very heart of EU's international cooperation (European Commission, 2021)

To this end, a shared responsibility and common action is vital from all actors, including public authorities, civil society, the private sector, academia, and all citizens (European Commission, 2021).

As expected, the EU is monitoring the results based on SDGs and the last five-year EU has made considerable progress towards almost all goals. However, further efforts are required to fully deliver the sustainability goals. In particular, the EU's policy places importance on circular economy, food production, clean -energy with emphasis on energy efficiency buildings and climate neutral transport, as well as, on a socially fair –transition. Furthermore, the EU's key facilitators for sustainability transition include education, science, technology, research and innovation, finance and taxation, responsible business conduct, rules- based trade, governance, and policy coherence at all levels, as well as EU's mediation as trailblazer in the sustainability transition (European Commission, 2021).

Regarding the EU's global engagement, it must be mentioned that it cooperates with multiple stakeholders worldwide (i. e. international organizations, private sector, civil society etc.) Especially after 2017, the new European consensus on development has coordinated all the planned, developmental activities of the European institutions and the Member States with the 2030 agenda, while assessing the possible impact on developing states, through the EU Champions policy coherence for development (EuropeanCommission, 2021).

In specific, the EU grants euro 44 billion, through the European External Investment Plan, presumed to bring about 10 times that amount in sustainable investments, focusing on the EU neighborhood and Africa. Besides that, it provided euro 75, 7 billion through the Official Development Assistance, in 2017, to increase the assistance to at least 0, 7 of the EU's gross national income. Accordingly, the EU and its Member States offered euro 20, 4 billion, in 2017, through the European Investment Bank to assist developing countries combat climate change. Lastly, as the main export market for the least developed countries, the EU's exports of goods have increased to 25%, in 2016, succeeded by China European Commission, 2021).

Finally, the EU's involvement on the ground is comprised of various programs, which support education, peace building and conflict prevention, employability, trade, investments, business- climate, human rights etc. in various parts of the globe (i. e. Africa etc.) (EuropeanCommission, 2021).

Recent relaunch of Euro Mediterranean regional energy community

Toward a Euro Mediterranean Energy Roadmap via a credible narrative

The initial idea about a Mediterranean Energy Community can be traced back, in March 2011, when a relevant communication entitled 'A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity' was released, indicating the possible extension of the Energy Community Treaty to the Mediterranean southern partners (Escribano, 2016).

The proposition was to enhance Euro- Mediterranean energy integration as a stimulus of growth and prosperity in the wider region. It was viewed as a form of Europeanization of the energy sector, since the engaged countries were obliged to conform to the energy- associated *acquis communautaire*. The extension of the Energy Community Treaty towards the Mediterranean Southern partners was interpreted as a form of compliance to the EU *acquis* or as something like the EU-North Africa Energy Community, constructed upon an incremental and specified approach. As a result, pathways towards a Mediterranean Energy Community

require divergence at two levels: from other EU external energy initiatives (i. e. Energy Community Treaty, Energy Charter, Mediterranean Solar Plan, etc.), by country and sector (Escribano, 2016).

In this context, any Mediterranean Energy Community should take into consideration a series of factors, such as asymmetries and relevance. For example, from states dependent on natural gas exports it is asymmetrical to require full compatibility, since the hydrocarbon domain is pivotal to the gas and oil- producers. Non- producers have the potential to progress, as well, as a sector-by-sector approach facilitates the development of the renewables, a sector open to institutional innovation. In addition, such a roadmap should tackle energy poverty, facilitate energy development, upgrade local energy resources as means of economic growth, assist technical cooperation, enable technological transfers, as well as provide access to the European markets so as to ensure the so-called shared prosperity. Highly correlated with energy security are also sustainability and constructive energy- resource management in the region. The EU implementing its soft power towards global energy, as a normative player, aspires to transfer its energy model to the countries in the neighborhood effectively. By promoting successfully, for example, sustainability, EU projects its external energy governance. In the same vein, by encouraging de-carbonization, EU further enhances its energy- resources' management model, which is based on the fair redistribution of the profits, deriving from the energy resources for the benefit of all stakeholders. It comes without saying that the energy -resource governance should be extended also on the renewable energy, which carries developmental and economic value (Escribano, 2016).

Based on the, it is obvious that a roadmap towards a Mediterranean Energy Community should be structured upon three basic pillars: physical integration, regulatory convergence, and normative deployment. Besides the physical integration and regulatory convergence, a normative attractiveness of the EU's energy narratives to Mediterranean neighbors is also needed (i. e. on individual, sector, or country level) A flexible EU energy- narrative towards the Eastern Mediterranean neighborhood should, therefore, consider multiple variables. Clearly, the EU's energy discourse should be primarily based on cooperative schemes, as vehicles of attaining political, economic, and operational goals. Besides energy cooperation, promotion of energy efficiency and energy security in the region should be built upon good energy governance, which is of paramount importance and should be incorporated into the credible narrative of the Euro-Mediterranean energy interdependence (Escribano, 2016).

Furthermore, geopolitical and geo-economic energy- related aspects and challenges, which are occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean, should be taken into consideration, as well. With respect to that, it could be stated, for example, that the Eastern Mediterranean, over the years, due to various events, has been enlarged as a subsystem, extending beyond the shores of the Middle East and North Africa, as depicted for instance, in the Syrian war, the conflict in Iraq, the concerns of the Gulf countries, the turmoil in Libya, the Sahel, Nigeria, the Islamic state etc. Moreover, various energy- related events (i. e. disruptions or attacks in energy infrastructure) or revolutions (i. e. in Tunisia, Egypt etc.) in the region, were reflective of the strategic significance of the region for the EU, as an alternative energy supply. However, it must be underlined that renewable energy development in the Eastern Mediterranean could have positive prospects and introduce a better energy interdependency framework between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors (Escribano, 2016).

In conclusion, the energy sector in the Eastern Mediterranean should adjust to the new geopolitical realities, which request also a new Mediterranean strategy and a share strategic challenge, on the EU's part, towards energy security concerns, enlarging its geopolitical borders into a wider Mediterranean space with more natural resources. Lastly, the success of the Mediterranean energy policies will be dependable on the quality of the energy governance, which could promote development and growth, through investments and upgrade profoundly the entire region.

1.3. The Cyprus' problem & the Hydrocarbons issue

The Republic of Cyprus, a state under occupation, is internationally recognized as the legitimate government of Cyprus and is a member of the European Union. Turkey refuses to recognize the Republic of Cyprus and instead recognizes the pseudo-state Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The island has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded its northern third. Turkey maintains, till now, up to 40, 000 troops in Northern Cyprus (Ratner, 2016).

Repeated UN- led peace talks to unify the island under one equally administered federation between Turkish Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus accelerated significantly, since 2015, yet they failed to yield results. The latest round of negotiations, in July 2017, at the Swiss resort of Crans -Montana ended inconclusively. In this context, Turkey strongly opposes to the development of the Cypriot natural gas resources unless the Turkish Cypriots will have a share in the financial benefits or until a resolution of the Cyprus problem is achieved (Ratner, 2016).

The international community was highly involved with Cyprus' issue, -despite its small size-, not only because of the peculiar relationship that was formed between the two communities but also because the Cyprus' problem impacts the Greek- Turkish relations (Λιάκουρας, 2007).

Certainly, the Cyprus' problem is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon in the international relations and one of its aspects, the 'raw material' geopolitical factor, namely, the hydrocarbons, which trigger the gas dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean, is an important, new element of the Cyprus issue (Grishin, 2016).

As expected, the engaged parties in the Cyprus problem approach the issue from different perspectives, which in turn affects their positions on the hydrocarbon's exploration and exploitation (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

The Greek Cypriot position

The Greek Cypriot position regarding the hydrocarbon's exploration is discerned by three features. The first is related to the rights of exploration, the second is associated with the distribution of revenues from the hydrocarbons exploitation and the third has to do with whether any of these issues should be discussed within the context of the UN-facilitated talks, aiming to resolve the Cyprus problem. It is worth mentioning that position(s) of the involved sides on the first aspect have been firmer, compared with the second, while position(s) on the third aspect are clearly non-negotiable.

Greek Cypriot position on exploration

Focusing on the exploration, the Greek Cypriots assert their arguments in compliance with the international law. Firstly, they appear 'privileged' since the international community recognizes the Republic of Cyprus as the legitimate government and the only state on the island. In addition, Cyprus highlights the importance of the respect of the international law, based on the UN Charter, which constitutes for a small state, like Cyprus, with no considerable military power, a protective shield. After 2013, Cyprus commenced its exploration strategy for potential extraction of hydrocarbons within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Prior to that Cyprus had signed the relevant delimitation agreements with three adjacent states, in accordance with the international law and the UNCLOS. In other words, their core position is that since the internationally recognized government of Cyprus is represented by the Greek Cypriots, they are entitled to explore the natural resources, if, this is

in alignment with the international law. In fact, this argument has fully received the support of the international community, as well (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Greek Cypriot position on revenue distribution

The central argument on how potential revenues from the hydrocarbons could be distributed was primarily less well-defined. According to the Greek- Cypriot argument, the efforts for the discovery of new natural gas findings are expected to be beneficial both for Europe and for the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. In addition, feasible gas discovery and extraction could act as a catalyst for both communities to speed- up the procedures towards a just, viable and functional solution to the Cyprus' problem, through the existing natural wealth, which could enhance peace, security, and prosperity (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Be that as it may, some remarks made by the Cypriot President Christofias, in the past, (2012) about possible exploitation of the natural resources 'regardless of the circumstances', 'even if there is no political settlement for the reunification of the island', were heavily criticized and henceforth there has been no suggestion that revenues should be shared before a solution (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

A substantial part of gas -revenues is planned to be deposited in a fund for the next generations, yet no share of revenues is possible prior to the settlement of the Cyprus' problem. The natural resources will be, therefore, shared wealth for all Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, and Turkish Cypriots, only in a future reunified island.

Greek Cypriot position on discussing the issue in the negotiations

At first, it must be stressed that the Greek Cypriots acknowledge that the Turkish Cypriots can participate in the share of profits, deriving from the hydrocarbon's exploration. In fact, they have confirmed that natural resources will be a federal, shared capability in a united Cyprus. Be that as it may, the Greek Cypriots have clarified that any other discussion regarding the hydrocarbons, (i. e. how revenue might be shared in a future unified -island, or joint management of exploration or future exploitation), is not a subject under negotiations or for any kind of UN role (i. e. mediation) (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Since 2011, it was made explicit that exploration and exploitation of the natural resources constitutes a sovereign right of the Republic of Cyprus, which is not negotiable. Notwithstanding the acceptance by the Greek Cypriots of the Turkish Cypriots' right to

participate into the share of the natural wealth after a solution of the Cyprus' issue, they reject the idea that the Turkish Cypriots will have a say on how a sovereign state like Cyprus, should govern its resources, prior or devoid of a solution. Based on the, it becomes evident why the Greek Cypriots avoid commenting the Turkish Cypriot positions or proposals on the hydrocarbons (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Furthermore, the Greek Cypriots' stance is explained also by the fact that such a discussion could act as a stimulus for the Turkish Cypriots towards a solution.

The Turkish Cypriot position

The Turkish Cypriots' central position is built around their objections to all maritime zones-related actions of Cyprus (i. e. delimitation agreements, exploration licenses, off- shore drilling activities etc.), since they entail sovereign rights being exercised on an international level, where both communities of the Republic of Cyprus (i. e. 1960) are equal (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

From the Turkish Cypriot point of view, such activities totally disregard them, and they are considered as *fait accompli*, prior to a solution of the Cyprus' problem. According to the Turkish Cypriot perspective, any hydrocarbons- related initiatives should be undertaken only after a solution is achieved and a joint government of the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots (i. e. a bicomunal federal authority) is formed to pursue such operations. In addition, the Turkish Cypriots assert that unilateral actions in this area, should be postponed, otherwise both parties should collaborate via an interim bicomunal federal body, set up with this specific mission, which will determine all revenues'- related issues. It becomes apparent that the Turkish Cypriots, through the allocation of the natural resources' wealth, they are primarily interested in the sharing of the sovereignty. The Turkish Cypriots demand recognition by the Greek Cypriots and by the international community with respect to their equal rights in the maritime jurisdiction, the hydrocarbons' exploration, and the wealth distribution, despite the absence of a negotiated solution to the problem (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Thus, for the Turkish Cypriots money from gas- revenues, through a heritage fund, is not the real issue but the Greek Cypriots' exercise of the exploration right, unilaterally. In fact, the Turkish- Cypriot objections date back to 2000, when the Greek Cypriots, representing the Republic of Cyprus, commenced negotiations with Egypt and Syria for maritime delimitation regarding offshore hydrocarbons' development (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

According to their perspective, the Greek Cypriots ignored the Turkish Cypriots, their ‘constitutional partners’ instead of acting in collaboration, and hence the TRNC will defend its rights, as it has a say in all matters, including the natural resources on sea and the land. As mentioned, the Turkish Cypriot side did not recognize the delimitation agreements signed between Cyprus –Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel, based on the argument that the maritime jurisdiction issue constitutes a topic of negotiations for a solution to the Cyprus’ problem and expressed their opposition strongly, with relevant letters to the UN, even from 2009, characterizing the government of the Republic of Cyprus as null and void, whose actions subverted the stability of the island. Accordingly, the Turkish Cypriot side accused, also, the EU and the international community of supporting the Greek Cypriot hydrocarbons- related operations- since from 2004- they openly recognize the Greek Cypriots as being the representatives of the island. However, the Turkish Cypriots underlined that the continuing UN -led talks corroborate the fact that the Turkish Cypriot side is just as essential as the political determination of the Greek Cypriots and that the future of the island cannot be defined only by the Greek Cypriots. Furthermore, the Turkish Cypriot part highlighted that the Greek Cypriot actions are cancelling any possible convergence among the two sides, including the post- solution prospect of managing the island’s natural wealth under the authority of a federal government. From the Turkish Cypriot standpoint, the Turkish Cypriot side was obliged to defend its rights by undertaking reciprocal actions, after the rejection of their proposal issued, in 2011, (i. e. suspension of the hydrocarbon- related operations or collaboration on the share of revenues) (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

As a result, the Turkish Cypriot side implemented the principle of reciprocity, signifying a shift of the Turkish Cypriot-Turkish policy on the issue. Prior to that, the Turkish- Cypriots reactions were reflected in warnings and protests, capitalizing the assistance of Turkey, as a guarantor state. Hence, the Turkish Cypriots, in collaboration with Turkey, started their own hydrocarbons exploration plans, after 2012. In fact, during that period, a Turkish Cypriot proposal was presented to the UNSG concerning the hydrocarbons operations off the coastlines of the island of Cyprus (both North and South), which included the following points: the UNSG would select a facilitator as head of a new bicomunal technical committee, comprised of members appointed by the two sides, whose mission would be to receive the official consent of the two parties regarding the international treaties and the unilaterally promulgated licenses of both sides, to define jointly the resource- related shares and to administer the relevant account, containing the overall revenues (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

The latter would be utilized firstly via financing tools and provisions towards a solution of the Cyprus' problem, as well as, for non- military causes. Finally, the proposal recommended, also, the construction of a pipeline via Turkey, for the delivery of the resources, a beneficial and feasible option for all stakeholders, including the European markets, as opposed to other unproductive transport alternatives (i. e. the LNG plant or pipeline via Greece).

The Turkish position

The Turkish core position is comprised of two arguments concerning the Greek Cypriot hydrocarbons exploration, which are associated directly with the Cyprus' issue. Firstly, it rejects all actions of the Greek Cypriot Administration in the direction of unilaterally framing maritime jurisdiction zones, combined with providing permissions to offshore licenses to international oil companies (IOCs) for undertaking offshore hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Secondly, as analyzed in chapter 2, the Turkish claims regarding the continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean contradict with the EEZs promulgated by the Greek Cypriots, since Turkey, as discussed in chapter 2, does not recognize the Greek Cypriot government as being legitimate (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Being on the same wavelength with the Turkish Cypriots on this issue, it asserts that there is no single authority by the law, which is legitimized to represent both communities. In addition, according to Turkey, the Turkish Cypriots or the TRNC possess equal rights in the maritime zones of the island, which means automatically that the delimitation agreements between Cyprus- Egypt, Lebanon and Israel are nullified since the Turkish Cypriot side is ignored. Accordingly, the legal framework of the hydrocarbon operations is reprobated by the Turkish side, as the Turkish Cypriots' rights and interests are being disregarded in both the maritime zones and the island's natural wealth. Moreover, the Turkish position coincides with that of the Turkish Cypriot arguing that the Greek Cypriot activities are conflicting with the UN- led talks for the settlement of the Cyprus' issue. These unacceptable actions generate *fait accompli* and perplex negotiations, while putting the Turkish Cypriot side in a disadvantageous position, according to the Turkish viewpoint. Such actions from the Greek Cypriot -part, impact negatively the Cyprus' issue and must be suspended, stresses the Turkish side. It must be reminded, also, that, in 2010, after the conclusion of the delimitation agreement between Cyprus and Israel, Turkey, through a press –release, criticized heavily the Greek Cypriot stance, associating these agreements with the sovereignty issue, which in turn jeopardize the settlement procedure. Similarly, Turkey opposed, also, to Cyprus' granting a

license to the US-based Noble Energy to conduct drilling- operations in block 12, which led to the signing of a delimitation agreement between Turkey and TRNC, as explained in chapter 2b (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

This agreement, in fact, initiated the Turkish-Turkish Cypriot collaborative strategy, which was based on reciprocal steps as a form of confrontation towards the Greek Cypriot hydrocarbon – related activities. However, in 2012, Turkey announced that the two communities could benefit jointly from the natural wealth of the island, which could be exploited with common consent and determination. Turkey clarified, also, that this issue could be examined after a solution to the Cyprus’ problem, or it could be put for discussion under the auspices of the UNSG to co-configure the future development of the exploration and exploitation activities around the island (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

The position was reiterated by Turkey in another statement, during Cyprus’ granting of the second tender, whereby it stated that both sides could determine how to proceed with the exploitation of the off- shore natural resources. At this point, it must be reminded that the Greek Cypriot hydrocarbon- operations are denounced by Turkey, also, due to its core- position regarding its maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. As described in chapter 2, Turkey does not accept the Cyprus – Egypt delimitation agreement (2003), on the argument that it defies the Turkish continental shelf in the area to the west of longitude 32° 12’ 18” (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

According to the Turkish claims, its continental shelf covers the Cypriot EEZ in the west, including part of the Cypriot EEZ in the island’s south-west. In specific, the Turkish assertion overruns with areas within the Cypriot EEZs’ blocks, which were determined, in the context of the granting of international tenders’ licensing, for blocks 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Hence, ever since the Turkish stance changed and became more aggressive towards the exploration activities of the Greek Cypriots, also, in other areas, which pertain jointly to the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. Undoubtedly, the issue of overlapping Turkish affirmations is correlated with the Cyprus’ issue, which is difficult to be resolved (i. e. through negotiations, or an international adjudicative mechanism or tribunal), as long as, Turkey insists on adopting such positions and not recognizing the Greek Cypriot government as the legitimate one, representing the whole island (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Responses of the international actors

As expected, the positions of the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey are not supported by the major actors of the international community.

The response of the UN secretariat

The UN position should be discerned from the position of the UN Secretariat, namely, the Secretary-General and his staff, as well as, the UN Security Council (UNSC), comprised of five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US (the P5) (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Specifically, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, in his report on the peacekeeping force in Cyprus, UNFICYP, which was circulated, on 9 January 2022, as an official document of the UN Security Council, underlined the following, with respect to the natural resources of the island: ‘I am concerned about the rising tensions in and around Cyprus and the broader Eastern Mediterranean region. I stress again that natural resources in and around Cyprus should benefit both communities and constitute a strong incentive for the parties to find a mutually acceptable and durable solution to the Cyprus problem. I urge restraint by all parties and call for serious effort to be made to defuse tensions’ (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

Within this context, the UNSG emphasized also the supportive role of the two United Nations missions on the ground in this regard and their mutually reinforcing activities, while he underscored the importance of all Cypriots engaging actively in shaping the future of the island and called on the guarantor powers to do their utmost to support efforts to ultimately bring the Cyprus’ issue to a settlement and bring peace and prosperity to all Cypriots (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

In addition, the Security Council expressed its support for greater civic engagement and trust-building and urged the leaders to encourage contact and cooperation more explicitly between the two communities. This means that the leaders should aim for a more inclusive peace process, as per recent international best practice and should involve underrepresented groups, including women, minorities, youth, and persons with disabilities, in discussions pertaining to the Cyprus’ problem and in any resumed peace talks (United Nations Security Council, 2021)

Moreover, during the closed consultations, held on 18 January 2022, among the UN Security Council members regarding the SG’s, A. Guterres reports, Colin Stewart, Special

Representative of the UN SG in Cyprus, briefed them on his mission. Specifically, he stressed that the focus of the mission now is to build trust and respect between the two communities and to create a better environment for peace building on the island. On their part, the UNSG members, recognized the challenging situation on the ground, as described in the reports, and called for respect and adherence to all relevant Security Council resolutions and decisions, while uttering their readiness to engage in negotiations on the Security Council resolution to extend the mandate of UNFICYP (Kyriakou, 2022).

It must be reminded, though, in a sort of a small parenthesis, that in October 2014, after the hydrocarbon exploration bottleneck, which was the first round of the so- called NAVTEX crisis, in an attempt to attract the attention back to the negotiation table that had been overshadowed by the natural gas barrier, UN Special Adviser, Espen Barth Eide, came up with a new proposal for the establishment of an advisory panel, responsible for the management of the technical aspects of natural gas exploration activities. This would act as a double-sided process, parallel to the peace negotiations, but the Greek Cypriot leadership, as expected, rejected to discuss the hydrocarbon exploration issue as part of the negotiation procedure. The rest of 2015 and 2016 witnessed an extensive period of negotiations between the two leaders, Anastasiades and Akinci, and their technical committees. On numerous occasions UN representatives stated that UN good offices could not go on forever and this was a very important stage for the Cyprus' problem, since by the end of 2016, serious developments were to be followed. In the post NAVTEX crisis environment, coupled with the unsuccessful ENI KOGAS drillings and with TOTAL having second thoughts regarding its exploration plans, from May 2015 to March 2016, the Republic of Cyprus kept a low profile in the hydrocarbon exploration activities (Kahveci, 2019).

After the first (7-11 November 2016) and the second (20-21 November 2016) Mont Pelerin meeting, which ended with a UN's statement declaring that the leaders could not achieve convergences on territorial adjustments, the SG Special Adviser on Cyprus announced that the two leaders agreed to go back to Switzerland, on 9 January, to present their respective maps, on 11 January, during the long awaited international conference, in which the leaders of the Greek –Cypriots and Turkish- Cypriots, as well as, the representatives of the Guarantor Powers, would meet. The international conference in Geneva, which was held, on 12 January 2017, did not bring any improvement. March 2017 was marked by extensive efforts by the UN to bring the parties back to the negotiation- table. Yet, these attempts were overshadowed by the continuation of the Greek- Cypriot administration's hydrocarbon program, in line with the timeline of the third licensing round. (Kahveci, 2019)

Finally, the International Conference on Cyprus, which followed, on 28 June 2017, in Crans-Montana, came to a standstill mainly due to Turkey's insistence on the permanent presence of military troops in Cyprus and on maintaining its invasive rights (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

In general, it must be highlighted that both communities acknowledge that the natural wealth of the island should be federal. In fact, a National Hydrocarbons Fund was adopted by the Cypriot parliament, in 2019. Be that as it may, concerning any discussions of the hydrocarbon's topic under the UN (i. e. the good offices mission, enabling the negotiations on a settlement of the Cyprus' problem), it is clarified that the issue must be kept away from the negotiations (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

This position derives, also, from the UN general policy regarding the disputes between member states concerning the boundaries. Even though protests, complaints and letters are accepted by the UN from member states on boundary- disputes, its policy prevents the organization from commenting on them. In fact, the UN can function as an arbiter in a dispute but only on the basis of a joint request. Consequently, since exploration –issues are associated with boundary -dispute, the UN is unwilling to interfere. In addition, the UN as an organization has formulated its dispute- related policy based on the received proposals by the engaged sides, calling for UN facilitation. (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

In other words, the UN could act as a mediator only after being requested to do so by both communities. Furthermore, UN is not engaged in the hydrocarbons issue due to the fact the subjects, expected to be discussed under the UK-led talks are usually agreed by both parties after long- lasting consultations and then they enter the agenda. Finally, the fear that this specific subject could deflect and hinder the negotiations is an additional reason for not including the hydrocarbons on the discussion table. Unsurprisingly, the sharing of future revenues is, also, off the agenda since the future federal government would have to tackle with this issue. In view of the above, it becomes clear that the UN is expected to stick to its position and policy and any intervention on its part will require a joint request by both communities. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Greek Cypriots reject any discussion concerning the hydrocarbons issue. In conclusion, due to the combination of these two factors and the general sentiment about the hydrocarbons, it is expected that the issue will be off the agenda for some time, which will perplex, even more, the future settlement of the Cyprus' problem.

Responses of the UN security Council- P5

As previously mentioned, the UNSC permanent members (P5) have expressed individually their positions on the hydrocarbons issue. Apart from China, which evades commenting on other states' disputes, the other members of the P5 have supported Cyprus' right for exploration (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Russia

Russia constitutes Cyprus' closest ally in the UNSC, which fully adopts the Greek Cypriot approach, conforming to the international law, without making any reference to the revenue-sharing. Russia affirms that if Cyprus is planning to undertake mineral exploration and production activities within the areas of its EEZs, which are delimited with the opposite states based on international treaties, such activities are in full compliance with the international law and the scope of sovereign rights available to the Republic of Cyprus, as determined by the UNCLOS (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

The United States

The US stance on the hydrocarbons issue is associated with the American interests, regarding the protection of its drilling companies, as well as, with the sharing of the future revenues after the solution to the Cyprus' problem. Even from 2011, the US recognized the Cypriot right for exploration of its resources within its EEZs, while highlighting that both sides should benefit from the future shared revenues, achieved through a relevant agreement (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

At first, the US demonstrated its support for UN-led mediation concerning the revenue-allocation, as soon as, the relevant proposal was presented by the Turkish Cypriots. Specifically, the US assessed the Turkish Cypriot proposition as positive for the two communities, since it could not only promote dialogue but also a UN's mediation on future revenue-sharing, entailing less frictions and a future settlement of the Cyprus' problem (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Be that as it may, the US did not reiterate its supportive stance towards the aforementioned issue due to the fact the Greek Cypriots expressed their opposition, while the UN demanded a joint-request by both communities. At this point, it must be underlined, though, that the US, occasionally, demonstrates its concern and hopes that all the involved parties could reach an agreement on the revenues-sharing, which could either facilitate a solution to the Cyprus'

problem or cause further division, since energy –related activities represent opportunities but also risks, instigating disputes. In conclusion, the US appears to be not agreeable with the lack of discussions regarding this issue and views the natural wealth as a catalyst and facilitator for peace in the entire Eastern Mediterranean.

The United Kingdom

Even from 2011, the UK expounded its position, through a specific statement of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, underlying their support and solidarity to the Republic of Cyprus in exercising its sovereign rights to explore and exploit its natural wealth within its EEZs, based on the international law and the UNCLOS. (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013)

The United Kingdoms' position became even more explicit after 2011, as the Commonwealth reiterated, on numerous occasions, its full support towards the Cypriot rights exercised within its EEZs (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

From the UK's standpoint, Cyprus has the right to circumscribe its EEZs and exploit its resources, yet, a moderate approach must be adopted, which will facilitate the future sharing of the revenues, deriving from the hydrocarbons, for the common benefit.

France

France, in alignment with the European Commission, exhibits the following position regarding gas-related rights in the maritime zones of the Mediterranean: 'the Member States have the sovereign right to sign bilateral agreements with third-party countries, in accordance with the Community acquis of the European Union and international law, including the UNCLOS' (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Consequently, within the framework of international law, France, recognizes only the Republic of Cyprus and believes that disagreements can be resolved, solely, through dialogue.

Response of EU institutions

The EU empathizes and stands with Cyprus towards its exploration right, as reflected in the conclusions of the European Council, even from 2011. The Council often underscores that Turkey must commit itself unequivocally to good neighborly relations and to a peaceful

conflict- settlement, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, appealing, if necessary, to the International Court of Justice (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

The EU expresses its serious concern and denounces any sort of threat or action against a Member State, or source of friction or operations, which could harm good neighborly relations and the peaceful conflict- resolution. In addition, the EU underscores the sovereign rights of the EU Member States, which include, also, concluding bilateral agreements to explore and exploit their natural resources, in accordance with the EU acquis, the international law and the UNCLOS (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Apparently, it is concluded that the European Union and its Member States recognize only the Republic of Cyprus on the island, while reiterating the need of seeking normalization of relations between Turkey and all EU Member States, including the Republic of Cyprus (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Summary of the international community's response

The international community supports Cyprus towards its right for exploration, yet, it has clarified (i. e. except for Russia) that feasible benefits from such activities should be shared (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

For the time being, no excessive pressure is being employed over the Greek Cypriots to discuss the issue, despite the efforts undertaken by the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, to resume the peace talks and invigorate the confidence building measures (CBM). Nonetheless, the US, which currently has a US-based drilling company in the Cypriot EEZ, seems to be perplexed about the protracted ramifications of the Cyprus' problem un -settlement on the hydrocarbons issue (Gurel, Mullen, & Tzimitras, 2013).

Be that as it may, eleven years after the discovery of the first confirmed deposits of the Aphrodite field, the situation remains still unchanged and Turkey has proceeded with five illegal drillings. Moreover, the efforts between, 2014-2017, to utilize natural gas as a political tool for further cooperation, as well as its subsequent instrumentalization as a bargaining chip were unsuccessful, as the Turkish narrative about the exclusion of the Turkish- Cypriots from gas-related decisions, prevailed. Hence, Cyprus' issue remains, still, an unresolved problem of international relations, entering irrevocably into a new difficult phase, as reflected in the recent drilling activities of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation, (TPAO) not far away from Limassol or in the maps of Cagatay Erciyes, or even through Turkey's gun-boat diplomacy,

despite the presence of emblematic aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean Sea or the giant drilling companies in the Cypriot EEZ. Thus, the energy -related aspects of the Cyprus' problem concern not only Cyprus but also the entire subsystem of the Eastern Mediterranean and present multiple implications and challenges, especially, for the Nicosia –Athens axis, whose diplomatic presence in the region remains extremely active. (TO BHMA, n.d.)

Without the shadow of any doubt, the Eastern Mediterranean region has, indeed, been at the heart of significant conflicts and geostrategic developments due to its central geostrategic location at the crossroads of three continents and of major civilizations and religions. In light of the above, it is understandable, in all respects, that today more than ever this regional subsystem can be transformed into a zone of stability, growth and prosperity, if all parties acknowledge that the common goal is to work together in order to create conditions fostering regional maritime and energy security.

Chapter 2. Cyprus within the context of regional security: the case of revisionist Turkey: its provocations & assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean region can be viewed as a regional sub-system, given the number of the states engaged, their geographic proximity and their interactions. However, the regional sub system notion was questioned by Professor Buzan and was replaced by the more inclusive term ‘security complex’, encompassing the regional sub system, as well, denoting a group of states, whose security concerns are interlinked with their national securities (Buzan, 1990), as reflected in the so- called ‘security independence’ traceable in security complexes’ clusters (Buzan & Waever, 2003,) By acknowledging these indivisible relational schemes and the regional security dynamics, it becomes evident that the Eastern Mediterranean is a distinctive geopolitical region with particular characteristics (Goren, et al., 2018).

The security arrangements interpreted as ‘security regime’ are norms and decision- making settings, which are not established via official agreements or contracts but are based on common interstate goals and interests. As analyzed in chapter 4, the security regime- related agenda, through the enhanced cooperative frameworks in the Eastern Mediterranean, focuses on various issues, among which: energy. In other words, this tacit security regime existing in the Eastern Mediterranean’s sub-system/security complex is achieved through bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral cooperative schemes, where Cyprus is a major player and is of inclusive and non- discriminatory character (Goren, et al., 2018).

Whether the Levant states could participate into political transformations, which would, in turn, de-securitize the bilateral and regional relations, facilitating energy trade agreements, it is yet to be discovered. Given the fact that no prior, positive energy- induced dispute- settlement examples exist, it is believed that long standing conflicts, such as the Cyprus’ issue, are unlikely to be overcome, since natural resources perplex the regional relations and multiply security concerns (Adamides & Christou, 2015).

Be that as it may, some academics are of the opinion that energy exploitation can lead to de- securitization and dispute settlement. Eventually, energy has a spill- over effect and impacts highly the degree of interstate securitization, positively and negatively, on cross- sectoral level, as seen clearly in the case of Cyprus (Adamides & Christou, 2015).

Cyprus is circumscribed by the regional perspective of the Eastern Mediterranean, either in the form of conflict or cooperation and as interstates' strategic interests are defined by the expansive dynamics of securities and insecurities, it is pivotal for Cyprus to confront the new security challenges. Within this context, regional cooperative schemes, issues related to sovereignty, delimitations, international law, energy security and relevant policies, domestic policy, as well as other topics of the regional agenda (i. e. terrorism, migration etc.) are all segments closely interlinked with Cyprus' security (Tziarras, 2017).

At this point, it is therefore important to examine meticulously Turkey, which constitutes a 'divergent player' in the above –described regional sub system of the Eastern Mediterranean and a constant security threat for Cyprus.

It is commonplace that since the accession of AKP party to power, in 2002, the Turkish foreign policy has been transformed significantly, showcasing paradoxes, limitations and dilemmas, exemplified in various forms, such as, deterioration of relations with its neighbors, friction with its allies in the West, stalemate of its EU accession, its conceptualization as a 'trading state' etc. The neo-liberal, increasingly assertive foreign policy, under the AKP era, reflects, clearly, the serious structural problems of the Turkish economy and its unsuccessful development model. After the implementation of 'the strategic depth' doctrine, perceived by A. Davutoğlu, which portrayed Turkey as a leading actor in the international politics, as well as, a pivotal regional power, which aimed to 'zero problems' with its neighbors through a proactive- diplomacy and led to the prioritization of an aggressive economic engagement in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, things radically changed. In specific, the Arab uprisings and the civil war in Syria have weakened the Turkish political vision and caused a shift to a more aggressive policy. In view of the Turkish economic pathogenicity combined with the decline of the EU prospect, in terms of attractiveness, had significant ramifications on its foreign policy strategy, not only on the Cyprus' issue but also in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.

Undoubtedly, the last decade Turkey has experienced major foreign and security policy changes and its domestic problems are inextricably correlated to its foreign policy choices. Due to Ankara's securitization of its foreign policies, its relations with the West have become dysfunctional, as reflected in the U. S and EU's sanctions. Nonetheless, since November 2020, R. T. Erdogan seeks to re-approach the West, following a normalization scheme (Gurer & Bastian, 2021).

In the case of the EU, for example, a sort of ‘strategic patience’ has been exhibited towards Turkey in the hope of minimizing its aggressiveness. In addition, Turkey tries to open a new chapter with the Middle East countries, taking advantage of the political Islam, by displaying ‘a charm offensive’ towards Israel, the Gulf -states and the US, as well (Gurer & Bastian, 2021).

The problem with the Turkish narrative, though, is that there is no evidence that Ankara wishes better ties and, likely, pursues 'reconciliation' without doing anything.

It comes without saying, that the re-orientation of the Turkish foreign policy -strategy, is based on the adaptation of new military approaches (i. e. brand new technologies, targeted military investments etc.). The addition of the Turkish drones to its military arsenal has been both a frequent tactic and a morale booster and Turkey has managed, so far, to shift from the ‘zero problems with its neighbors’ vision to the so- called ‘zero- friends in the neighborhood’ current status (Gurer & Bastian, 2021).

Despite Ankara’s determination to make new normalization steps in its foreign policy, in 2022, in an attempt to renew and invigorate its relationship with Egypt and the Gulf states and construct new cooperative synergies with everyone, including the US, based on a positive agenda and a new diplomatic strategy, according to the Presidential Spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, (DAILY SABAH, 2022), contemporary Turkey by adopting the hegemony of neoliberal policy discourses and practices, such as the Blue Homeland doctrine (Mavi Vatan), seems to be inconsistent and characterized by a standoff and a dysfunctionality in its foreign policy (Tekin & Tekin, 2015).

Turkey uses not only rhetoric but implements its assertiveness, through coercion and military threats, provocations and obstructions in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, based on a reactive approach. Lately, an unprecedented revisionist Turkey is being witnessed, which continues through the militarization of its foreign policy its neo-Ottoman agenda to attain a hegemonic role in the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider region of the Middle East. The violations of basic principles of international law, the threat of use of force against Cyprus, the casus belli against Greece, as well as the violations of provisions of the Law of the Sea, on the Turkish part, continue in parallel with the occupation of neighboring countries, persistent violations of sovereignty and sovereign rights and the new hybrid threat of ‘weaponizing’ immigration. With respect to the hydrocarbon activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish officials underscore often that no project in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea, in which TRNC and Turkey do not participate, will be accomplished

(Toksabay&Kambas, 2018), since Turkey cannot be excluded from the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, the Turkish attempt to challenge international law- combined with practices based on an anachronistic, revisionist, uncompromising and self- seeking approach-, as well as, on the militarization of its foreign policy, have led the country out of regional cooperation. The four key issues involved in the general dispute, taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean, can be encapsulated in the following: the definition of the continental shelf, the delimitation of the EEZs, specific regulations regarding islands, as well as the case of the median line method (Axt, 2021).

Ankara perceives natural gas issues in the region through the lens of sovereignty, particularly with respect to maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean. (Demiryol, 2019)

In this context, inextricably associated with enduring aspects of the Cyprus' Problem, natural gas resources evolution in the Levant Basin have further intensified the dispute over the EEZs' delimitation due to the Turkish- Cypriot rivalry over rights to exploit rich energy resources. Given the fact that the viability of the energy projects is dependent on an equitable resolution of the EEZs' conflict, rival claims of the EEZs have amplified the competition between Cyprus and Turkey and dragged Greece, Israel, Egypt, and Lebanon into the dispute, converting the wider region into a crisis spot (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

The Turkish aggressiveness, which takes the form of revisionism, is attributable to energy-related reasons, to secure its natural resources (and of TRNC's) and prevent its further exclusion from the regional energy developments (i. e. EMGF), as well as, to security and geopolitical factors, which are beholden to its expectations of becoming a regional hegemony (Tsakiris, 2021).

Obviously, Turkey remains a suspicious observant of the regional developments and will not accept its exclusion from the energy map of the Eastern Mediterranean, taking the role of the server or client power with respect to the energy resources. The Turkish strategy on the chessboard of the Eastern Mediterranean depicts its determination to be not only a player but also a leading power, despite the regional alliances, that didn't welcome and were perceived as a form of counterbalance. Undoubtedly, Turkey will safeguard its energy- interests in the region by demonstrating its power and the entire procedure of the hydrocarbons' exploitation revolves around the solution of the Cyprus' issue, based on the UN Security Council resolutions (Balodimos, 2016).

Provocations and incidents, such as, issuance of NAVTEX, threats from the Turkish warships to use force and violence against drill ships conducting hydrocarbons exploration within the Cypriot EEZs, Turkish survey vessels' illegal exploration activities under the protection of the Turkish navy in areas that overlap with the rightful EEZs of Cyprus, the Turkish illegal actions in the fenced off area of Famagusta, the frequent deployment and use of UAVs/ drones from the Turkish airbase at Gectikale or Lefkoniko in TRNC etc., are all examples of its aggressive/ expansionist repertoire, whilst the biggest obstruction from the Turkish part is still the continued illegal occupation of the island. Turkey proclaims that its intervention in the Cypriot waters is to safeguard Turkish-Cypriot benefit and prevent unfair treatment from the Greek-Cypriot side, whilst Cyprus' stance remains consistent and unchanged. This stance exemplifies that revenue from the oil exploration on the coast of Cyprus will benefit all of Cyprus. Despite the establishment of the National Hydrocarbons Fund, adopted by the Cypriot parliament, in 2019, which secures that the commercialization of the natural-resources will be beneficial and inclusive for both communities to unleash the economic potential for both parties and act as a catalyst to a solution of the Cyprus' problem, Turkey insists on obstructing, as well as, on delaying all the energy- related projects and activities. Evidently, the Turkish foreign policy constitutes an example of offensive realism, a neorealist approach of the international relations theory, developed by J. Mearsheimer, according to which state- centrism must be unlimited. In the case of Turkey, whereby the offensive realism is being applied, regional hegemony combined with economic and military capabilities is the cornerstone of the Turkish state's grand strategy, which is reflected highly, also, in Cyprus. The Turkish presence in Cyprus, in other words, is of paramount importance for both geostrategic and economic, energy- related reasons, as it facilitates its pursuit of predominance in the region. However, the Turkish aggressiveness and coercion towards Cyprus and other states in the region might put at risk its grand strategy for regional hegemony and become misleading, since practice shows that states, which adopt the offensive realist approach, end up being a victim of the so –called Mearsheimerian tragedy, denoting entrapment by the excessive desire for power and preponderance, as a way of survival (Troulis, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2011).

This is attributable to the fact that the aforementioned approach rejects cooperative schemes and synergies as a means of dispute resolution. Turkey demonstrates a competitive zero-sum relationship with other states, believing that there is a regional power vacuum, whereas, in reality, inter-state relations in the wider Eastern Mediterranean have evolved from the zero-sum framework to interdependence and win-win game, principally in the energy sector, as

reflected in the well –known trilateral or quadrilateral cooperative regional schemes. Undoubtedly, this focus on regional cooperation has been endorsed by the United States, which has supported militarily and politically states like Cyprus, Greece and Israel, offering reassurances for stability and mitigation of external threats. The unprecedented economic challenges associated with the energy resources, have made Turkey even more aggressive, implementing a hard power strategy towards Cyprus, since a possible exclusion from them could jeopardize its hegemony aspirations, as well as its economic and political goals. Besides the discovery of the natural gas resources in the region, political situations, such as the Arab Spring, which allowed Turkey to upgrade its status, the coup d' etat, that occurred in Turkey, in 2016, and was associated with human rights violations and non- compliance with the EU law by Turkey, an almost obliterated candidate for EU accession, as well as, the lack of serious security dilemmas or threats explain Turkey's persistence in its foreign policy to remain in Cyprus and portray an expansionist policy (Patronidis, 2019).

In consonance with the Blue Homeland doctrine, President Erdogan corroborates further the Turkish revisionism, by implementing enemy stereotypes, reflected also in his negative stance towards the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, which is viewed as a defeat for Turkey (Axt, 2021).

In view of the above, it becomes evident that Turkey is an inducer of conflict and a source of instability in the Eastern Mediterranean, seeking hegemony in the region. President Erdogan's counter- productive and aggressive policies, via the offensive realist strategy, discourage cooperation, doom Turkey to hostility, distrust, isolation and attach negative stereotypes to its profile. A consequential leader, who rules Turkey for nearly two decades he is the inventor of nativist populist politics in the twenty-first century. In the foreign policy realm, Erdogan's interventionist and nationalist policies have alienated many among Turkey's European allies, especially France (Cagaptay, 2021)

By bullying Cyprus through the illegal occupation of the island and the natural gas drilling obstructions within the Cypriot EEZs, Turkey continues the violations of the international law, acting as a destabilizing factor. In addition, by implementing a regressive approach, contemporary Turkey appears contradictory since it corroborates that it does not embrace the European values and standards on human rights or democracy, whilst its over- extended influence on TRNC is evident through the Islamization process on the occupied part of the island (Patronidis, 2019).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that Turkey, in 2022, seems to be shifting from unilateral realpolitik towards a multilateral approach and readapts its foreign policy due to the following reasons: the US's provisional 'restraint strategy' in the region (expected to change after the Ukraine- Russia war), the need to 'invigorate' its economy through foreign investments (i. e. FDIs) and exports, the desideratum to capitalize the advantages from its military achievements in Syria, Libya and the South Caucasus, the necessity to alter the anti-Turkish arrangements in the Eastern Mediterranean, the growing competition between Turkey, Iran and Russia and the upcoming presidential elections of 2023 (Outzen & Cagaptay, 2022).

2.1 The Turkish position in EEZ & Continental Shelf-Territorial claims against Cyprus

The Cypriot perspective

As mentioned earlier, Turkey places strategic importance on Cyprus and continues its expansionist, neo- ottoman plans and hostile actions, supporting the TRNC pseudostate to survive, whilst disallowing the unification of the island. The three basic complexities around the Cyprus' problem involve: the Turkish military invasion and occupation on the island since 1974, which constitute violations of the Cypriot sovereignty and all fundamental principles of the UN Charter, the Turkish illegitimate claim towards the natural resources discovered in the Cypriot EEZs and an equal share in the revenues, on the grounds that the rights and interests of the TRNC are being violated, (Kouskouvelis, 2018), as well as, the total control and influence of Turkey over TRNC, which is evident, via numerous interventions, such as, the Islamization of the Turkish-Cypriot life-style (i. e. building of mosques, encouragement of religious education etc.), which transforms gradually the secular culture into an autocratic, Islamic one (Kouskouvelis, 2018).

As expected, the discovery of energy resources in Cyprus' waters has added a new dimension in the political relations of the region, whilst the completion of the demarcation agreements of Cyprus with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, which defined the EEZ of each state and their rights to jurisdiction over the specific areas, has intensified the Turkish provocative stance, as it argues that TRNC is entitled to a share of the hydrocarbon's resources (Patronidis, 2019).

However, Cyprus reiterates that that no agreement before the solution of the Cyprus' problem would be enacted over the common management of the natural resources, given the fact that

Cyprus aspires to become an energy hub through the exploitation of its energy deposits (Balodimos, 2016).

With respect to maritime delimitation issues, it must be reminded- according to international law- that the 1982 United Nations' Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the primary document of international law, which regulates the various aspects concerning the establishment of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Besides the definition of the term EEZ as defined by the Article 55, which is analyzed in chapter 3, the relevant United Nations convention affirms that a coastal state has the jurisdiction and control of its own EEZ, including the rights for exploration and exploitation, that no other state is able to intervene without permission of the coastal state, as well as, the coastal state's rights to use resources, build structures, commence scientific research and lay pipelines in their EEZ.

On the other hand, the continental shelf, as defined by the Article 76, which has also been described in chapter 3, is more simplistically, the state's extension of land underwater, which ends when a steep slope or continental slope begins leading to the ocean's abyss (Patronidis, 2019).

Before explaining the Turkish position and claims, it must be clarified that international law attests that Cyprus is a recognized sovereign state and that its EEZs and continental shelf are following UNCLOS and validated by the UN. Cyprus, in 2004, declared 12 nautical miles as its territorial waters. (Dalay, 2019) Turkey, on the other hand, does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus as a state and accepts only the Cypriot territorial waters, which extend 12 nautical miles from the baseline and are perceived as a sovereign territory of the state (Patronidis, 2019).

Focusing on Turkey, it must be stressed that Turkey is not a signatory of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of Sea, which has been ratified by more than 160 states. Apart from Turkey, Israel, United States and Venezuela are not also parties of the UNCLOS. The Geneva Convention and UNCLOS constitute the basis of the codified international law and Turkey- whilst being present in the meetings of both bodies- has not ratified neither of them. However, Turkey has the right to set forth its claims invoking internationally accepted rules, has arranged a series of maritime zones in its waters and relies on its domestic legislation regulating the territorial waters but not the contiguous zone (Sahin, 2019). The Turkish action in delimiting its maritime boundaries with all of its northern neighboring states, while not being a signatory of the Convention of Montego Bay for the Law of the sea, constitutes an

oxymoron. Oxymoron because, in the case of the Mediterranean Sea, which is viewed as a semi-enclosed sea with particular provisions in the UNCLOS, Turkey postulates that the use of median line is not the right principle for the Eastern Mediterranean, while the same applies to the cases of the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea, defined as semi-enclosed seas by the UNCLOS (Potka, 2016).

Be that as it may, some provisions of the Convention have acquired customary international law status, which are binding for all states. The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is perceived as part of the customary law, and this is generally accepted. Subsequently, if a state has not signed it, it does not entail that it has no obligations or that it has the right to question the law. A possible explanation to that is that Turkey's position of two standards is imposed by its status as a powerful regional player (Potka, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, Turkey does not recognize the sovereignty of Cyprus and regards the Cypriot demarcation agreements of its EEZs as non-binding and legally void. Hence, its obstructions in the Cypriot EEZs are interpreted by Turkey as a means of protecting the rights of the Turkish- Cypriots (Patronidis, 2019).

In brief, four assertions are found in the Turkish claims regarding the Eastern Mediterranean region. To begin with is the invocation of the application of the principle of equity in the maritime delimitation agreements, followed by the refusal of accepting the representative function of Cyprus for the whole island, which suppresses the rights of TRNC. In addition, the affirmation that the licensed assumed Cypriot EEZ zones violate the international law, as well as, the maritime rights of Turkey, which must be considered, including the allegation that any concluded agreements without considering the overlapping areas before reaching consensus with Turkey and TRNC are deemed to be invalid (Sahin, 2019). Finally, the Turkish assertions are concluded with the proclamation that the Greek islands are not eligible to have any EEZ rights (Sahin, 2019).

Concisely, Turkey and Cyprus face two significant problems regarding the delimitations of maritime zones, impacting the entire Eastern Mediterranean. The first one of overlapping areas between them and the second problem is the representation of Cyprus coupled with the protection of the TRNC's rights (Sahin, 2019).

More specifically, the Turkish position over the maritime territorial dispute is based on two pillars: firstly, when UNCLOS refers to who is given the right to claim an EEZ, it makes

clear that only states that have coastal line can assert right for it, which is significant for Turkey since by disputing the legitimacy of the Republic of Cyprus, does not recognize the latter's claimed EEZ' and secondly, in Cyprus' delimitation agreement with Egypt there are some areas, which are overlapping with the Turkish continental shelf (Potka, 2016).

With respect to the Cypriot EEZs, it must be underscored that Turkey seeks to claim as large amount of an EEZ as possible, by asserting that a considerable proportion of Cypriot EEZs pertain to TRNC. Legitimate claims to the rights and jurisdiction of EEZs are realized only by states internationally recognized and not by groups within states or pseudostates. Moreover, Turkey asserts that the area south-west and west of Cyprus belongs to the Turkish continental shelf, arguing, also, that its continental shelf elongates into the Cypriot waters, which are internationally recognized (Patronidis, 2019).

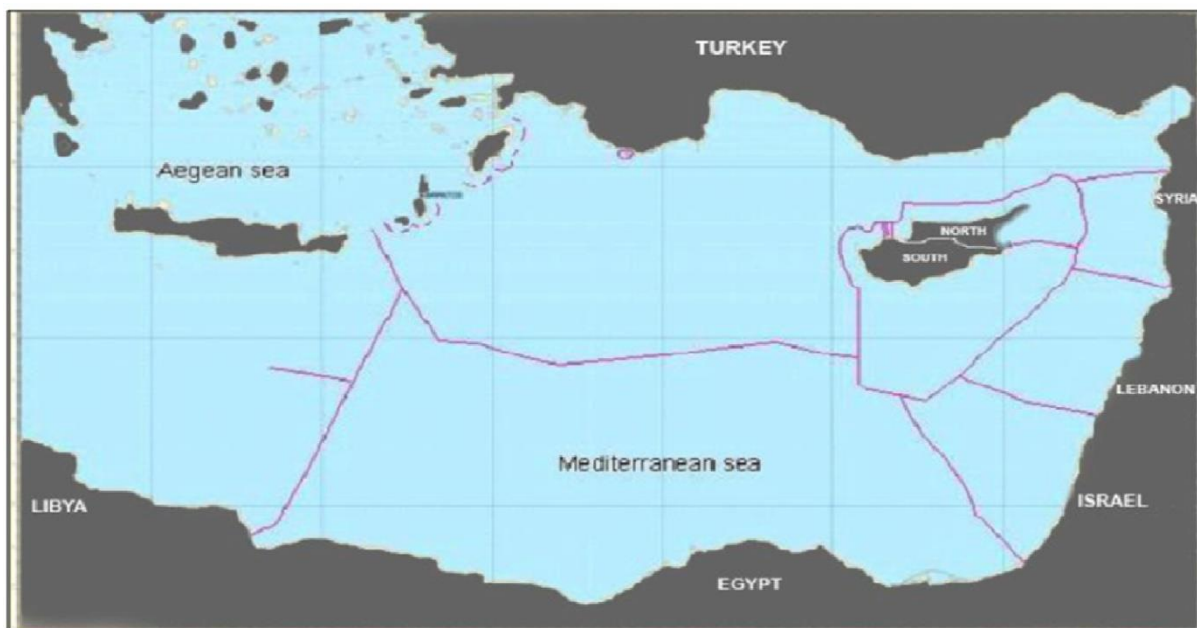


Figure 2. Turkish EEZ Maritime Zone

Source: (Ozturk & Baseren, 2008)

However, the Turkish violation of sovereignty is applied not only in the case of Cyprus but also to Greece, as it asserts that the Turkish continental shelf outstretches into the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea. In the case of Kastellorizo, Crete and Rhodes, their jurisdiction and their corresponding continental shelves are totally overlooked by Turkey, a practice, which is reflected in the long- established Turkish position, that Cyprus and the Greek islands of the Eastern Aegean Sea are not eligible to a continental shelf or an EEZ. It comes as no surprise, that on a series of often published Turkish maps, Turkey disregards completely the maritime

rights of Cyprus and Greece. Central to the Turkish assertions is, also, the rejection of the principle of equidistance/median line, especially in the case of maritime delimitation with Greece and in particular with the Greek islands in the eastern Aegean Sea (i. e. Kastellorizo, Rhodes etc.), which can not possess full maritime zones, when competing directly against continental land areas. According to the equidistance/median line, a state's maritime boundaries are defined by a median line that is equidistant from the shores of adjacent states. Yet, Turkey's viewpoint on the delimitation method is that it should follow the equitable principle, which is based on fair and equal proportionality, while there is no particular delimitation method that is compulsory (Patronidis, 2019).

Apparently, Turkey considers its geographical definition as a top priority and rejects the term of equitable solution in the wording of Articles 74 and 83 of UNCLOS, as the interpretation is left to the mutual understanding and in cases, where consensus is not achieved, said articles directly designate the obligatory dispute resolution provisions of Part XV of the Convention (Sahin, 2019).

In addition, it strongly disapproves of granting equal status to the islands due to the assemblage of islands positioned in adjacent contiguity to its coasts, while submitting texts, included in the principle of equity, to establish the regime of enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, the broadness of the territorial sea, as well as, the delimitation of the continental shelf and the EEZ between opposite or adjacent coastal states (Sahin, 2019).

Despite the aforementioned Turkish position on the equidistance based on proportionality, Turkey has appeared to be contradictory and inconsistent with its delimitation zones' claims, as it has implemented the median line method with Egypt and has ratified agreements in the Black Sea region, in the same manner. Turkey, for instance, is self-seeking in order to claim an EEZ according to the equitable principle with Greece, at the same time, is implementing the equidistant principle with Egypt, while overlooking totally the sovereignty of Cyprus.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, according to the Turkish claims, its alleged EEZ overlaps with blocks 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Cypriot EEZ. Turkey has even tried to convince Egypt to renounce its delimitation agreement with Cyprus, on the grounds that Egypt had missed maritime space without succeeding its goal. In general, the Turkish claims and actions in the Cypriot EEZs are not only illegal by the international law, also violating the legal framework among Cyprus and Egypt but also detrimental for the rights of the Turkish-Cypriots, since a possible acquisition of a portion of the Cypriot maritime space would entail infringement and reduction of the maritime space of the Turkish-Cypriots, as well.

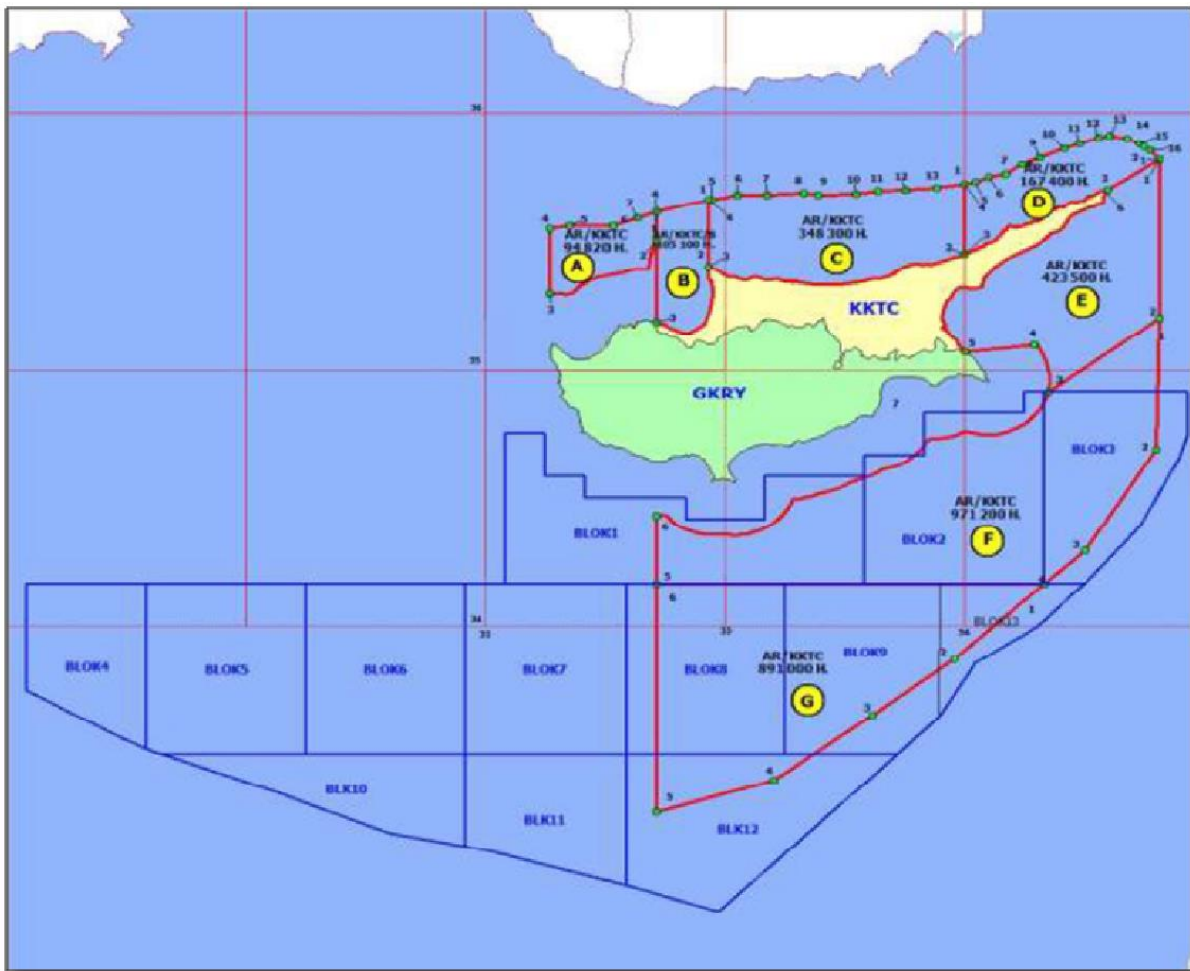


Figure 3 The Overlapping of Turkish Cypriot Blocks with Greek Cypriot

Source: (Erciyas, 2019)

Regarding the coastal states' exclusive sovereign rights in conducting exploration and exploitation activities within their EEZs and their continental shelf, (i. e. the seabed and subsoil of the EEZ is in fact the continental shelf) (UN General Assembly, 1982), these are defined by the UNCLOS' Articles 56(1)(a)(3), 77(1)(2) and 81 LOSC. This rule is part of customary international law and all states, even non-state parties to the convention, are required to adopt it (Patronidis, 2019).

Coastal states are facilitated to enjoy their natural resources within their maritime space and are granted the exclusive jurisdiction to regulate and manage the construction, operation and use of installations and structures pertinent to hydrocarbon activities (i. e. oil rigs) (Patronidis, 2019).

Furthermore, it must be underlined that, in 2008, Turkey granted concessions to the state-owned company TPAO in areas, which- according to Cyprus and Greece- are falling within their continental shelves. Despite the fact that both Cyprus and Greece have acknowledged that Turkey is authorized to have maritime space in specific areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey and TRNC made a delimitation agreement, in 2011, while later on, TRNC and the state –owned company TPAO signed an agreement, yielding the right to the latter to make exploration on the Cypriot coasts (Ioannides, 2014).

However, Turkey does not only object and obstruct the EEZ and maritime activities of Cyprus but has granted exploration licenses to the TPAO for areas falling within the continental shelf of the Cypriot and the Greek EEZ, entailing violation of the sovereign rights of Cyprus and Greece, through the Turkish stance in the Eastern Mediterranean (Patronidis, 2019).

The aforementioned agreements, which constitute claims on the natural resources of Cyprus, are invalid, due to the illegitimacy of the Turkish invasion and occupation on Cyprus, whilst the current state on the island does not entail eradication of the sovereignty rights of the Republic of Cyprus. In addition, it is unlawful for an ethnic group or community within a country to yield licenses to a national company for energy- related exploration activities (Patronidis, 2019).

The Turkish aggressive stance and its non –compliance with the international law has excluded Turkey from strategic regional cooperation and the planned energy projects, whereas the disputed maritime zones and boundaries have been an important stimulus for the genesis of the tripartite alliances and quadrilateral cooperative frameworks, which are gathering momentum and depict the need for stability, prosperity and good neighborly relations in the Eastern Mediterranean. In view of the above, it becomes apparent that Turkey bypasses international law and only adheres to it, when it facilitates its objectives, whilst any Turkish interference or involvement against Cyprus, in the form of provocations or obstructions, constitutes a clear violation of international law.

The Turkish perspective

Turkey as a non-party to UNCLOS does not recognize the proclaimed EEZ delimitation agreements of Cyprus with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel. It also argues that as a de-facto divided island ‘Republic of Cyprus’ cannot represent the interests of TRNC, unless it is reunified with a single EEZ, while insisting that the exploitation of natural resources should

be postponed until a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue is achieved (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

At the same time, according to the Turkish point of view, the Cypriot exploration undermines the resolution of the Cyprus' dispute, while the issuance of exploration licenses to IOCs by Cyprus constitutes an attempt to outflank Turkey from any resources in the Eastern Mediterranean (Tziarras, 2019).

Moreover, the Turkish part adopts the so- called diagonal method, unlike Cyprus, which has applied the vertical one, as reflected in its bilateral delimitation agreements with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, which led to the configuration of the 'hypothetical' Cypriot EEZs' landscape into 13 blocks, parts of which are claimed by Turkey and more accurately the sovereignty rights over blocks 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. From the Turkish perspective the maritime zones on the West of Cyprus should be demarcated by a median line between Turkey and Egypt, which slightly overlaps with the aforementioned blocks 1, 4, 6, and 7 of Cyprus' EEZ, bypassing Cyprus, since it is an island (Dalay, 2019).

Hence, Turkey considers that the sea territory that is positioned 32o 16' 18'' west of the meridian is overlapping Turkey's continental shelf. From the Turkish perspective, due to specific circumstances of the island and the size that the southern part of the island holds, the maritime zones should be limited and the same applies in the case of the Greek island of Kastellorizo/ Megisti/ Meis, as well, given its proximity to Anatolia, which is 'embraced' by the Turkish continental shelf (AylaGurel, 2013) (Potka, 2016).

In fact, in case these two arguments were applicable this would mean that Turkey and Egypt are adjacent states (Potka, 2016).

Within this framework, the Turkish claim is over-extended, as stated, to the south and southeast Cypriot blocks 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 13, including the tip of block 12, over which TRNC has rights, whose exploration was given through the issuance of licenses to the TPAO, the Turkish state oil company by TRNC (Dalay, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, Turkey's position in EEZ delimitation is in accordance with the equity principle that takes into consideration special circumstances to respect proportionality and non-encroachment rules. Given the more than 20 times difference between coastal lengths of Cyprus and Turkey, the Cypriot EEZ should be coextensive with its 12-mile-wide territorial waters according to Turkish view. In specific, Turkey postulates that the starting point of the

maritime delimitations is the relevant coasts of the states (i. e. Muğla Deveboynu Cap. to Antalya Gazipaşa), whose length is much bigger compared with that of Cyprus (i. e. the Turkish coast length is 656 miles and frontal length is 294 miles, whilst the Cypriot coast length is 32 miles and frontal length is 28 miles). According to Turkey, which places importance on the principle of proportionality in delimitations, a significant disparity can be easily observed, which has been delineated, though, in favor of the state possessing a prolonged coastline by the case law practice (i. e. the Libya/Malta case, whereby the coastal length ratio between the states was determined to 8: 1 in favor of Libya, or the St. Pierre and Miquelon and the Nicaragua/Colombia cases highlighting the necessity of obviating the island's cut off effect over a parallel frontal projection of relevant coasts of mainland). Taking as a reference the Guinea/Guinea-Bissau decision, which underscores the prominence of the ports (i. e. Antalya and Mersin in the Turkish interpretation), Turkey postulates that maritime boundaries between Turkey and Cyprus must be set, taking into consideration specific circumstances, on the basis of the principle of equity and not the median line (i. e. towards the east at 032° 16' 18" e-longitude, which is nearer to the western coasts of Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus and it will follow that longitude towards the south till the median line among the coasts of Egypt and Turkey). However, Turkey asserts that a closer evaluation of the vertical delimitation approach of Turkey, juxtaposed with the diagonal Cypriot one, corroborates that Turkey has retrenched its claims since it follows the approach. In this context, Turkey argues that if it applies the similar method with Cyprus, it will have to make delimitation agreements with more countries (i. e. Lebanon, Israel). Accordingly, Turkey purports that it might broaden its EEZ claims from 55.985 to 69. 535 square miles and considers its overall assertions as fair-minded (Sahin, 2019).

Lastly, it is must be stressed that safe access to high seas and the underlying economic resources of the seabed, in other words, gas exploration are of high importance for Turkey, since it wants to maintain its economic growth and its position as an energy supplier and transit hub in the region, (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014), despite the Cypriot efforts to exclude TRNC and Turkey- according to the Turkish perspective- from any share of the exploitation of the natural resources (Dalay, 2019).

Conclusions

In light with the above, it becomes apparent that the UNCLOS is the legally binding international treaty, which sets guidelines for responsibilities and rights of nations in their use

of the seas, while formulating a rule of conduct over all maritime disputes between signatory parties (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

Any agreement on these issues can be achieved only under the UNCLOS, providing a globally acknowledged value system, as well as, a dispute resolution mechanism for its members. (Falkenberg, 2015), whilst according to EU's precondition, applicant states must resolve their delimitation conflicts with EU member –states before EU-accession.

More specifically, according to Articles 56 and 57 of the UNCLOS, EEZ of a coastal state is coextensive with its continental shelf for up to 200 miles and grants a coastal state the right to exercise economic exploitation and exploration of the zone (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

Despite the fact the Cyprus is a signatory to the treaty, UNCLOS, at the same time, is not binding to non-parties of the treaty including, Turkey. Consequently, it is expected that Turkey and Cyprus are unlikely to agree on the interpretation of the treaty with respect to the EEZs' delimitation and, likely, they might refer, in the future, to the jurisdiction of the ICJ for litigation, upon mutual consent (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

Furthermore, as Turkey did not welcome any exploration activities of Cyprus and issued excruciating demands to pause such activities, it realized afterwards that it found itself encircled in a legal position, whereby, over time, its own legal and fact-based position deteriorated, while those of others improved (Falkenberg, 2015).

As a result, the consequences of the Turkish legal position are reflected in its exclusion from the energy projects and its isolation from the energy cooperation booming in the region, which could be overcome through the respect of the principles of the international law as a common denominator and as the one and only inalienable condition.

Due to the unique geographic characteristics of both the Aegean and the Mediterranean seas, Article 121 of UNCLOS prevents Turkey from benefiting from natural resources in proportion to the length of its coast. Usually, UNCLOS does not stipulate the direct application of its provisions. Instead, it establishes a four-step dispute settlement mechanism to encourage parties to reach equitable solutions. Section One of UNCLOS Part XV includes non-compulsory procedures to find solutions via conciliation and negotiation. If the parties cannot reach an agreement, Section Two requires parties to use compulsory dispute procedures, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Tribunal for the Law of Sea (ITLOS) (Yurtsever, 2022).

Ultimately, it can be argued that there is no reasonable ground for Turkey not to sign UNCLOS due to the presence of other dispute settlement methods (Yurtsever, 2022).

2.2. EEZ delimitation agreement between Turkey & TRNC

The TRNC does not recognize the unilateral promulgation of the Cypriot EEZs on the account of representing the entire island questions the Cypriot right to sign maritime delimitation agreements and discredits the bilateral agreements between Cyprus and third parties as being void. The Turkish Cypriot part associates the EEZs' delimitation directly with the sovereignty issue and demands equal rights on the natural resources (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

Regarding the maritime zones, TRNC's position is like that concerning the Cyprus' problem: it seeks to access the hydrocarbons reserves and achieve exploitation of a portion in profits (Dalay, 2019).

Moreover, Turkey disputes the maritime boundary agreed between Cyprus and Egypt due to its own continental shelf- claim, stretching west of Cyprus to the Greek island of Rhodes (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, Turkey's EEZ assertions elongate to the west of the island of Cyprus and overlap with those of Cyprus and its objections on the drillings refer to the Cypriot blocks 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Hence, it becomes clear that the resolution of the overlapping maritime boundary claims among Cyprus, Turkey and Greece are further complicated due to the Cyprus' conflict (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

Unquestionably, in absence of TRNC's international recognition, the exploitation of the existing natural resources is obstructed and the pseudostate tries to attain its goals in collaboration with Turkey. (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014) Unsurprisingly, TRNC relies on Turkey's military and diplomatic support to assert its rights and jurisdiction over Cyprus' maritime areas (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

In response to the delimitation activity of Cyprus, TRNC and Turkey signed an EEZ delimitation agreement, in 2011, which gave the authorization to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) to conduct seismic research and hydrocarbon exploration activities in

seven EEZ areas, (one onshore and six offshore blocks) overlapping with those demarcated by the Greek Cypriot government (Çubukçuoğlu, 2014).

)In specific, Turkey signed a delimitation agreement with TRNC, which overlaps and defies the EEZ claimed by Cyprus, while at the same time TRNC- itself, affirms an EEZ, overlapping with the rest of the Cypriot EEZ (Papakostas, 2020).

The aforementioned agreement is the so -called Continental Shelf Delimitation Treaty, whereas the second one, the Oil Field Services and Production Sharing agreement, signed between TRNC and Turkey, also in 2011, grants the right to TPAO (Turkey Petroleum Corporation) through the Continental Shelf Delimitation Treaty to conduct exploration, drilling, production and operation in the field of oil production. It also contains the provision that in the case of possible production the parties to the contract will have a 50-50% share (Dalay, 2019).

The agreement is comprised of 27 coordinates and the delimitation was realized in accordance with the international law, implementing the equitable principle and not the median line, for Turkey to ensure that its protracted coastal line is being taken into consideration, as well as, that its argument regarding the role of islands in delimitation could be applied. The latter supports that island do not generate full maritime zones when they are competing directly against land areas (Potka, 2016).

As expected, Cyprus and Greece characterized the agreement straightaway as invalid and illegal. Nonetheless, the agreement was signed among parties that recognize each other and it will be included in the list of the upcoming treaty committee, being operable between the Cyprus and TRNC in the pre-settlement period (Potka, 2016).

In spite of the unproductive drilling activity, TPAO still conducts seismic surveys and drillings, in more than twelve wells in the Turkish continental shelf. Especially, 2016, was the year, when the maritime boundary conflict among Cyprus and Turkey commenced, as Cyprus granted license to the contested block 6. From 2017 the Turkish drilling operations were further intensified, as Turkey proceeded with explorations in areas delimited by Cyprus, whereas, in 2018, the Turkish navy blocked a drillship hired by Eni to drill for gas in block 3, to which the TRNC also lays claim (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

In 2019, numerous exploratory drillings took place in areas claimed by Turkey to be within its continental shelf, which Cyprus argues that coincide with its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

In particular, after 2019, TPAO started directing its geological research and hydrocarbons exploration operations in contested areas (i. e. Cypriot blocks 4, 5, 6 and 7), as well as, in the TRNC's blocks F and G, overlapping with the Cypriot blocks 2, 3, 8, 9, 12 and 13 (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020). Accordingly, throughout 2020, TPAO performed extended drilling operations in block 6, near the island of Kastellorizo, between Crete and Cyprus, as well as, in the areas of the Mediterranean, claimed by both, which led to non- commercial quantities of hydrocarbons (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

Notwithstanding the adoption, by the EU, of a framework containing measures and sanctions on individuals and entities engaged in drillings undertaken by TPAO in disputed maritime zones, on 11 November 2019, TPAO still continued unperturbed its activity in contested areas, violating the Cypriot EEZs, while generating tension in the region (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

Hence, even though the Eastern Mediterranean is an energy abundant region, maritime boundary disputes constitute one of the major impediments to exploitation and transportation of gas. Currently, as observed, there are no agreements delimiting the maritime boundary between Greece and Turkey, Cyprus and Turkey, Cyprus and Syria, Israel and Lebanon or Israel and Palestinian and the ones already signed are questioned by the adjacent states. Nonetheless, all of them have consigned their maritime claims concerning their territorial seas, contiguous zone, EEZ and the continental shelf with the United Nations (UN) (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

2.3. Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey & the Government of National Accord (GNA) of Libya on the delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean & its significance

On 27 November 2019, Turkey signed a maritime delimitation agreement with the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, Libya (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019).

The pact determined the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of each state and granted them the right to exploit exclusively the existing natural resources within these areas (Axt, 2021).

The continental shelf and EEZ borders were defined, having a 29, 9 km long borderline. On 6 December 2019, the agreement was approved by the Presidential Council, and it was adopted by the Libyan legislation. In addition, it was declared to the UN by the two stakeholder countries (Oceans & Law of the Sea, 2019).

As defined, the two states could execute exploration activities within the specific areas. In addition, the agreement was realized, in accordance with the Anatolia-Africa Joint Line framework and the equitable principle (Papakostas, 2020).

As anticipated, the Turkish objectives, closely related with the exclusive economic zones (EEZs), were clearly reflected in the 'Blue Homeland doctrine' (Mavi Vatan), incorporated into the agreement, perceived, in 2006, by the admiral Ramazan, Cem Gürdeniz, a proponent of an expansive, nationalist strategy of the Turkish state and were portrayed in relevant maps, exhibiting half of the Aegean Sea and the Eastern coast of Crete as Turkish (Axt, 2021).

According to the Mavi Vatan doctrine, Turkey possesses 145, 000 km² area in the Mediterranean, including its EEZ, which is, now, expanded, with the help of the agreement, reaching 189, 000 km². Apparently, due to the expansion of the Libyan maritime jurisdiction to the territorial waters of Crete, Turkey acquired additional areas, as well. In specific, Turkey obtained extra 8900 km² EEZ, whilst Libya enlarged its maritime borders towards Crete.

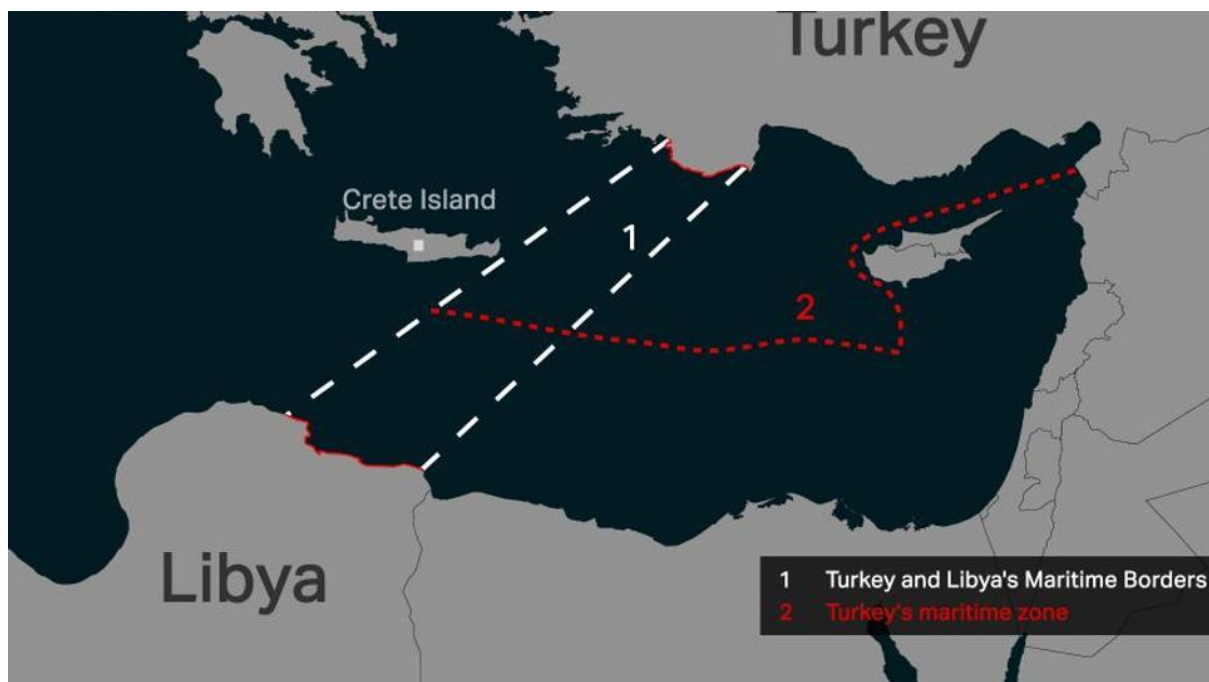


Figure 4. Turkey and Libya's maritime borders

Source: <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/why-did-turkey-sign-a-maritime-deal-with-libya-32064>

From the Turkish perspective, the Turkey- Libya agreement is suitable and legitimate within the context of international law, as well as, beneficial for the two parties with the equitable

principle being utilized. According to the Turkish 'interpretation', the Turkey -Libya bilateral agreement, within the context of the UNCLOS, should be based on the equitable principle and both parties are obliged to conduct an EEZ agreement to be operational (Yaycı, 2011; Papakostas, 2020).

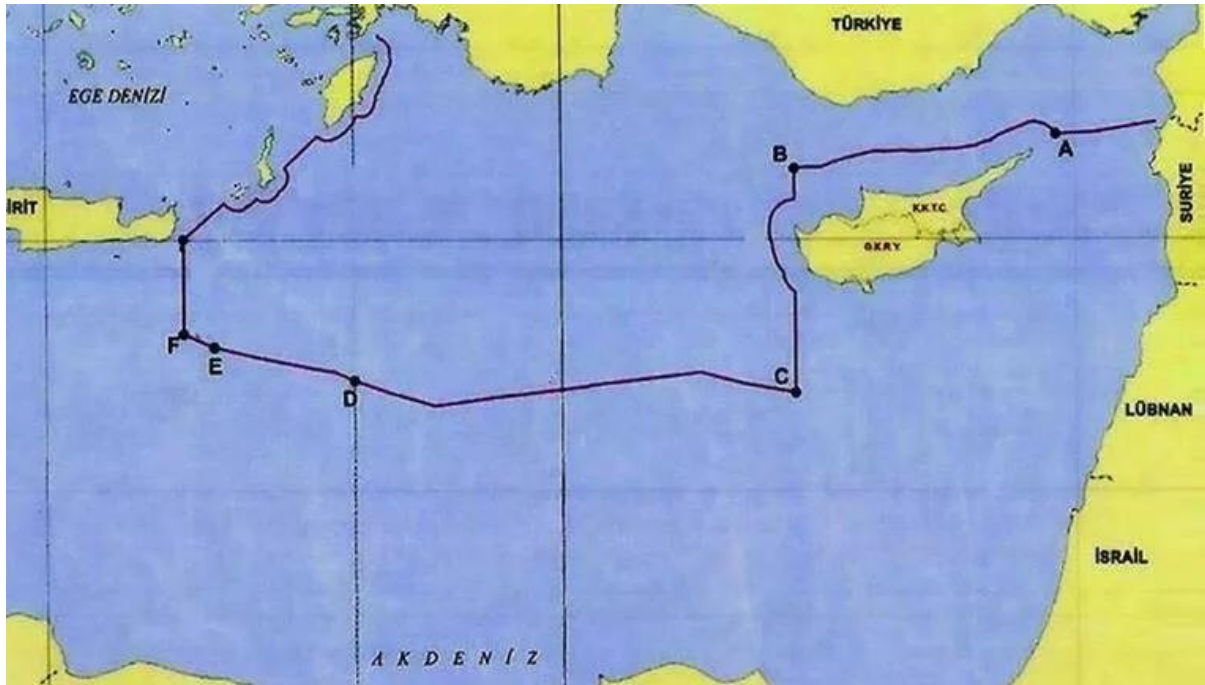


Figure 5. Turkey's maritime zone.

Source: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-proceeds-for-approval-of-libya-deal-yet-not-aims-tension-in-e-med-149452>

Moreover, the second Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was signed between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of National Accord-State of Libya on Security and Military Cooperation, focuses on military assistance and reflects the expansionist Turkish military aspirations (Axt, 2021). Without any doubt, the aforementioned agreement is viewed as a game-changer in the Eastern Mediterranean, as it safeguards the rights of Turkey and TRNC and impacts highly the inter-state diplomatic, political and trade relations between Turkey and Libya (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of National Accord-State of Libya on Security and Military Cooperation can be interpreted as retaliating Libya's backing by facilitating Turkey's objectives to demarcate the maritime zones in the Mediterranean. Further, it displays the over-extended Turkish geopolitical interests on the map, including Cyprus and Greece, as well as, the

northern parts of Iraq, Syria, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, where Turkey exerts its neo-Ottomanism influence (Axt, 2021). In specific, the Turkish support to the government of Fayeز Mustafa al-Sarraj involved military training, assistance in services and goods, whilst-according to media sources- Turkey has enabled the relocation of 35 military advisers and 2,000 Syrian rebels to Libya to fight against Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, warlord and commander of the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army (Axt, 2021).

However, the rival government, positioned in the eastern city of Tobruk, associated with the military commander, Khalifa Haftar, dismissed the agreement as illegal. (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019)As expected, Cyprus and Greece also disagreed heavily by stating that the delimitation of the maritime zone was conducted at the expense of a third party, as Turkey had not counseled them on the overlapping areas (Axt, 2021). On the contrary, the maritime zones southeast of the Greek islands of Dodecanese and Crete were purported by Turkey. With respect to the latter, Greece asserted that the particular areas are included within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and denounced the agreement as it had totally eluded the island of Crete (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). Egypt, correspondingly renounced the legitimacy of the agreement, whilst, after the signing of the pact, Greece expelled the Libyan ambassador and the European Union condemned the deal (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019).

Notwithstanding the legality issue of the agreement, if the Turkey- Libya pact is sustained, it will constitute a success of the Turkish foreign policy, since Turkey has, so far, only performed a continental shelf delimitation agreement with TRNC, which is not internationally recognized as a sovereign state. Yet, in all likelihood, the deal will remain in dispute since the contested Libyan government exercises control over a limited part of Libya (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019).

Interpretation, significance & impact of the agreement

The signing of the maritime delimitation agreement between Turkey and the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Fayeز al-Sarraj, has alarmed and distressed many regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean. The pact can be seen as a Turkish counter-reaction to the pre-existing EEZs' delimitation agreements of Cyprus with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, perceived as detrimental actions to the Turkish objectives. In brief, the agreement impacts negatively the relations of Turkey with

multiple regional players, such as Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt, it contributes to the prolongation of the Libyan civil war and it constitutes a threat for the doubtful construction of the East Med pipeline, which is being disrupted (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019).

Evidently, the motives and the timing of the agreement are attributable to a series of factors. Initially, it can be argued that Turkey, which is not a signatory of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, wanted- through the signing of the aforementioned pact- to express vehemently its opposition to the implementation of the UNCLOS principles, which restrict its EEZ and continental shelf, in view also, of the energy resources' discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). Secondly, the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which has received the US support, was viewed as an attempt to exclude and isolate Turkey from the energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and, as a result, Turkey reacted with the signing of the Turkey-Libya agreement against its encirclement and confinement. (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). Thirdly, the deal falls within the applied Turkish strategy, which is based on assertiveness and provocations in the neighborhood, as reflected not only in the Turkish operations in Syria but also in the obstructions of the drillings operations in the Cypriot EEZs' and in the gunboat diplomacy implemented by the Turkish state.

Undoubtedly, the Turkey- Libya agreement impacts significantly, as mentioned, the Turkish relations with various players in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean. Firstly, it represents a new challenge for the Greek –Turkish relations, as it increases the distrust and attaches a new dimension of friction, which might lead to a military confrontation, in the future. Moreover, it stimulates further aggression towards Cyprus, targeting its drilling program, while putting pressure, simultaneously, towards the resumption of the talks on the Cyprus' problem. Thirdly, Egypt, perceives the pact as a source of instability and a threat of terrorist activity for Libya with a spill-over effect in the entire region. Especially for Egypt, the aforementioned agreement represents an intervention in the Arab- Libyan affairs, which requires a collective response from the Arab League and, at the same time, is a major threat for Cyprus and Greece (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). In addition, from the standpoint of Saudi Arabia and UAE, the Turkey- Libya deal violates the UNCLOS and depicts the wider regional fight between opposing forces of the political Islam. What's more, the specific deal puts into question the feasibility of the construction of the East Med pipeline, which is further complicated, as it presents a source of additional regional conflict. The aggressive rhetoric of

the Turkish President, R. T. Erdogan, confirms that the Turkey- Libya agreement is highly associated with the specific energy project, which cannot be realized without the Turkish permission. Furthermore, the deal arouses a renewed civil war in Libya and incites foreign intervention, since Turkey is assisting the GNA by furnishing weapons, drones, vehicles, training etc., whilst Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia are providing Haftar with financial support and weapons. It must be underlined, also, that other actors, such as, the US remain absent, while Russia has strengthened its presence (Lindenstrauss, Sarah, & Winter, 2019). Additionally, the pact is perceived as a source of tension between Moscow and Ankara, given the fact that they both assist opponents. Lastly, for Israel the Turkey- Libya agreement raises the stakes for hostilities and frictions. Given its geopolitical interests in the region, Israel has expressed its determination to be actively involved in neighborhood and not to act as a bystander, which is evident in its steadfast solidarity towards both Cyprus and Greece against the frequent Turkish provocations.

Reactions by regional & international actors

After the signing of the agreement, Greece denounced the pact and complained heavily to its allies, such as the EU, France and the US, which all castigated the Turkey- Libya agreement, while facilitating commander Haftar, at the same time, in Libya. In December 2019, Greece proclaimed the Libyan ambassador in Athens as persona non grata (Kampas, 2019) and Cyprus along with France and Italy performed joint military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean. (Papakostas, 2020). In an attempt of enhanced solidarity, France stationed, in January 2020, Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier near the island of Crete. However, despite EU's denunciation of the pact, Cyprus and Greece impeached EU for not responding strictly to the Turkish illegal activities, given also the fact that specific decisions against Turkey did not have any legal binding impact on the national Turkish legislation.

After the Turkish act, which was approved by the Turkish parliament, to send troops to Libya in order to assist the Sarraj government, the US castigated the Turkish decision, whilst Cyprus, Greece and Israel released a statement against Turkey (Papakostas, 2020). Greece's and Cyprus' basic argument remains the Turkey is not a signatory of the UNCLOS, entailing that the Turkey- Libya agreement is void since it does not abide by the international law. Egypt, on its part, as mentioned earlier, was alarmed and forwarded a note to the UN, with regards to the agreement (Oceans & Law of the Sea, 2019), while Israel criticized the agreement by de-associating it with any upcoming cycle of conflict EU and especially France

felt disagreeable with the agreement as their spheres of influence in the region were being eradicated due to the Turkish presence, which is motivated by interests related to the energy resources. Lastly, USA and Russia, two countries involved in a long standing proxy war, sensed also discomfited with the agreement due to their competition in order acquire the authority gap and a leading role in the entire region (Johnson, 2020) (Papakostas, 2020).

Conclusions

In view of the above, it is obvious that the Turkey-Libya maritime boundary delimitation agreement is significant, on a regional and on a global level, not only for energy- related reasons but also for geopolitical and strategic ones. The pact, which is evaluated by the Turkish part as second in importance after the Serves treaty (Demitras, 2019), managed to ‘obliterate’ the Seville map, through which Cyprus and Greece were hoping to isolate Turkey in the Gulf of Antalya, by eradicating its EEZ. As already mentioned, the agreement is, also, seen as a shield, ensuring the protection of the rights of Turkey and TRNC, a counter-action towards the delimitation agreements of Cyprus with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel and as a response to the enhanced energy regional cooperation, reflected in energy projects and platforms, such as, the East Med pipeline and the EMGF, perceived as illegal and unfair actions by Turkey. Also, by intervening to Libya, Turkey contributes to the continuation of the Libyan war and prevents de-escalation.

Certainly, the Turkey- Libya agreement is a historical one, since it adopts the Mavi Vatan borders, which are in accordance with the Mavi Vatan doctrine of Cem Gürdeniz, as explained earlier, underscoring the significance of safeguarding the Turkish national interests on seas, as well as, the active Turkish involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean. This historic agreement is, undoubtedly, a game-changer, having ramifications on the entire ecosystem of the Eastern Mediterranean (Papakostas, 2020).

For the Turkish part, the agreement is an undeniable success of the Turkish diplomacy, since it defends its national interests, including those of TRNC. Apart from ‘cancelling’ the planning of Sevilla map, aimed to confine Turkey in the Gulf of Antalya, the Turkey- Libya agreement obstructs the energy –related activities of Cyprus and Greece in the region, without the previous approval of Turkey and TRNC, such as, in the cases of the East Med pipeline or the EMGF, riveted to isolate Turkey. In addition, the agreement is a significant act on the maritime boundary conflict among Cyprus- Turkey- TRNC and Greece, interrelated

with the utilization of the energy resources. In specific, it prevents Greece from declaring an EEZ with Cyprus and from violating the rights of Turkey and TRNC. Furthermore, the pact weakens Cyprus on the maritime boundary dispute, while benefiting TRNC, since Cyprus will no longer act as the proprietor of the island and will be deprived of its right to sign an EEZ agreement with Greece, as it is perceived to occupy other states' EEZ. In view of this, Cyprus will not possess the rights it arrests on the island, without solving the Cyprus' problem. Moreover, the pact halts the expansionist plans of Cyprus and Greece, from the Turkish point of view. In the case of islands, for example, the Turkish part postulates that they can only have a continental shelf and no EEZ and that they cannot possess an EEZ 10 times bigger than their own area. In line with its, islands cannot discontinue the mainland and an EEZ is not possible to surpass 10-20 times the islands (Papakostas, 2020).

As discussed, the Turkey- Libya agreement has a negative impact on the East Med pipeline, since the stakeholder countries of the project will be obliged to attain the approval of Turkey and TRNC and the permission of Libya, as well. The project's route is blocked with this agreement and its construction is weakened and disrupted, as Turkey has managed to reverse the situation against its isolation. This is considered to be a turning point for the energy reality of the Eastern Mediterranean and it is expected to cause political shifts and re-arrangements among the regional actors, by bringing- for example- Egypt, Israel or Italy nearer.

Definitely, the Turkey decided to sign the aforementioned agreement with Libya instead of Cyprus or Greece because it wanted to achieve a strategic, political and psychological advantage in the wider region. Apart from that, the pact is mutually beneficial since Libya gains much wider maritime zone, (i. e. more than 16, 700 km²), juxtaposed to a hypothetical EEZ agreement with Greece, and so does Turkey, which prolongs the Mavi Vatan to 189, 000 km². In case, Turkey signs a future- EEZ agreement with Egypt and Lebanon- instead of Cyprus- it would also obtain an expanded area.

As observed, the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean now includes Turkey and TRNC as the game- makers and game- changers of the hydrocarbon ecosystem (Papakostas, 2020). Regarding Greece and Cyprus, the outcome of the pact averts them from signing any future EEZ agreement, as the claimed area is located within the Turkey- Libya zone. This means that any exploration activities performed by Cyprus or Greece in this area will require a Turkish and Libyan permission, as they will pass through their zones. Evidently, Turkey

creates a new reality in its energy geopolitics and is now legitimated to utilize the energy resources in the region by conducting major exploration activities. In other words, Turkey has seized the opportunity to safeguard its interests and objectives by ensuring a fair new order and has reshaped the balances and the energy policies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Notwithstanding its importance, the Turkey- Libya agreement remains volatile and changeable. Its viability depends on a series of factors. The post- war, post –elections scenarios, in case of Haftar’s victory- for example- embrace a possible annulment of the agreement. Yet, the approval of the agreement by the Libyan parliament entails its acceptance in terms not only of national but also of international law. In addition, if Haftar becomes the winner after the elections and cancels the Turkey- Libya agreement, Libya would lose a significant maritime area. As a result, the post- elections dynamics are expected to determine the destiny of the agreement and any prediction, at the moment, is premature and uncertain.

Evidently, the impact of the Turkey- Libya agreement can be encapsulated in the following: Turkey and Libya turned into littoral- states, Cyprus and Greece are obviated from signing an EEZ agreement, Turkey endorsed an EEZ delimitation with a littoral –state for the first time, the so- called western borders of the Turkish EEZ were declared in conformity with the international law and Turkey established a legitimate a fundamental point of reference for its rights (Papakostas, 2020).

To sum, it is evident that Turkey has upgraded its position with the Turkey- Libya agreement and became a game changer, disrupting the planning of other players in the region, while serving its national interests in maritime boundaries’ delimitation, which are closely interconnected with energy geopolitics. Consequently, Turkey has acquired a position both on the diplomatic table and within the energy fields of the Eastern Mediterranean. As seen, by implementing the so –called smart diplomacy, Turkey has reversed the regional game and it is hoped and expected that by abiding its foreign policy by the international law, it will be able to de-escalate regional tensions and disputes and ensure a fair sharing of the hydrocarbon resources in Greater Eastern Mediterranean.

In conclusion, the maritime disputes in both the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean can be classified as the most challenging maritime zone delimitation disputes in the world due to the complexity of the geography, making it difficult to reach equitable and fair solutions via negotiations or reconciliation. In any case, the nationalistic Mavi Vatan (Blue Homeland)

doctrine, which contains significant flaws in international law, has been a considerable obstacle to creating an effective negotiating mechanism between the countries of the region. Eventually, international law should be the only vehicle to resolve maritime delimitation disputes in the region and Turkey should abandon the Mavi Vatan doctrine and develop a holistic approach on maritime delimitation in the Eastern Mediterranean, based on regional cooperation and the international rule of law (Yurtsever, 2022).

Chapter 3. Cyprus' Grand Strategy: smart leadership of a small state among political troubles & energy hopes

Cyprus constitutes an example of highly successful bargaining power. As a small state, especially after 2014, has managed to portray considerable flexibility and with the quality of its leadership bargained with its assets and negotiated successfully with strong international actors in order to implement its energy resources' strategy. In specific, Cyprus commenced its energy- related strategy in 2002–2003, when two parallel procedures were co- happening: negotiations for its entry in the EU (i. e. 2004) and negotiations under the United Nations to reach a solution to the Cyprus' problem, which were followed by the rejected Annan Plan, through a relevant referendum (i. e. 24 April 2004) (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019; Kouskouvelis, 2015).

After Cyprus' accession into the EU, with its decisive and competent leadership, the island pursued its energy objectives, against the Turkish hostility, through a well- organized - strategy, comprised of: institutional preparation, global network of alliances, enhanced regional cooperative schemes, as well as, deterrence of threat.

Small states, like Cyprus, are not passive players of the international system but they possess hard power, as well, and their power is projected through diplomacy, a compelling instrument of persuasion, as well as, through geographical location/ proximity to regions of geostrategic significance, an influential tool or main negotiating card, interlinking a small states' demands with the interests of strong actors (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019; Kouskouvelis, 2015).

Apart from these, energy resources can also be implemented by small states as a bargaining instrument. Especially for the small states, leadership is crucial and may define their fate since the exploration of the natural resources is pivotal. Moreover, after the three successful delimitation agreements with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, Cyprus determined, step by step, its natural resources' exploration program. While attracting major investors' interest in the region, through an organized campaign, Cyprus created a strong international network of relations. In addition, Cyprus managed to receive support from the US and the EU, capitalizing the advantages of its accession to the European system and highlighting the importance of its energy plans and the energy bonanza of the entire region, which in turn could enhance energy security, also, for the EU. Furthermore, Cyprus achieved to tackle the Turkish hostility towards the Cypriot energy program by denouncing, through specific political and diplomatic actions, its provocative and illegal behavior to the UN and the EU (i.e. Cyprus has threatened to obstruct Turkey's accession into the EU etc.). Within this

context, Cyprus has maintained a leading role, also, in significant cooperative frameworks, taking place in the region (i. e. trilaterals, quadrilaterals etc.) Lastly, Cyprus has been leading the way in building the link with the Middle East and the Arab world, as a key partner and an interlocutor, through a strong partnership, gathering still more strategic value.

In particular, it must be clarified that the Cypriot strategy was based on four pillars: making institutional amendments, networking with strong energy players, utilizing its diplomacy and its membership in international institutions, as well as, participating into enhanced cooperative regional schemes (i. e. political, economic, security, energy etc.) (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019) (Kouskouvelis , 2015).

In conclusion, Cyprus, besides becoming the first state in the region, which implemented a smart- strategy regarding its natural resources' exploitation, became also a neutral ground of the Eastern Mediterranean, where the interests of regional states could meet. As seen, due to its competent leadership, Cyprus, in no more than ten years, has achieved to elevate its profile as a future gas producer, acquired significant allies within the EU and UN, approached positively the US, enhanced its security through the Israeli cooperation and has confronted revisionist Tukey (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2019; Kouskouvelis, 2015).

3.1. Delimitation of maritime zones & their significance

World War I is viewed as the 'triggering point' that has highlighted the significance of natural resources as a means of abundance for a country and post-world war period has given prominence to the necessity of maritime boundary delimitations. The maritime zones recognized under international law include inland waters, the territorial sea, the high seas, the contiguous zone, the continental shelf, the exclusive economic zone, the seabed and the subsoil. With the exception of the high seas and the Area, each of these maritime zones is measured from the baseline, determined in accordance with customary international law, as reflected in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (InforMEA, 2021).

States have the same sovereign jurisdiction over internal waters, as they do over other territory, and there is no right of innocent passage through internal waters. International legal provision calls for equitable resolutions of disputes over exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines EEZ as a coastal state's self-declared area above its continental shelf, in which it enjoys exclusive rights to develop marine resources, including on and under the seabed, up to a maximum of 200 miles from the coastal state's shoreline, including islands (Koh, 1988).

This is not to be confused with a territorial sea, which UNCLOS defines as a state's sovereign territory on the seabed, sea surface and the airspace above, which can extend to a maximum of twelve miles from shore. Countries unilaterally declare their own EEZs and then register them with the United Nations. Inevitably, disputes arise among neighboring states, when their respective EEZ claims overlap. Article 59 of UNCLOS stipulates such conflicts: 'should be resolved on the basis of equity and in the light of all the relevant circumstances, taking into account the respective importance of the interests involved to the parties, as well as, to the international community as a whole' (Bryza, 2020).

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea Basin, in particular, is one of the sub-basins of the semi-enclosed Mediterranean Sea. It has a special and complex geographical situation due to its relatively confined maritime areas that contain numerous islands and are bordered by ten states with competing economic interests in natural resources. The potential natural gas discoveries in the region motivated basin states to claim jurisdiction and exclusive sovereign rights for exploring and exploiting the natural resources in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) or continental shelves (Dirwany, 2018).

Apparently, the extension of states jurisdiction over maritime zones with the absence of defined maritime boundaries have generated contesting claims between basin states on overlapping un-delimited maritime zones and instigated maritime boundaries disputes. Additionally, this enhanced the importance of maritime boundaries delimitation since it provides legal certainty to maritime boundaries between basin states and enables them to securely exercise their legal rights over their extended maritime zones (Dirwany, 2018).

As mentioned, the law of maritime boundaries delimitation can be sourced from the legal rules embodied in the law of the sea conventions and customary international law principles. International jurisprudence has contributed to the development of this law. In specific, the law of the sea conventions distinguishes between different maritime zones and each maritime zone, has a separate legal regime, while the conventional rules governing the delimitation of maritime zones are binding on all state's parties to the convention. Nevertheless, states that are not parties to a convention are not bound to its rules, unless they 'reflect' and 'embody' customary international law. It is reminded, in brief, that conventional rules of maritime delimitation were outlined in the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone "CTS", the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf "CCS" and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea "UNCLOS". The two former conventions encompass rules for the delimitation of the territorial sea and continental shelf

respectively, whilst the later convention incorporates rules for the delimitation of the territorial sea, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf. Thus, due to the subject matter under examination, special focus will be placed, henceforth, on the term 'Exclusive economic zone' (EEZ).

Exclusive Economic Zone

The significance of the economic exclusive zone (EEZ) in the international law of the sea has been analyzed by many experts throughout the years, in all its dimensions: legal, political, economic and social. However, it still incites discussions and disputes with respect to specific provisions of the UNCLOS, to the compliance of the latter to customary law and to the gradual extension of the jurisdiction of coastal states to new usages of the sea, limiting the freedom of navigation. EEZ as a maritime zone is viewed by the international law of the sea, as a foundational subject due to the concentration of economically exploitable natural resources within it, as well as, due to the interplay of politico-economic interests of various jurisdictional powers (i. e. coastal states, flag states etc.), including those of the international community. The aforementioned aspects provoke 'divergences' in the interpretation and application of the legal rules, raising concerns on environmental, technological issues, as well as, on the maritime spaces' control (Andreone, 2015).

In fact, the exclusive economic zone regime was the outcome of the blending of the EEZ concept with the notion of the patrimonial sea, uplifted by the new independent and developing states, in the 1970ies, aiming at re-appropriating their natural resources. It was seen as a far-reaching arrangement between the interests of the coastal states and those of the flag states, including the international community's wider interests, consolidating the regime of the waters superimposed to the seabed and its subsoil in a multifunctional zone (Andreone, 2015).

More specifically, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is a sui generis zone, susceptible to selected sovereign rights and powers of the coastal state in symbiosis with some freedoms of the high seas. Article 55 of the LOSC defines the EEZ as an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, that is subject to the specific legal regime, applicable to the coastal state and to other states and provided for by the relevant provisions of the convention. Before the entry into force of the LOSC, in 1994, the concept of the EEZ was already viewed as part of the customary international law (Andreone, 2015).

The maximum extension of 200 nautical miles (nm) was adopted, although extensive and inadequate in scientific argumentation, and nowadays 166 states are parties to the LOSC and approximately 143 coastal states claiming EEZs or EFZs (i. e. exclusive fishery zones) are included among them. About the coastal states' pledges within the EEZ, it is complicated to reassure that they fall under a customary status. In cases, where request for a maximum EEZ expansion is obstructed by geography, according to Article 74, a delimitation of overlapping zones must be agreed on by states with opposite or adjacent coasts. However, the delimitation method, aimed at achieving equitable solution, without any predominant criteria, despite its practicality, it adds complexity to the legal regime of the EEZ. A reduced implementation of the EEZ, due to specific political or geographical factors, is applied, for example, in fishing protection zones, in ecological protection zones, or in mixed zones. These reduced zones are perceived as legitimate zones, but their legal regime is dependent on different powers exercised by coastal states, which might not correspond either to the claimed purpose for the zone, or to the powers asserted in the zone by means of a proclamation or legislation. An analogous ambiguity, 'governing' the types and limits of coastal state claims beyond the territorial sea, is seen in the Mediterranean Sea. Yet nowadays the state practice of proclaiming EEZs or transforming the *minoris generis* zones to EEZs is gathering momentum (Andreone, 2015).

The need and logic of distinction between sovereign rights over living and non- living resources within an EEZ and over other activities related with the exploration and economic exploitation of the EEZ, as well as, the distinction between jurisdictional rights over the installment and use of artificial islands, structures, scientific research and environmental marine protection, is a fundamental issue, introduced by Article 56 of the LOSC. The definition of the resources- related rights of coastal states as sovereign and more exclusive rights, conforming to more extensive enforceable powers, juxtaposed to the simpler jurisdictional powers, is pivotal. In any case, the rights, whether sovereign or jurisdictional and the related obligations of coastal states are not absolute, since due regard to the rights and duties of other states is explicitly provided for by Articles 55, 56(2), and 58 of the LOSC (Andreone, 2015).

It must be clarified that Articles 56, 58, and 59 acted as a legal adjustment in order to harmonize the divergent concerns, ascribed to the controversial nature of the EEZ. In particular, Article 59 attempts to achieve conflict resolution of remaining rights and jurisdiction in the EEZ not assigned by the LOSC, with a special emphasis on equity. Be that as it may, it has not succeeded in resolving conflicts among coastal and third states and

therefore coastal states' and third states' interests must be reevaluated in alignment with the interests of the international community.

The significance of the exclusive economic zone can be encapsulated within the following aspects: Firstly, via the relevant provisions on the living resources, upon which the coastal state enjoys exclusive rights. Secondly, through the regulatory regime, whereby, according to Articles 61 and 62 of the LOSC, a coastal state that has proclaimed an EEZ, must estimate the total allowable capture of its living resources and define the necessary conservation measures for the optimum exploitation of them within its EEZ. In cases, when rational allocation of the surplus fisheries towards third states is decided by the coastal state, negotiations and agreements are needful, based on the LOSC. The discretionary character of this allocation is reflected in Article 297(3), whereby it is explicitly stated that coastal states are not obliged to submit to settlement a dispute, related to their sovereign rights over the living resources in the EEZ. Thirdly, through the enforcement powers of the coastal state that include- according to Article 73-boarding, inspection, arrest and judicial proceedings, which can be adopted on foreign vessels, in the exercise of the sovereign rights of the coastal state over living resources. Moreover, EEZ' significance is attested by the power of a coastal state to exploit and conserve its living and non-living resources of the seabed and subsoil, whereby, as defined by Article 56(1)(a), this overlaps with the power over the resources of the continental shelf and is regulated by the provisions of Part VI of the LOSC. Specific provisions of the LOSC perplex things further, since they recognize a coastal state's sovereign right over the economic exploration and exploitation of its EEZ. However, the full and exclusive sovereign rights of the coastal state over all its economic resources are not ensured by relevant provisions, given the fact that energy resources- related activities presuppose different industrial and technological regulations. In addition, EEZ' utility is further corroborated by the jurisdictional rights of a coastal state on the construction of artificial islands and installations, as regulated by Article 60, within the EEZ and the continental shelf, which are important and reciprocal, with the only difference that in the latter they are restricted, whilst within the EEZ they can be implemented for multiple purposes. Similarly, EEZ' importance is highlighted by the jurisdictional rights of a coastal state for marine scientific research, as defined in Article 56(b) and Part XIII of the LOSC, which provide for the need of explicit consent of the coastal state for research projects, put forward by other states or international organizations, within the EEZ. Article 246, in specific, is supportive of maritime research aimed at peaceful purposes and at enhancing scientific knowledge for the benefit of all mankind and defines as a moral duty of a coastal

state to assist maritime research and not delay or deny its consent. Nonetheless, consent can be denied under Article 246(5), based on discretionary assessment of the coastal state, giving rise to conflicting interpretations, as well as, to legal disputes. Further, EEZ' worth is demonstrated through the jurisdictional rights of a coastal state on environmental protection within the EEZ –as defined by Article 56 and Part XII of the LOSC- which are granted with selected powers, on the basis of the type of the pollutants. Coastal states enjoy wide regulatory and enforcement powers, facilitated by international standards, except for ship source pollution, whereby coastal states cannot adopt ineffective domestic laws or regulations on environmental protection measures, which are not in alignment with the regulations, adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Finally, EEZ' functionality is evident in the amount of freedoms enjoyed within the EEZ, such as navigation, overflight and laying of submarine cables and pipelines, which is reversed proportional to the coastal state's objective to play an active role in its EEZ' environmental protection or the exploitation of its living or non-living resources or even to the placement of installations, which might inhibit international navigation. Despite the general obligations provided by the LOSC, referring to international standard of environmental protection against various types of vessels potentially involved in EEZ or high seas pollution, restrictions or measures upon limiting navigation of foreign vessels within the EEZ have proved controversial and have given rise to unresolved disputes. Likewise, it is doubted whether the laying of submarine pipelines has been correctly classified among the freedoms enjoyed by other states within the EEZ, since prior consent to the delineation of the course can be interpreted as a discretionary power of the coastal state to grant this right to the third state (Andreone, 2015).

In light of the above- mentioned, it becomes apparent that EEZ is a concept in constant evolution. As a result, the likelihood of conflict in the acclamation of rights and competences within the EEZ remains high. Focusing on the creeping coastal state jurisdiction, the classic distinction is between the pressure toward spatial extension of national jurisdiction beyond 200 nm and claims for powers unforeseen by the LOSC, based on an extensive interpretation of implicit powers, concerning fishing, the protection of the marine environment and resource-related functions of the EEZ. Nowadays, the rise of new collective environmental and security needs and challenges and the constant readjustment of the international community to new norms, demand alternative cooperative schemes and synergies among states, non-state actors and individuals, regarding the rights and duties to be applied within the EEZ. In this context, it would not be seen conflicting to the spirit of the LOSC to transform the freedoms of the sea into a more clear-cut regulatory regime of the rights of

third states, through general or regional conventions, enforcing the LOSC provisions. The formidable ‘territorialization’ of the EEZ has not yet been realized, yet it still remains a possible scenario for the future (Andreone, 2015).

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the area under examination, is composed of seventeen potential maritime boundaries, the majority of which are not yet delimited. There are only four boundaries that were delimited by agreements. The first exclusive economic zone (EEZ) boundary delimitation agreement in the basin was concluded, in 2003, between Egypt and Cyprus, as described below (Dirwany, 2018).

Unquestionably, in the Eastern Mediterranean, the prospect of discovering new gas reserves progressively pushed the countries of the region, among which Cyprus, to define their EEZs (Exclusive Economic Zones), in order to attract the global energy companies to invest in the prospective blocks (Karagianni, 2021).

As seen, Turkey and Turkish Cypriots dispute Cyprus’ right to sign maritime delimitation agreements with other countries in the region, claiming that the interest of the Turkish Cypriots is not being represented (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

As expected, the overlapping maritime boundary claims between Israel and Lebanon, as well as, among Turkey, TRNC, Greece and Cyprus pose challenges for the exploration and export of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean and impact highly Cyprus’ economic and political prospects. Against this backdrop, newly vast discoveries in Eastern Mediterranean stimulated a dispute over EEZs’ delimitation, attributed to a culminating competition among coastline states over their rights to exploit offshore mineral resources and to further promote their energy agendas. At the back of this challenge resides the fact that international extraction, storage and transportation energy- related projects over sovereign areas of Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel and Palestine regularly contest to acquire feasibility and security appraisals in ‘pinpointing’ the most cost-effective alternative energy supply routes from the Eastern Mediterranean towards Europe (Serhat, Çubukçuoğlu & Saner, 2018).

Hence, since the viability and security of the energy- related project realizations are dependent on the degree of a just and equitable resolution of the EEZ delimitation disputes, this evolving situation has explicitly underscored the crucial strategic position of Cyprus and has enhanced its role as a regional player (Serhat, Çubukçuoğlu & Saner, 2018).

3.1.1. A timeline of Cyprus' activity: EEZ delimitation between Cyprus & Egypt

On 17 February 2003, in Cairo, the Republic of Cyprus signed an agreement with Egypt on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas, which was entered into force, on 7 March 2004 (Ocean & Law of the sea, 2022).

Cyprus registered the agreement at the United Nations, on 14 January 2008. The agreement adopted the median line delimitation method and the maritime boundary line between both States is composed of 7 segments that join 8 geographical coordinates with a total length of 144 n. m. 291. Both States have concluded an agreement concerning the development and exploitation of the cross-median line hydrocarbons resources, which entered into force, on 16 September 2014.

By delimitating boundaries with Egypt, Cyprus would be able to explore gas within its own maritime domain and also make use of Egypt's decommissioned gas liquefaction plants so as to export LNG to Europe and to Asia (Eissler, Gozde & Arasil, 2014).

Furthermore, on 2 April 2004, Cyprus adopted a law, defining its EEZs in order to ensure that it would obtain the best coverage of the gas fields. This partnership with Egypt assisted Cyprus to bypass other regional players. Moreover, in 2014, the Republic of Cyprus and Egypt adopted a Framework Agreement regarding the development of cross-median line on hydrocarbons resources (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

As expected, Turkey objected the 2003 Egypt- Cyprus maritime boundary agreement and still disputes it, on the basis of its own continental shelf claim, expanding west of Cyprus to the Greek island of Rhodes (Rodos) (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

Accordingly, Turkey expressed its non-recognition of the agreement, on 2 March 2004. In this context, Turkey claims that it has existing ipso facto and ab initio sovereign rights over the maritime areas falling beyond the western part of the parallel of longitude 32°16'18" and reserves all its legal rights related to the delimitation of these areas (Dirwany, 2018).

On the other hand, Cyprus responded to the Turkish objection by asserting that it exercised with Egypt their legitimate sovereign rights to delimit the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) lying between their respective coasts and avoided extending their delimitation line into areas, where the rights of third coastal states could be affected. Similarly, Greece joined Cyprus in

rejecting Turkey's objection and reiterated its claim of having a shared continental shelf and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) boundary with Cyprus (Dirwany, 2018).

3.1.2. EEZ delimitation between Cyprus & Lebanon

On 17 January 2007, in Nicosia, a similar agreement was signed between the Republic of Cyprus and Lebanon, which has not yet entered into force. The agreement adopted the median line method and the boundary line between both states is composed of 5 segments that connect 6 coordinate-points with a total length of 84.5 n. m. (Dirwany, 2018).

Nonetheless, this agreement was never ratified by the Lebanese government. (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020). In specific, Lebanon did not conclude any maritime boundary agreement with its adjacent states Syria and Israel and argues that the terminal points of the median line fall short of the estimated equidistance tripoints (Dirwany, 2018).

On 26 January 2007, Cyprus passed a new legislation declaring thirteen oil exploration zones within the boundaries of the agreements signed both with Lebanon and Egypt (Dirwany, 2018).

In February 2007, Cyprus initiated its first international tender for three year oil and gas exploration licenses, covering eleven of its thirteen zones. In July and October 2010, Lebanon entrusted with the UN Secretary-General charts of geographical coordinates of its southwestern boundary with Cyprus and its southern boundary with Israel. Nevertheless, these unilaterally declared maritime boundaries differentiate from the ones, defined by the maritime agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon, in 2007. This agreement, as mentioned, was ratified only by Cyprus and not by Lebanon. More specifically, the shared dividing point that was set between Lebanon and Cyprus in 2007 (the so-called Point 1) became a source of debate. In 2010, in the maritime boundary submission made by Lebanon, a different coordinate was used (point 23), seventeen kilometers southwest of point 1 and the overlapping the area claimed by Israel (Wahlisch, 2011).

In view of the above, it becomes clear that the coordinates in the Cyprus-Lebanon 2007 maritime agreement were viewed as 'an interim solution' by the Lebanese part, seeking a settlement between Lebanon and Israel. Certainly, there are multiple scenarios and explanations, regarding the motives of Lebanon's setting point 1 as a dividing-point. According to some analysts, it was simply a diplomatic mistake or a way of bypassing further conflicts with Israel, in the post war summer of 2006. In any case, the agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon is not binding for Lebanon but to enter into force it needs ratification,

which was rejected by the Lebanese parliament. Consequently, the maritime agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon must be renegotiated. As expected, Turkey, in September 2011, disputed the maritime treaty. Since 2011, a series of negotiations were held between the Lebanese and Cypriot sides about the maritime boundary agreement with Cyprus, as well as the agreement between Cyprus and Israel. Apparently, it is difficult to predict whether the Israeli- Lebanese conflict over the offshore gas and oil fields will lead, soon, to a resource war. Especially, in periods of excessive oil and gas prices, such as in the case of the current emerging global energy crisis that we are witnessing, mineral rich countries like Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel, tend to secure their energy assets. Undoubtedly, the Syrian war, Iran's stance, the case of Palestine, as well as the dispute over Gaza's offshore gas, in all likelihood, will impact the Israeli- Lebanese relations. Be that as it may, it must be reminded lastly, that diplomacy constitutes the optimum approach to conflict- resolution (Wahlisch, 2011).

3.1.3. EEZ delimitation between Cyprus & Israel

On 17 December 2010, Cyprus, and Israel signed in Nicosia an agreement on the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which entered into force, on 25 February 2011. Israel registered the agreement at the United Nations, on 9 March 2011. The agreement adopted the median line method, and the boundary line is composed of 11 segments that join 12 geographical coordinates. Cyprus and Israel have claimed that the endpoints of their median line are in line with the Cyprus-Egypt and Cyprus-Lebanon agreements. In particular, the geographical coordinates of the southern endpoint number 12 of the median line between Cyprus and Israel were adjusted to be similar to the coordinates of the endpoint number 8 of the median line between Cyprus and Egypt. Similarly, the geographical coordinates of the northern endpoint no 1 of the median line between Cyprus and Israel were adjusted to be identical to the coordinates of the endpoint no 1 of the median line between Cyprus and Lebanon (Dirwany, 2018).

However, on 20 June 2011, Lebanon objected the Maritime Agreement between Cyprus and Israel and complained to the United Nations. The main argument of dissatisfaction of the Lebanese government was that the delimited zone between Cyprus and Israel in the agreement of 2010 absorbed parts of the Lebanese EEZ. In other words, it argued that the agreement violated the sovereign and economic rights of Lebanon by 'soaking up' part of Lebanon's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and that the endpoint no 1 of the Israel-Cyprus median line could not be used as a trilateral point between Lebanon, Cyprus, and Israel (Dirwany, 2018).

Nonetheless, similar coordinates were used by the maritime agreement between Cyprus and Israel, like those in the agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon. Subsequently, the Lebanese part highlighted that the demarcation point was not representative of the terminal southern end of the median between Cyprus and Lebanon, which distinguishes each EEZ and that point 1 is 11 nautical miles north of the equidistant point between the Cypriot, Israeli and Lebanese EEZs (Stanič & Karbuz, 2020).

In other words, the coordinate could not be seen as starting point between Cyprus and any other state but only as shared point between Cyprus and Lebanon. Given the fact that no agreement exists between Israel and Lebanon, the EEZ of Lebanon could outstretch beyond this point. In fact, the Cyprus- Israel maritime agreement was described in a protest letter of the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. Mansour, to the UN SG Ban Ki-moon, as ‘a blatant attack on Lebanon’s sovereign rights over the zone, which could jeopardize international peace’. In addition, the agreement could authorize Israel to store, and process extracted oil in Cyprus before exporting it to the European market, promoting Israel to access first Europe and securitizing Israeli offshore oil infrastructure under the defense umbrella of the EU. In July 2011, a map of maritime boundaries, in line with the agreement between Cyprus and Israel of 2010 was presented by the Israeli government and submitted to the United Nations. Thus, according to the Israeli Prime Minister, B. Netanyahu, ‘Lebanon’s boundary declaration refutes the line Israel has agreed upon with Cyprus’, namely ‘it contradicts the line that Lebanon itself concluded with Cyprus, in 2007’, indicating that ‘Israel has no choice but to define its borders’ (Wahlisch, 2011).

3.2. Cyprus’ natural gas landscape within its thirteen EEZ blocks

The agreements were combined with the division of the Cypriot EEZs into 13 exploration blocks. More specifically, a legal framework was established, in 2007, domestically with the adoption of the Hydrocarbon Law (i. e. Prospection, Exploration and Exploitation, No. 4 (1)/2007), where the relevant regulations were completed, in 2007, and, in 2009, (No. 51/2007 and No. 113/2009).

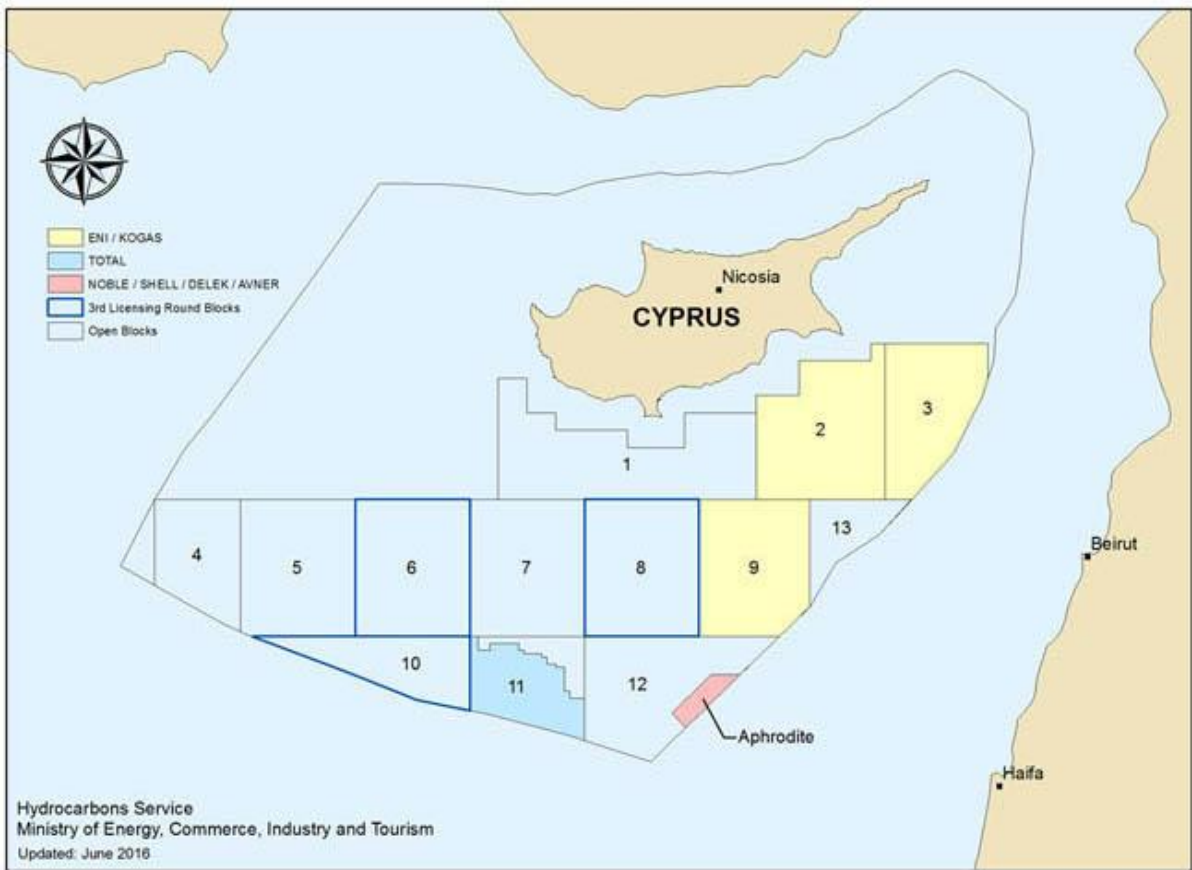


Figure 6. Offshore Cyprus exploration blocks.

Source: <https://meci.gov.cy/en/departments-services/hydrocarbons-service>

While preparing the legal frameworks a two-dimensional seismic study was conducted, between March-May-2006 and a three dimensional seismic study was conducted between January-March 2007, which paved the way for the opening of the First Exploration Licensing Round. The first round commenced for the periods of February- August 2007. Among the 13 identified exploration blocks, Blocks 3 and 13, were excluded from this round. Only one exploration license was granted at the end of the period, to Noble Energy International, on 24 October 2008, for exploration in Block 12. A series of two dimension (August 2008-March 2009) and three dimension (October 2009) seismic studies were subsequently conducted after the completion of the license agreement with Noble Energy. However, the 'turning point' in the hydrocarbon exploration activities in Cypriot offshore came after the signing of the EEZ agreement with Israel, in December 2010. A year after this, Noble Energy commenced its first exploratory drilling in Block 12, on 19 September 2011, and, on 28 December 2011.

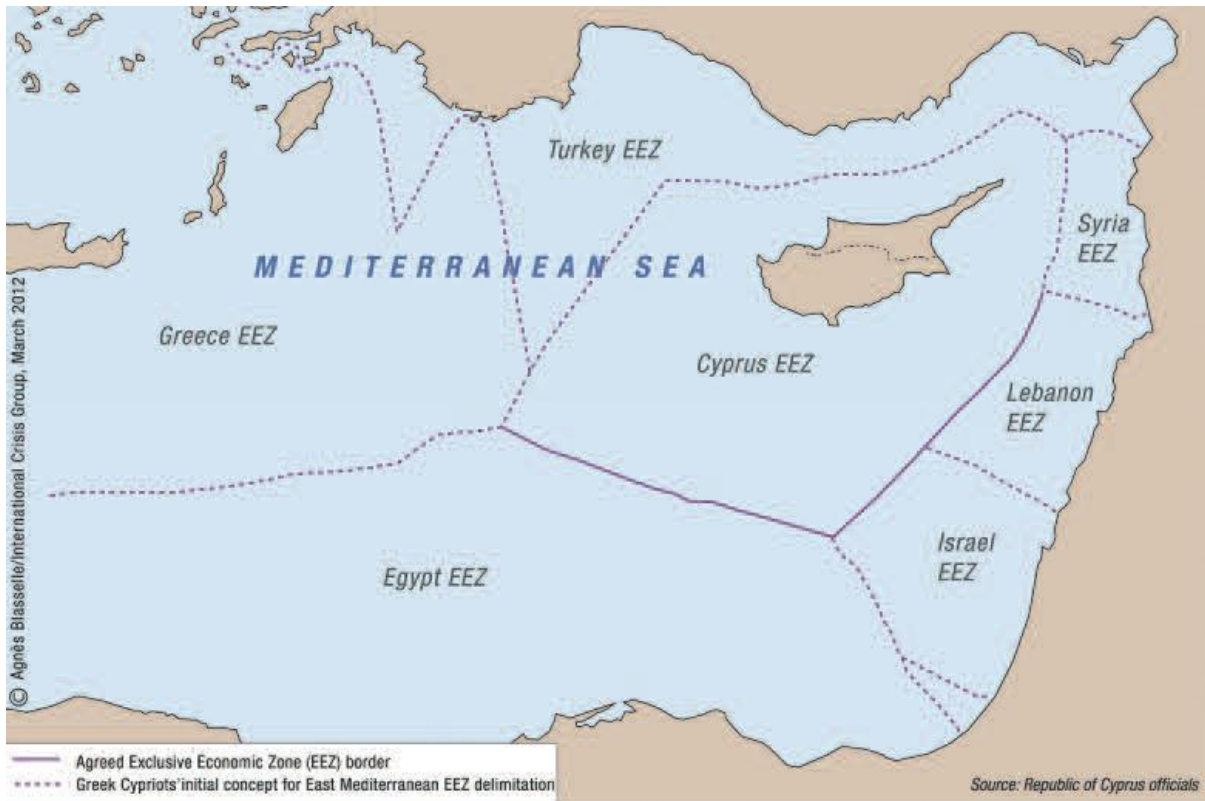


Figure 7. Maritime Boundaries of the Republic of Cyprus.

Source: Giamouridis, A. “The Offshore Discovery in the Republic of Cyprus: Monetization Prospects and Challenges”. The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, July 2012, p. 23, available at: http://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NG_65.pdf

Apparently, the efforts of the republic of Cyprus to explore its EEZ in search of offshore gas reserves were launched, in 2011, and until now 3 exploration rounds and 10 exploration licenses are being registered, according to the Cypriot Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry. Turkey (a non-party to UNCLOS) reacted, as expected, to the Cypriot plans, which were seen by Ankara as unilateral actions. Yet, it did not retaliate with any tangible measures and refrained from making explicit threats against either the Republic of Cyprus or Noble Energy. (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018) A few days after the launching of Noble Energy’s first drilling, Turkey’s state-owned company, ‘Turkish Petroleum Corporation’ (TPAO) was authorized to proceed with explorations off the coast of Cyprus, following the signing of a continental shelf delimitation agreement with TRNC. According to this ‘agreement’, they claim sovereign rights over a significant part of the republic of Cyprus’ EEZ, specifically in blocks 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7, as part of the Turkish continental shelf and in blocks 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12, as part of the TRNC’s’ continental shelf (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018).

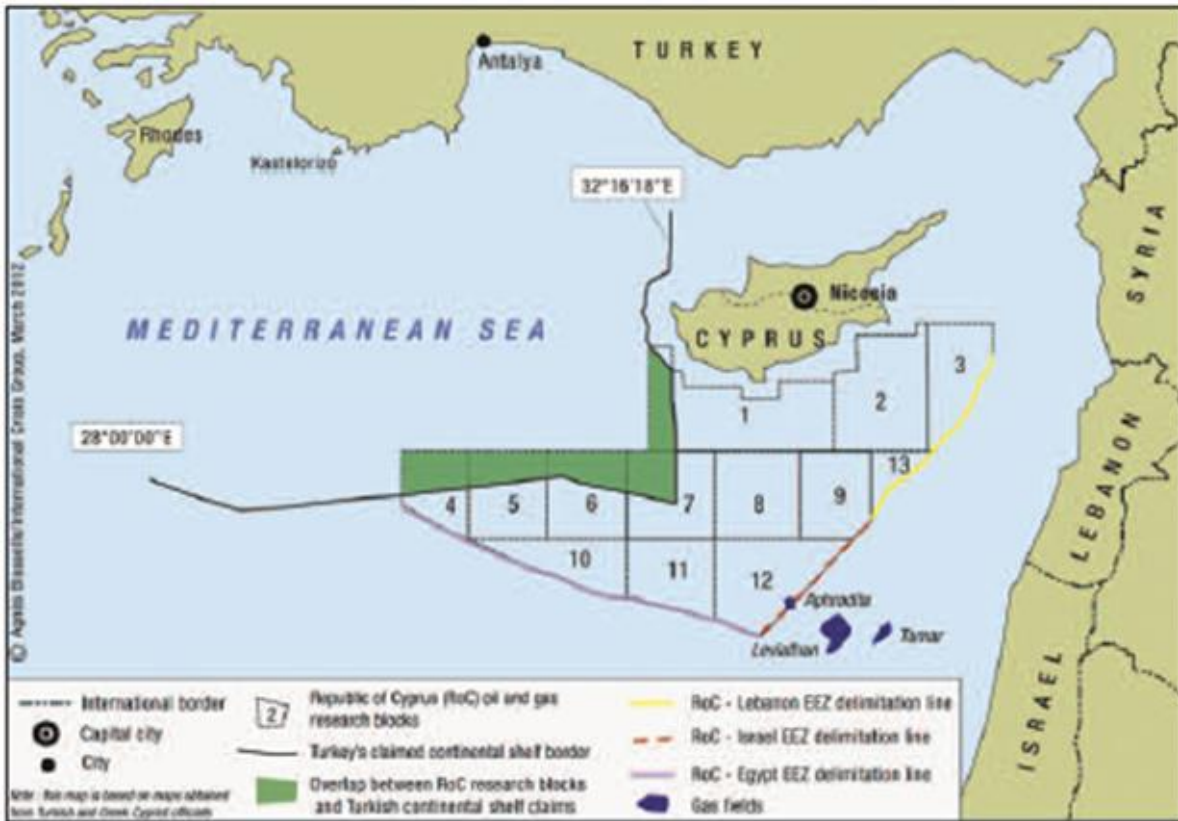


Figure 8. The Republic of Cyprus EEZ delimitations and hydrocarbon research blocks, and Turkey's continental shelf claims

Source: The Cyprus Hydrocarbons Issue: context, positions and future scenarios, Ayla Gurel, Fiona Mullen, Harry Tzimitras, PCC report 2013, Prio Cyprus center

Moreover, Noble Energy announced the discovery of the Aphrodite field with a potential of 3-6 Tcf, following the Green Tree meeting between Ban Ki Moon, Christofias and Eroğlu, in New York. Be that as it may, after the second exploratory drilling, it was disclosed that the potential of the field could be equivalent to 5 Tcf. Clearly, the discovery of the Aphrodite field invigorated the exploration trials of the Republic of Cyprus. This led, automatically, to the Second Exploration Licensing Round, in February 2012, for all the exploration blocks, apart from Block 12, which was licensed formerly to Noble Energy. More specifically, fifteen companies expressed interest in the Second Licensing Round and after negotiations, license agreements were granted for Blocks 2, 3 and 9, to ENI Cyprus Ltd. and KOGAS Cyprus Ltd - Consortium. Accordingly, for Blocks 10 and 11, TOTAL E&P Cyprus B. V acquired the exploration licenses. On 25 September 2014, ENI-KOGAS commenced drillings explorations at Onassagoras well, in block 9, of the Cypriot offshore, ending without success. Notwithstanding the ENI-KOGAS consortium contracts for four additional exploratory-drillings, due to the unsuccessful second explorations, further drillings in Block 9 were

suspended. The ENI-KOGAS failure combined with the low market prices alleviated the attractiveness of the region for the companies. As a result, TOTAL, which was the next to conduct exploratory drilling in Cyprus offshore, cancelled it. In addition, some incidents that occurred in the aftermath of these operations (i. e. the dispatch of Turkish seismographic vessel Barbaros Hayreddin Pasa, accompanied by warships in the Cypriot EEZ etc.), could be interpreted as tit-for-tat replies (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018).

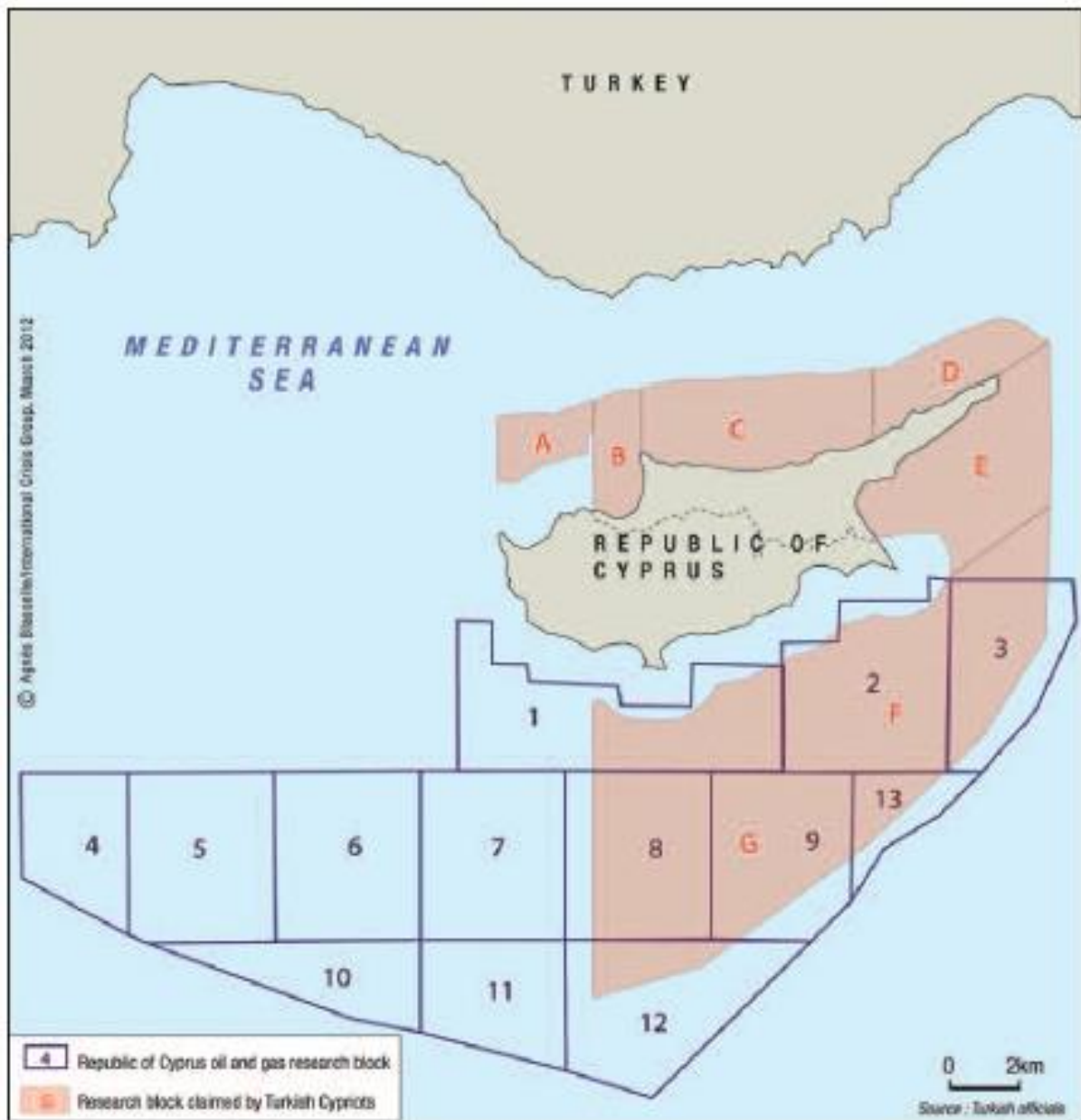


Figure 9. The Turkish Cypriots’ claimed hydrocarbon research blocks.

Source: (Gürel, Tzimitras, & Faustmann, 2014)

Similarly, in January 2015, TOTAL announced that it was planning to withdraw its licenses from blocks 10 and 11, which led incrementally to a downturn in the Republic of Cyprus’

exploration activities. Notwithstanding the press statements, that were in line with the previously signed oil and gas exploration agreement between TRNC and TPAO, onshore exploratory drilling was undertaken in the northern part of Cyprus (i. e. in the Turkyurdu 1 Well). Furthermore, in January 2015, the Republic of Cyprus disclosed that ENI-KOGAS would continue its exploration activities until 18 March 2015, in Block 9, with the drilling of another well named Amathusa. In fact, the two successive, unsuccessful operations by ENI, in block 9, had had a repressive impact on other companies' drilling programs, as well. Be that as it may, the discovery of the massive gas field of Zohr in the Egyptian EEZ reinvigorated the interest of oil and gas companies for the Cypriot blocks, which were declining after the unsatisfactory results of the drillings in blocks 9 and 10. Unsurprisingly, the Third Exploration Licensing Round was set forth, on 24 March 2016, only for Blocks 6, 8 and 10, provoking the strong reaction of the Turkish authorities. On 27 July 2016, the Republic of Cyprus disclosed the relevant applicants and, on 21 December 2016, published the names of the selected applicants to be invited for the negotiation of the exploration licenses. According to that decision, block 6 was granted to ENI Cyprus Ltd -Total E&P Cyprus B. V., block 8 was assigned to Cyprus Ltd and Block 10 was ceded to Exxon Mobil Exploration- Production Cyprus and Offshore Ltd. Qatar Petroleum International Upstream O. P. C. After the conclusion of the negotiations, Cyprus signed a license agreement with the companies on the 5th and 6th of April 2017. (Kahveci, 2019) Following this, ENI and Total deepened further their involvement in the Cypriot EEZ, whilst the entry of the US giant Exxon Mobil underscored the US interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and particularly, in Cyprus. In addition, the tripartite partnerships of Cyprus and Greece with Israel and Egypt respectively, analyzed in chapter 4, were reflective of an unprecedented regional geopolitical evolution that heightened Cyprus' role in the wider area. (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018) Moreover, in February 2018, ENI reported a new gas discovery, in Block 6, that confirmed the extension of the Zohr like-play in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is abutting the Egyptian EEZ, as defined by the Cyprus- Egypt delimitation agreement. Yet, this is still viewed by Turkey, as lying within the Turkish continental shelf, as explained in chapter 2 (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018). In light of the above, it is obvious that Turkey's strategy towards the Cypriot offshore activity was profoundly transformed into strategically chosen actions to question the Republic of Cyprus' sovereign rights over its EEZ and it is not viewed as a conflict-prone strategy of military threats. It came as no surprise, that in March 2017, Turkey notified of its intention to proceed with its own exploratory drilling operations in maritime areas, which considered as part of its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean and which coincided with the Cypriot EEZ. Furthermore, during that period, Turkey sporadically

issued navigational warnings, reserving areas within the Cypriot EEZ and deterred companies involved in explorations, under Republic of Cyprus' authorization, from proceeding with their plans within the Cypriot EEZ. Evidently, this signaled a shift of the Turkish strategy towards military coercion, as corroborated, for example, in ENI's drill- ship obstruction by the Turkish military ships, in February 2018, from executing an exploratory drill, in Block 3, of the Cypriot EEZ. In fact, this incident, which followed ENI's announcement of gas discovery, in Block 6, was registered as the only serious military activity since the onset of the Cypriot exploratory program. Specifically, in November 2018 Exxon Mobil's exploratory drilling, in block 10, commenced and it was accompanied by Turkey's proclamation that its first drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean was forthcoming. The same year, ENI further promulgated the discovery of a new gas deposit, called Calypso, in block 6, estimated to match Aphrodite field's production capacity, in block 12, that could 'feed' an East-Med pipeline, if also joined by Israel. Nonetheless, if the new round of exploratory- drills reveal additional, promising deposits, in block 10, one feasible way to commercially transport extracts from blocks 12 and 6 is through a direct pipeline to Egypt's LNG plants, despite the security, market and capacity risks (Serhat.S.Çubukçuoğlu-Salih.Saner, 2018). As observed, Turkey's strategy towards the Cypriot offshore activity, in particular after 2011, implies that military force could be an option, among others, and its failure to deter the Republic of Cyprus from launching its exploratory program could be seen as a sort of coercive diplomacy. (Kontos & Bitisis, 2018) Certainly, the most current discovery was realized, in February 2019, in Glaucus gas- field, the promising Block 10, by the ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum consortium, estimated to hold 5 to 8 tcf of gas. The latter was a positive evolution, as Glaucus, Calypso and Onesiphoros were discovered in geological formations similar to the giant 30 tcf Zhor gas field. The above- mentioned results suggest favorable developments for Cyprus, adding to its reputation as an emerging regional gas player in the Eastern Mediterranean. Not surprisingly, Exxon Mobil extended its interest with licenses for two blocks southwest of Crete and in Egypt, while Chevron has gained rights to three offshore blocks and has taken over Noble Energy's shares in the Tamara and Leviathan gas fields. Systematic analysis of seismic data has corroborated good prospects for new, potential discoveries in Cyprus' EEZ (Ellinas, 2021). Regarding the drilling undertaken by Exxon Mobil, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, has underscored, recently, that significant drilling -work in Glaucus, block 10, which started at the end of 2021, will determine if the deposit is at the highest or lower end of its estimated size of 5-8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (Hadjicostis, 2022). Moreover, the consortium of ENI TOTAL commenced drilling, in the first half of 2022, to decide on the size of what was described as a promising deposit in

Calypso 1 well, in block 6, which adjoins the area, where Exxon Mobil- Qatar Petroleum is licensed. Given the world energy crisis, N. Pilides, explained that Cyprus is going through a phase where, there is hope that if there are enough in Cyprus, it could provide an alternative for the Eastern Mediterranean region, whereby Egypt's interest in pushing forward regional cooperation for a pipeline transferring gas from Cypriot and even Israeli waters to its processing plants, is fervent. Finally, the possibility is being examined for a pipeline that would deliver gas to Egypt from Cyprus' Aphrodite deposit and Israel's vast adjacent Leviathan field, both of which are operated by Chevron (Hadjicostis, 2022).

More importantly, on 10 December 2021, the Cypriot government and the consortium of ExxonMobil and Qatar Energy signed an Exploration and Production-sharing contract and a hydrocarbon exploration license for block 5, in the consortiums' second license in the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), following the adjacent block 10. The agreements were signed by the Energy Minister N. Pilides, V. Theodosiou, CEO of ExxonMobil Cyprus and Ali al Mana, Director of Qatar Energy's International Upstream and Exploration (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). In specific, it is reminded that block 5, a continuation of block 10, is the tenth licensed one among the 13 blocks of the Cypriot EEZ.

Earlier, in 2019, the exploratory drilling of ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum, in block 10, revealed that the Glaucus gas field, it is estimated to have a gross mean of 5 to 8 trillion cubic feet. In this context, the hydrocarbon activities re-commenced, in the end of 2021, after being halted by the pandemic (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Notwithstanding the complex working environment for the global oil and gas industry, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, underscored that Cyprus and its stakeholders are making a decisive step towards enhancing their partnership in the Cypriot EEZ, while assuring that the consortium will undertake fieldwork for seismic data acquisition, in 2022 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Further, it was highlighted by all parties, that Cyprus is a promising region for offshore exploration and that the consortium proceeded with determination to a significant investment and invested time in concluding the negotiations, despite the Turkish aggressive stance towards the licensing of block 5, a part of which, according to its assertions, is within the Turkish continental shelf (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Hence, it was underlined, once again, that the stakeholders will proceed based on international law and the Law of the Sea, as this has always been the core- principle, upon which this partnership is build (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

3.3. Natural Gas Monetization Pathways for Cyprus: overview & assessment

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region with huge potential and prospectivity for resource development, offering a substantial diversification alternative to Europe. In addition, it is prone to geopolitical frictions and territorial disputes. Especially for Cyprus, its natural gas monetization strategy is dependent, also, on its domestic affairs and its conflictual relations with Turkey (Paltsev, et al., 2013). Undoubtedly, the announcement of the offshore gas discoveries, in block 12, the so called ‘Aphrodite field’, on 28 December 2011, by Noble Energy, a Houston-based oil and gas company, represented for Cyprus ‘a new path’ towards lower domestic energy costs and significant future export revenues. The specific field was evaluated- according to a moderate calculation- to come up to 7 trillion cubic feet (tcf, within a range of 5-8 tcf) in volume, or 198 billion cubic meters (bcm). In other words, at a notional low-price estimation of \$200 dollars per 1000 cubic meters, the above -mentioned value of the discovery would amount to \$39.6 billion (€31 billion) (Emerson, 2012).

Cyprus, aspiring to become a natural gas exporter country, as soon as its own domestic needs for gas-fired power generation have been satisfied, (Giamouridis, 2012) focused on a two-fold strategy: it made significant efforts to achieve a settlement on the Cyprus’ question, while targeting, simultaneously, to exploit the gas findings by attracting large investments (Emerson, 2012). Be that as it may, geopolitical and geographical factors perplex further Cyprus’ strategy concerning the resource development for the common benefit, alongside the existing historical, inter-ethnic frictions (Giamouridis, 2012).

General background -The ‘Aphrodite field’

As mentioned earlier, on 28 December 2011, Noble Energy, disclosed the discovery of a significant natural gas reservoir offshore Cyprus, in Block 12, within the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The ‘Aphrodite field’ is situated 1, 700 meters below the sea level and its initial estimations of recoverable volumes range between 5-8 trillion cubic feet (Tcf). Besides the above- mentioned amounts concerning the Aphrodite field, the confirmation of additional discoveries, as in the case of Glaucus, in block 10, expected to carry a reservoir between 5 and 8 trillion cubic feet, in December 2021, which is undertaken by the US- Qatari consortium of Exxon Mobile and Qatar Energy, is very encouraging and (Filenews, 2021) reflective of the potential of the resources engulfed in the Levant Basin, which come up to

122 Tcf. As analyzed previously, Turkey disputes almost all blocks within the Cypriot EEZs, except for blocks 10 and 11 (Paltsev, et al., 2013).

The Aphrodite field was viewed, in fact, as a means of transforming Cyprus into a natural gas exporter. Since 2012, though, the development of the field remains ‘a prisoner’ of the settlement of the Cyprus’ problem and its full potential is, still, not unlocked. A new realistic resource- related approach for Cyprus should be based on the disassociation of the hydrocarbons issue from the Cyprus’ problem, since natural resources should be exploited for the benefit of the entire island, regardless of the resolution of the Cyprus’ question. The Turkish Cypriots, for instance, still take advantage of the Cypriot gas by either buying or bartering it (i. e. against water, electricity etc.) (Tsakiris, 2018).

However, most of the misperceptions are attributable to the exploratory drillings undertaken in the Aphrodite field. Initial unfounded estimations based on unproven findings were presented as final confirmed resources, projecting that the reserves could even surpass 8 tcf, yet this, in reality, was unattainable from a mathematical point of view. According to statistics, a drilling estimated to be higher than 8 tcf, has a scientific possibility to be confirmed only within a small percentage, ranging from 10 to 15%. In addition, money is invested in potential findings, which are verified with a certainty up to 90%. Furthermore, primary misleading drilling outcomes were also implemented as tool of generalizing within the Cypriot EEZs and presenting, for example, undrilled areas with reserves as confirmed natural gas findings, which could be given the status of an LNG export facility (Tsakiris, 2014).

In June 2012, Nicosia decided to proceed with the development of liquefaction facilities in Cyprus, in line with the preference of Block 12 license holder, Noble Energy (Giamouridis, 2012). The first setbacks of the construction of Vassilikos facility combined with the delay of its final investment -decision, were heavily criticized, even though the initial reserve-estimations were insufficient to justify a two -train LNG facility, demanding a minimum of 8–10 tcf of confirmed and bankable reserves (Tsakiris, 2014).

With respect to the Aphrodite field, it must be underlined, firstly, that the final reserves - estimates are still pending, despite the prior announcement, made by the involved companies, which projected a 4, 5 tcf amount, (i. e. 2P, 50% probability), in November 2014, juxtaposed to the Cypriot estimation (i. e. 1P), in 2015, which was presented as commercially exploitable, whilst being uncertain. Secondly, given the division of the Aphrodite’s reserve

into four unconnected reservoirs/ segments, any well –grounded assessment of the overall development plan is very complex. Thirdly, the negotiation of the sales and purchase agreement is a time-consuming procedure, which presupposes responses to the aforementioned facts, as well as, a final investment decision, since the sales contract can be utilized as collateral by the banks to finance the gas field development and its relevant infrastructure (i. e. production and export) (Tsakiris, 2014).

Moreover, several years will be needed before Cyprus acquires a sizable revenue flow from the exploitation of Aphrodite, since the majority of gross revenues will be distributed according to the terms of the Production Sharing Agreement.

Besides the reevaluations of the potential reserves of the Aphrodite field, between 2013-2015, certain setbacks, and problems in drilling activities in the Cypriot EEZs (i. e. in the fields of Onassagoras, Amanthousa etc.) were viewed as disappointing developments that stopped the exploratory activities, even though they are perceived as frequent phenomena in the upstream industry. As a result, the overoptimistic Cypriot gas narrative was overshadowed by pessimism. In any case, Cyprus should confront any adversaries by adopting the so- called competitive pragmatism strategy towards resource related issues. In the case of the Aphrodite field, for example, the estimates either below 3 tcf or above 4, 5 tcf, indicate that they are of a dynamic nature and will lead, after a certain period of at least 15 years, to project development, production, and investments. Moreover, Cyprus can still cover its domestic gas needs, even in the case, whereby estimates of 3-4, 5% tcf reserves are not sufficient for the construction of an LNG facility. As an alternative, Cyprus, after securing its domestic energy needs, could opt for exporting and selling gas to Egypt, an attendant–partner and chief export destination for the Aphrodite’s reserves.

Apparently, the cost of Aphrodite’s monetization is very high for any upstream contributor to assume. It is doubtful, also, that the future LNG price, correlated to the oil prices, will be lower than the cost of shipping gas to Cyprus from the Aphrodite field, on the precondition that Aphrodite’s gas is exported to another destination, as well, such as Egypt. Even in the case, where the utilization of the Aphrodite’s gas could decrease its annual bill by half and bring about savings up to €245 million per year, or €2. 45 billion over a decade, this could approximate the 30% of the €8.5 billion- amount, which Cyprus has borrowed, in the past, (i.e. in 2013) from the IMF/EU/ECB program. Yet, the combined profits from the direct gas sales to the regional markets and the substitution of its oil import products for electricity generation, would mount up to several billion euros over a decade. In addition, a domestic

gas market on the island would upgrade and boost the Cypriot economy by transforming Cyprus into a regional energy hub. The prospects of the Cypriot EEZs are sizeable and substantial, besides the Aphrodite field. Within an area of almost, 51.000 km², overlaying the demarcated Cypriot EEZs, ongoing exploratory drillings are expected to follow, which might come across with spectacular findings.

More specifically, the aforementioned field has three main characteristics: firstly, the reserve will be shared with Israel, secondly, the primary consumer of the Cypriot gas will be Egypt and thirdly, the Aphrodite field could be viewed as a stimulus for the settlement of the Cyprus' problem, given that Cyprus could counterbalance Turkey's assertiveness and persuade TRNC to adopt a more productive and positive stance. However, any future profits from gas sales are too remote to impact immediate negotiations (Tsakiris, 2014).

Furthermore, in view of the new discoveries (i. e. in Glaucus etc.), Cyprus was encouraged to proceed with its LNG facility plans, at Vassilikos, backed up by the financial contribution of the EU and supported by its various stakeholders. If the upstream cost for the Aphrodite gas amounts to \$5–6/MMBtu, according to the Cyprus' National Oil and Gas Company, this means that the Cypriot gas could be delivered to Egypt, at a minimum price of \$6–7/MMBtu, given that the transport cost for the construction of the underwater pipeline would not increase the price by more than \$1/ MMBtu. In other words, the Cypriot gas would suffer a loss in Egypt, only if the Egyptian government increased its domestic sales price. In the second case, Cyprus, as well as Israel would have two possible options: to select the Egyptian LNG export facilities in Idku and Damietta, where the principally European (BG/ Shell, Eni, Gas Natural) proprietors could sell the Cypriot/Israeli gas to the international LNG market, at prices higher than the aforementioned (i. e. \$6–7/MMBtu margin). Lastly, according to the Cypriot Energy Minister, N. Pilides, at the beginning of 2022, recommendations are expected by those bearing the licenses for Aphrodite gas field for possible synergies with Israel or Egypt about the development of the gas field.

The Vassilikos energy center

As discussed previously, the idea for the construction of natural gas facilities must be traced back to 2012 and it is closely associated with the discoveries in the Aphrodite field. On 4 December 2019, Cyprus signed a milestone deal with the multinational China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Consortium to build a EUR 290 million terminal for the import of LNG natural gas for electricity generation. This significant project, which directs Cyprus towards

the natural gas, will include a floating storage and re-gasification unit (FSRU), a jetty for mooring the FSRU, as well as a jetty borne gas pipeline with the related infrastructure. The tender documents for the design, construction, and operation of the LNG import terminal at Vassilikos bay, next to Limassol, was announced by the Natural Gas Public Company of Cyprus (DEFA), acting on behalf of the Natural Gas Infrastructure Company (ETYFA). In specific, the terminal, comprised of the above four components, has secured a funding of 40% of the CAPEX, up to €101 million, as a grant from the EU under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) financial instrument. The EU has strongly supported the LNG facilities in Cyprus so as to help the island remove its internal bottlenecks, terminate its isolation and facilitate the delivery of gas from the Eastern Mediterranean region (Poteau, 2018). The undertaking, which falls within the framework of the EU's projects of common interests (PCI), is part of the European energy strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean, along with the further cooperation with Egypt and the suppliers of the Southern Gas corridor. The investment in the infrastructure aims to the development an offshore LNG facility (i. e. floating storage and regasification unit - (FSRU), as well as, to the deployment of onshore natural gas facilities in the port of Limassol to establish an entry point of the natural gas for the European markets and create an economy of scale in the Eastern Mediterranean by means of enhanced regional cooperation (Poteau, 2018).

On 25 December 2021, Deputy Managing Director of China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering, Duan Bingquan, pledged his determination to bring natural gas to Cyprus, which is scheduled to be delivered at the end of June 2023 (Koniotis, 2021). The project is described as the biggest ever in the field of energy in Cyprus and along with the €101-million grant that has anchored from the EU under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) financial instrument, it will be, also, be financed by Cyprus Electricity Authority's participation in the share capital of the Natural Gas Infrastructure Company (ETIFA), with 43 million euros, as well as, by the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with 150 mln and 80 mln, respectively. The CPP, which is a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corporation, is specialized in petroleum storage and transportation. Domestically, it has more than 85% of the marketing share pipeline projects in China and has been an international player for 25 years with projects in the Middle East and especially in Africa, Europe and North America. In addition, this undertaking at Vassilikos is viewed as a significant step for Cyprus to make the transition towards clean energy. At the same time, given the fact the gas is nowadays greener and cleaner, it is fundamental for Cyprus to acquire its own domestic natural gas for the benefit of the entire region. Certainly, the LNG

plant at Vassilikos will provide Cyprus with substantial add-on benefits, apart from sales' profits, such as, employment, enhancement of the industrial and service sector, development of a downstream industry based on cheap gas as feedstock utilization, decrease of electricity prices etc. (cyprus-mail.com, 2022). However, the project has suffered the ramifications of COVID-19, yet all the involved stakeholders (i. e. clients, DEFA, contractors etc.) have managed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the project, whose delivery is rescheduled for the end of June 2023 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Within this context, the Cypriot Ministry of Energy, N. Pilides, underscored, on 14 January 2022, that the national plan of Cyprus is structured upon six policies, including: enhancing energy security and lifting energy isolation of Cyprus, combining competitive gas and electricity, strengthening the role of consumers and reducing energy costs, which are all incentives facilitating private initiatives towards a circular economy and promoting energy efficiency in the public sector, as well as, implementing reforms and new legislation with respect to investments in green technology research and green infrastructure (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Apparently, storage infrastructure turns out to be an imperative for Cyprus due to its peculiar electricity system, which isolates the island from Europe and the entire Eastern Mediterranean. For this reason, upcoming subsidization plans for the installation of energy storage systems are expected, in 2022, which will all be financed by the relevant EU fund with €40 to € 80 million (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Furthermore, it must be underlined that the discoveries, in block 6, the Calypso field, as well as the subsequent in block 10, Glaucus, have reinforced the possibility of the development of a liquefied natural gas plant, at Vassilikos. The Calypso 1 NFW well, which was drilled in 2, 074 m (6, 804 ft) water depth in block 6, reaching a final TD of 3, 827 m (12, 556 ft) possesses high quality reservoir qualities and it is viewed as an extension of the Zohr- like play in the Cypriot EEZ. Certainly, further studies are expected to determine the in-place gas volume range and to delineate further exploration and appraisal activity by Eni and Total (offshore, 2022). The drilling, undertaken by the consortium of ExxonMobil and Qatar Energy is part of the assessment of the Glaucus deposit, which corroborated that it has hydrocarbons of excellent quality, estimated at 5 to 8 trillion cubic feet, after the initial drilling, in February 2019 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). The ENI/TOTAL joint venture proceeded with research activities during the first half of 2022, according to N. Pilides and, therefore, results, as regards this quantity, are expected after March 2022 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Finally, it is reminded that, on 18 November 2021, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, underscored that a terminal in Egypt is the cardinal scenario, (Cyprus News Agency,

2022), while stressing that the ecosystem has been transformed in the energy field, since the EU Green Deal, as well as, that the ‘fit for 55’ package demand more timely targets. (Savva, 2022). In light with the above, it is obvious that if the block 10 fulfills its promises, ExxonMobil might consider constructing an LNG terminal, having the potential to reunite both the Aphrodite and the Calypso field in the same terminal to export their natural gas to Europe. Such a development would enable Europe’s diversification energy sources and strengthen considerably the Cypriot economy, as compared with the gas transfer to Egypt before reaching the European markets (Poteau, 2018).

Analysis of LNG as a Gas Monetization Pathway for Cyprus

The natural gas findings in the Cypriot EEZs constitute a window of economic opportunity for Cyprus to fully unleash its economic potential of its resources. There is a series of monetization options, through which the Cypriot gas can be delivered to the international markets. Nonetheless, the LNG option with the four segments, as being materialized at the Vassilikos energy center, seems to be a reasonable one. The existing options within the LNG monetization pathway are three: Cyprus constructing a liquefaction facility alone, developing joint liquefaction capacities with Israel and establishing a floating liquefaction plant (FLNG) alone or with Israel (Giamouridis, 2012).

The LNG value chain, as the linkage between the upstream and the natural gas markets is dissevered into its sub- components, namely, feed gas, liquefaction, shipping, and regasification. Based on the so- called economics of the liquefaction it can be explained how the all-in costs of dissimilar gas monetization pathways are interlinked with the possible, attainable price in the diverse destination markets (Paltsev, et al., 2013). The focus on the liquefaction stage in the case of Cyprus is attributable to two reasons. Firstly, the number of investments correlated with the liquefaction is higher than shipping and regasification and secondly, likely, Cyprus will be engaged mainly in the liquefaction phase and secondly in shipping or regasification through equity, which might be modified in the upcoming years, depending on the development of the LNG sector. The economic analysis of the liquefaction is being described through BEP (i. e. Building enclosure performance), a metric, which presupposes that any engaging monetization pathway, under examination, should be at least equal to the BEP in terms of volume (i. e. gas price in the destination market) and represents the overall LNG value chain (Paltsev, et al., 2013). If the total BEP is lower than the market price this is reflective of a value- creating LNG undertaking, yet in the case of Cyprus, whereby the proprietorship of the LNG value chain is even more segmented, a variation of

the BEP metric is applied, called free- on board (FOB) BEP, examining the liquefaction-only section. More specifically, according to LNG economic analysis focusing on the liquefaction component, based on the amount of the confirmed reserves 5–7 Tcf, the construction of a single 5-Mt LNG liquefaction train, with an operability of 20 years, can be achievable and the degree of the redeemable Cypriot resources might be higher than the confirmed ones. The aforementioned analysis takes into consideration, also, various parameters, such as, the DFC (i. e. discounted cash flow), including the project's capital costs, its operating costs, the plant's fuel loss factor and the plant's utilization, fiscal parameters (i. e. tax rates, depreciation etc.), as well as, financial parameters. e. cost of capital etc.) Be that as it may, fiscal relevant data applicable to the liquefaction infrastructure in Cyprus is not available (Paltsev, et al., 2013). Moreover, due to the increase of the capital costs involved in the liquefaction facilities, latest analysis denotes that a minimum cost of \$1, 200/tonne of nameplate capacity is expected for such projects within the next ten years. As a result, the data indicated as the best option of capital cost -base case scenario, the amount of \$1, 200/tonne for a 5-Mt Cypriot liquefaction facility to be constructed around 2021. This estimation has incorporated a sensitivity analysis, as well, assessing three-man segments: the project's capital costs, the feed gas costs and its utilization range. (Paltsev, et al., 2013). Based on the overnight FOB breakeven gas price for a 5-Mt Cypriot LNG liquefaction project is estimated to be \$7. 25/ MMBtu out of which, the \$4.55/ MMBtu is correlated to the capital and other costs of the liquefaction phase, whilst the balance is associated with the feed gas. The specific base case outcome, including the overnight FOB breakeven prices, presupposes high and low case liquefaction capital costs of \$1, 600 and \$1, 000/ton respectively (Paltsev, et al., 2013). In addition, according to the low feed gas scenario the price is decreased from \$7. 25/ MMBtu to \$6.71/MMBtu, while based on the higher feed - gas, the cost increases the overnight breakeven price to \$8.87/MMBtu. With respect to the latter, Cyprus is advised to focus on decision- making regarding the upstream economics in relation to the liquefaction, since feed gas costs impact highly the profitability and the economic growth. Regarding the lower utilization, an assumed 10% decrease augments the project's breakeven price from \$7.25 to \$7. 83/ MMBtu, while simultaneously boosting the utilization to 95% and decreasing its overnight FOB breakeven price to \$6.80 (Paltsev, et al., 2013). Certainly, high utilization indicates competent economic performance. In the case of Cyprus, the construction phase of the LNG project involves interest costs (i. e. debt, expected return of equity), high cost, time consuming procedures and variations on breakeven price, depicting the necessity for an effective project development execution without bureaucratic, technical problems or delays.

In light of the above, it becomes evident that a 5-Mt train option is considered to be a complex project for Cyprus, in absence also of reliable data and therefore the Cypriot LNG is likely to be nearly competitive, juxtaposed to the LNG cost of other green field projects. Despite the ambiguity, emanating from the lack of available data, the Cypriot LNG has the potential to be cost –competitive, compared to green field projects and its success is dependent on the degree of the demand and its absorbability of new volumes. In other words, the Cypriot potentiality regarding the LNG holds an intermediate position within the global taxonomy and is depicted in the middle of the supply curve. Yet, its resources within the Cypriot EEZs indicate enormous economic capabilities. In developing its LNG facilities, Cyprus should stick to a risk analysis, since this kind of investment, addressing to a modest project, equals to the country’s GDP. Evidently, the construction of an LNG industry entails job creation, new expertise and high revenues (i. e. via taxis, dividends and royalties). Exogenous risks, such as LNG high prices, price risk, cost assumptions, plant utilization, contracting of volumes, as well as, upstreaming, must also be thoroughly assessed by the Cypriot government, especially in an era, where contracting, for example, is being dominated by flexibility and spot cargos, rendering a project’ s utilization more complex. Lastly, the analysis demonstrates that liquefaction projects acquire feed gas by the upstream proprietor and the ways the cost of the gas is distributed in terms of rents and interpreted in terms of risks is of equal importance. A fixed feed gas price facilitates upstream risk elimination in liquefaction but also helps upstream proprietor to acquire rents. In any other case, especially in cost- plus price- related format, any cost outrun in the upstreaming will impact liquefaction economics and might deconstruct the economic prospects of the Cypriot LNG (Paltsev, et al., 2013). In consonance with the above, LNG monetization option, as is being materialized at the Vassilikos, seems to be- from an economic point of view- a reasonable pathway for ensuring superior commercial terms. Such an option entails costly investments with a targeted orientation: either through a joint venture with Israel or through a single undertaken by Cyprus. The LNG choice provides flexible export schemes via LNG tankers, which can access any part of the globe, as well as profitability by the spot prices, which are higher than the contract prices associated with pipelines. Consequently, Cyprus will not be entrenched in an unfavorable situation, downgrading its bargaining position over transit costs and contract prices, such as in the pipeline case, and will benefit (Emerson, 2012).

Within the LNG pathway, Cyprus has the following options for gas- exporting. Firstly, gas delivery through Egypt’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) export infrastructure to the south, which would offer the lowest cost with the fastest time to market and potentially the best

netbacks (Offshore, 2019). On condition that the LNG facilities in Egypt are multi-utilized, it follows that Cyprus should move quickly, before 2025, to secure an important spare -capacity for the Cypriot gas. Secondly, another path is the construction of a new LNG project, which has high possibilities of being realized, since recently ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum have confirmed 7 tcf in Cyprus' offshore Glaucus discovery and have been signaling their intention to establish an onshore- greenfield LNG facility. Yet, the latter presupposes an additional major gas discovery to fuel a two-train LNG plant with 12-15 tcf of recoverable resources (Offshore, 2019). Finally, a third option could be the floating LNG (FLNG), which constitutes a smaller-scale solution that requires less gas than conventional onshore LNG projects (Offshore, 2019).

Re-focusing on the existing options within the LNG monetization pathway, the prospects of developing joint liquefaction capacities with Israel or establishing a floating liquefaction plant (FLNG) also with Israel (Giamouridis, 2012) presuppose cooperation and a joint monetization, able to surpass all the legal, political and commercial challenges associated with an arrangement, whereby gas from one country is liquefied and exported through another. These synergies with Israel are expected to be beneficial for Cyprus, in commercial and political terms. Through the joint monetization, Cyprus will achieve economies of scale, without waiting for 3-4 more years and will gain alignment and political backing from Israel. On the other hand, joint monetization entails dependence on the Israeli gas, whereby, a feedstock of a joint- plant, weakens Cyprus' control over these assets, subverts the new gas discoveries, portrays Cyprus as a base liquefaction service- provider to Israel, poses a political threat for the Cypriot strategic goals, due to the Turkish factor and- it is likely- to dismay IOCs from investing in relevant –projects in the Eastern Mediterranean (Giamouridis, 2012).

In any case, constructing a liquefaction facility alone or establishing a floating liquefaction plant (FLNG), alone or in through synergies, should be the optimum target for Cyprus, according to various energy- analysts, since it could attract ExxonMobil's investment interest. Such an undertaking, developed as an integrated project jointly by ExxonMobil, Total and ENI would augment commerciality of the LNG. By contrast, selling the Aphrodite gas to Egypt's terminals would render profits marginal, namely less than \$100 million annually. Without the availability of the Aphrodite gas, the LNG project will be decelerated for at least 3 years, or even more (Ellinas, 2019).

In view of the above, the construction of an LNG plant should be seen as a top - priority for Cyprus to exploit its resources from Glaucus, Aphrodite and Calypso, including gas from Israel and it should not be delayed, since fossil fuels will, soon, be disrupted and replaced by the renewables. According to estimates, the total amount of the combined recoverable gas findings, reaching almost 10 tcf, which is contained in Glaucus (4 tcf), Calypso (3 tcf) and Aphrodite (3. 1 tcf) is the minimum of the range of 15 tcf, needed for the establishment of a greenfield-LNG plant at Vassilikos. Be that as it may, this variance can be furnished by the Leviathan gas-field in Israel, which is still seeking for export markets, despite the lost opportunity of 2012-2013, when Delek was interested in developing an LNG plant jointly (Ellinas, 2019).

Thus, the choice of the favored Cypriot export strategy for the offshore natural gas is foundational and impacts highly its hydrocarbons' development program, including all chief-stakeholders (i. e. IOCs, investors etc.), as well as its potential LNG clients (Giamouridis, 2012). Indisputably, Cyprus is expected to evolve into an energy player, who will be participant in the overall value chain, from upstream to downstream, including natural gas production, transportation, as well as liquefaction and marketing of available export volumes globally, either alone or with Israel (Giamouridis, 2012).

LNG monetization: advantages & disadvantages

As discussed previously, Cyprus proceeded with the construction of liquefaction facilities, at Vassilikos. Liquefaction and export via LNG constitute a reasonable monetization path, which provides advantages to Cyprus and can be combined with other options, as well. Firstly, the LNG juxtaposed to the gas market, is more dynamic, as reflected in the growing number of countries opting for the LNG and the increase of the demand towards LNG sellers, globally. Secondly, due the flexible nature of the LNG it can be accessed in the international markets regardless of the location (Giamouridis, 2012). Thirdly, it enables profit- making arbitrage (i. e. program- trading) via its trains, whilst, at the same time, the contract framework is more adaptable, not dependent on their bankability. Consequently, Cyprus due to its geostrategic position can approach multiple markets, at inexpensive costs, following the example of Egypt, while capitalizing the competitive advantage and the market flexibility offered by the LNG. Be that as it may, LNG's main disadvantage is the high cost of liquefaction, which is calculated at approximately USD 4. 5-6/mmbtu for a single- train plant only (Giamouridis, 2012). In addition, the high LNG shipping rates combined with the enormous Asian demand, which is not expected to be unlimited, are additional inhibiting

factors. Fourthly, pitfall- risks associated with the LNG's dependence on oil's price volatility might have a negative impact, while this specific price-setting for LNG is not always the norm. Lastly, the new liquefaction facilities, especially green field plants, are expected to increase the global competition in the LNG exports, among certain regions, such as, Australia, North America and East Africa. In any case, Cyprus by adopting the LNG monetization scheme, in collaboration with Israel, will be able to achieve better commercial terms in liquefaction and upstreaming (i. e. small equity), more favorable contractual terms, sufficient access to capital and markets and construct 'gateway' LNG terminals targeting markets in the South East Europe (Giamouridis, 2012).

Additional monetization options

The pipeline pathway

Cyprus, besides the LNG option, has a variety of monetization pathways in exploiting its natural resources, which can be combined, in complementary and not substitutional ways. The pipeline pathway includes the following potential- pipelines projects: firstly, the subsea pipeline connecting the Aphrodite field to Egypt, aiming to deliver the Cypriot gas to Egypt, either for domestic consumption or to 'fuel' the LNG plants for expanded exports. It is reminded that, in 2014, Cyprus and Egypt initiated their energy collaboration, which was culminated, in 2015, with the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding, corroborating the details concerning the pipeline's feasibility study, as well as the gas exporting from Cyprus towards Egypt. In addition, Cyprus and Egypt signed an agreement for the construction of the pipeline, which would transfer the Cypriot gas to Egypt, once the Aphrodite field's production was about to commence. Notwithstanding the uncertainties related with the viability of the joint -venture and Egypt's upgraded energy role in the region (Karbuz, 2018), Egypt and Cyprus are still jointly collaborating to materialize this pipeline that will transport the Aphrodite field's natural gas to Egypt's liquefaction facilities (Poteau, 2018). Secondly, developing joint capacities with Israel, through the construction of a possible pipeline, interconnecting both countries, with Egypt as the final destination, is another project, which has confronted setbacks and delays due to a dispute among the two stakeholders regarding the exploitation of the adjacent Cypriot and Israeli gas fields (Poteau, 2018). A third pipeline option is the East Med project, analyzed in chapter 5, which would require Cyprus and Israel to collaborate so as to bring the Leviathan and the Aphrodite fields' natural gas together and transport it to the European markets (Poteau, 2018). East Med pipeline, as it turns out, is currently, in the crossfire of economic, foreign and energy policy

across several very different countries, continents and operating philosophies and according to, Amos Hochstein, senior advisor for energy security of President Biden, U. S will abandon the East Med project because of its environmental implications (Bryen, 2022). An additional pipeline option is the construction of an export gas pipeline via Greece to Europe (Giamouridis, 2012). This specific pipeline from Cyprus to Greece, which is advocated by the Greek public gas corporation DEPA, despite the political rationale and the connectivity that it offers to the European markets, it is a sea route too deep and too long and seems to have been dissipated as an idea by the Cypriot part (Emerson, 2012). The last pipeline option is the development of an export gas pipeline to Turkey (Giamouridis, 2012). This pipeline would commence from the Aphrodite field, traversing the Northern part of the island (TRNC), then heading undersea to Turkey, interlinking with the trans-Anatolian network, which would deliver the Caspian gas to Europe. Despite the inexpensive infrastructural costs and Turkey's proposition to negotiate the project following a resolution of the Cyprus' problem, it seems unattainable, due to geopolitical infeasibility, as it presupposes a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus' issue (Emerson, 2012; Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016).

Already existing pipelines or new pipelines with lower upfront investment requirements, juxtaposed to the LNG, or constructed pipelines in inaccessible destinations by sea via LNG tankers or LNG deliveries, in either form, pipelines are still essential means of delivering natural gas from regasification facilities to the end customers. In case Cyprus opts for a pipeline pathway, it will have to examine an offshore pipeline. With respect to the monetization of the gas, the development of one or more offshore pipelines is already expected (i. e. a 200-km line from the Aphrodite Field to Vassilikos, as part of the venture to build an LNG plant onshore). An upstream pipeline like this is viewed as a forerunner to any monetization attempt of Cyprus, apart from FLNG and LNG technologies. However, estimated quantities of the Aphrodite field are not adequate for both an export pipeline or an LNG and this could only be achieved through cooperation with other countries, such as Israel. A 5–8 Tcf of natural gas amount can vindicate one LNG train, as mentioned already, therefore the pipeline option can be examined in combination with the LNG option, only if extra gas quantities are confirmed or secured by other counties (Paltsev, et al., 2013).

The CNG pathway

Compressed natural gas marine transport or floating pipeline is a system of continuous compression, transport and delivery of natural gas by ships. However, it must be clarified that if Cyprus chooses the CNG path, it will not be able to achieve economies of scale or high

energy density. The advantages of the CNG path include increase of the energy density due to the innovative technologies in compression, restitution of the loss in long -haul efficiency by the lighter infrastructure costs, short development period, price premium achievement, approach of stranded energy markets with low regasification infrastructure potential, as well as, suitability of Cyprus' location within the Eastern Mediterranean subsystem, which encloses fragmented energy markets in contiguity. In fact, CNG was examined as an option for Cyprus before the discoveries in the Aphrodite field, yet nowadays it is an interim solution. In addition, its main drawback is bankability, as marine CNG storage and transport have never been deployed at scale, despite the existence of multiple CNG-fueled vessels, as well as on-land CNG storage and transport. Moreover, the innovative nature of CNG has rendered Cyprus skeptical towards its monetization, since it is more challenging, from an economical and technological point of view, option in its development. Nonetheless, an onshore facility, at Vassilikos, with a vacillate system that can reach, as far as, the Greek mainland is feasible (Paltsev, et al., 2013). Evidently, CNG is an untried technology, which causes hesitance to its potential customers, compared with the LNG and pipelines pathways, which are the pillars of the global gas transport system. Extracting and exporting natural gas, in other words, could become a 'game changer' for Cyprus, yet regional cooperation is key in developing and monetizing the resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, the long- standing mistrust, stemming from the Cyprus' problem, should be uprooted, and replaced by a rational mindset, in line with the existing geopolitical factors. Lastly, the Greek Cypriots should speed-up and confront the unabated question of whether traditional fears of Turkey are worth it (Ozay.Mehmet-Vecat.Yorucu, 2020).

The electricity interconnectors' pathway

As discussed in chapter 5, Cyprus views as 'top -priority' the development of the Eurasia and the Eurafrica interconnector- projects, which are high voltage cables that link the electricity systems of adjacent states, enable fossil -gas based electricity to be traded, whilst decreasing, simultaneously, electricity costs and energy waste. On 20 January 2022, Cyprus Energy Regulatory Authority (CERA) Chairman, A. Poullikkas, re-affirmed that the Euroasia and the Euroafrica interconnectors are being closely monitored, while the regulatory framework for hydrogen technologies is under development. In addition, the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, after receiving the annual report of the Cyprus Energy Regulatory Authority for the year 2021, underscored that an isolated market, such as Cyprus, will open up to new possibilities with the Euroasia and Euroafrica interconnector plans, with one of the options being to exploit the natural wealth of the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Cyprus News Agency,

2022). Such projects will facilitate, also, the attraction of relevant investments, as well as, the integration of additional Renewable Energy Resources, through the achievement of the energy goals in the framework of transition to a green economy and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. Finally, it comes without saying that the interconnectors will offer significant, economic, social and environmental benefits to the Cypriot and to the European consumers (Savva, 2022).

Conclusions

Cyprus should adopt a plan adaptable to the international markets, which will unleash the project's investment potential regarding its resources (Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016). Moreover, Cyprus should implement a series of synergies with Israel, Egypt and with other countries so as to discover new monetization pathways and reassess its hydrocarbons' program, whose offshore gas resources presuppose a combination of factors (i. e. geological, commercial, export, political etc.) in order to achieve an equilibrium between domestic and export production (Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016). As analyzed earlier, in chapter 4, regional cooperation- schemes may secure prosperity for all states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within this context, Cyprus, as the only EU member-state in the region, adjusted to the EU regulatory- system, could become a trading hub, based on the appropriate infrastructure, facilities, gas trading platforms, price transparency, market liquidity and market culture, while benefiting from the relevant EU support, through the energy security package. In specific, Cyprus' potential to become an energy hub is dependent on three factors: first, on its geostrategic position, second, on its European identity and thirdly, on its commercial spirit, which is in accordance with the EU regulations. Such a development could be beneficial for the entire region, since a more effective natural resources' exploration would be fully realized. Notwithstanding the large- scale offshore hydrocarbon discoveries, the region is overloaded with inherent political frictions and disputes. Multiple obstacles (i. e. security, legal, political, technical etc.) have obstructed the positive momentum and numerous projects (i. e. export, exploratory etc.) have been postponed or delayed. The initial enthusiastic hype has been downgraded, also, by geopolitical reasons. Apparently, the hydrocarbons are considered to be an important shaping factor for the Eastern Mediterranean, which can stimulate stability and prosperity or fuel disputes. Nonetheless, incompatible interests and problems among various regional players are not reflective of an optimistic future. It is an imperative, therefore, to transform current challenges into opportunities and view the economic interests as a catalyst for deescalating tensions and generating interdependencies. Apart from the popular multilateral cooperative- schemes that are

gathering momentum in the region, a new mechanism of joint exploitation and transport of the natural resources is needed, which – if combined with realism and political will- could alter the physiognomy of the entire region (Ellinas, Tzimitras, & Roberts, 2016). However, most of the regional players in the Eastern Mediterranean natural gas market have expressed their determination to pursue their interests through the trade of their energy supply, by investing in the market and deepening their relationship with neighboring states via joint-agreements. In any case, bilateral agreements are not adequate to unleash the region's potential in terms of energy trade and despite the existing financial means, which could upgrade the entire region, energy resources are precluded due to the lack of optimal collaboration (Karbuz, 2018).

It must be mentioned, also, that most of the countries in the region have, at some point, demonstrated their will to overcome their disputes, yet, without success. Thus, the region's natural gas trade resembles like an accumulation of unilateral decisions and bilateral agreements, all clashing with each other. Regional cooperation, though, is a prerequisite for energy security and prosperity for it to come to an optimal development. Similarly, regional stability will be achieved only if each part gets a fair share of benefits from the regional natural gas trade.

Moreover, the EU on its part, through its projects and investments, could contribute to conflict- resolution by initiating a constructive dialogue between all states in the region. Undeniably, the EU could incentivize stabilization of the region through the natural gas discoveries' exploitation and focus on the promotion of the green energy- cooperation, which does not provoke territorial disputes, since no such thing as 'the renewable energy producer curse' exists, as it is growing and attractive to investors (Poteau, 2018).

In conclusion, joint energy synergies could unequivocally facilitate peace in the region, while energy policies have the potential to launch significant geopolitical partnerships, able to mitigate disputes and fortify a well- grounded basis for long-term economic development in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, it is understandable that if all countries wish to prosper, energy aspirations should be viewed as a window of opportunity for cooperation and not confrontation (Konofagos & Karageorgis, 2016).

Chapter 4. Strategic regional cooperation in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean: an emerging network of alliances: Trilateral & Quadrilateral frameworks

The importance of an effective multilateral system with the UN at its core, which successfully encounters today's and tomorrow's global challenges, is a priority of the Cypriot foreign policy. The need for interstate cooperation, in such a way, that international peace, stability and security is promoted, and great challenges of humanity are confronted, such as the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, migration, terrorism, among others, has underscored the role of multilateralism and cooperation between countries. In this context, Cyprus and Greece have established mechanisms of trilateral cooperation and dialogue between countries in the Middle East and the Gulf, including Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. More specifically, these mechanisms are used as communication channels for an enhanced dialogue and as a basis to develop synergies in areas, such as security, energy, economy, commerce, culture, education, and others. This regional initiative, by its very nature, adopts multilateralism at a regional level, enabling thematic cooperation, which remains open to all countries that share a vision of international peace and security, based on international law and all that is contained in the UN Charter (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Trilateralism, as an anchor of the Eastern Mediterranean architecture, has expanded its scope from energy to security and economic development issues. In reality, the trilateral partnerships of Greece-Cyprus-Israel, Greece-Cyprus-Egypt, Greece-Cyprus-Jordan, Jordan-Egypt-Iraq, as well as, the quadripartite of Greece-Israel-Cyprus-UAE are driven by a shared vision to develop closer cooperation in the fields of energy, counterterrorism and security, including human security (Dimou, 2021). In fact, after 2011, the Cypriot foreign policy acquired a more energetic manifestation, through various foreign policy openings and the scheme of trilateral partnerships along with the hydrocarbons discoveries have become the cornerstone of Cyprus's 'new foreign policy' in the Eastern Mediterranean, compared to the systemic environment, prior to 2011 (Tziarras, 2019). Hence, it comes as no surprise that Cyprus's post-2011 proactive foreign policy was oriented towards a more appropriated external balancing strategy vis-a-vis Turkey, as well as, the establishment of broad networks of international cooperation (Tziarras, 2019). Multilateral cooperative mechanisms acting as 'compliance pulls', usually in the form of tripartite or quadripartite partnerships, are schemes of enhanced collaboration formed between countries or organizations for mutual benefits or a relationship based on similarity of interests, nature or qualities. Alliances include written,

formal agreements, upon which the partnership is finalized, through productive dialogue. They generate normative ‘covenants’, ‘contracts’ and ‘discourses’ that have the potential to reshape international politics and they are alliances on a dynamic track towards materializing specific projects and actions (Tziarras, 2019). Undoubtedly, the trilateral meetings- through a steady pattern- being held every six months, as a cooperation- mechanism, are not exclusive in design or by nature, they do not constitute a threat to other countries but rather aim to promote peace, stability, and regional co-operation in the Eastern Mediterranean. These trilateral meetings and summits have provided a useful forum where problems and projects are discussed, cooperation is institutionalized, and leaders get to know each other (Tziampiris, 2021). Trilateral partnerships, the miniature of multilateralism, can significantly contribute to peace, security, and economic development between regional countries. Shared interests, common values and effective leaderships guarantee coordination to address regional contingencies. The emergence of multilateral energy cooperation fora and trilateral security arrangements in the Eastern Mediterranean reflect collective commitment to regional stability and prosperity (Tziampiris, 2021). By and large, this partnership is based on common regional values, such as peace and prosperity, which are beneficial not only for the stakeholders-countries but also for the wider Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (Apostolidi, 2018).

The ‘alliance system’ in the Eastern Mediterranean has changed remarkably, especially after the interruption of the Israel-Turkish relations, in 2009, and the new strategic developments that evolved, including the strengthening of ties between some chief- regional actors. In specific, the confluence of energy interests, acting as a facilitator, instigated countries to commence cooperating, from 2014, along two different axes, Greece-Cyprus-Egypt and Greece-Cyprus-Israel, both convening regular trilateral summits and signing agreements (Sotiriou, 2020). Preponderantly, the Israel, Greece, Cyprus trilateral process has, on occasion, included the U.S., thus inaugurating a 3+1 summit process (Tziampiris, 2021).

The respective agreements, originally, embraced the development of energy resources, according to the UNCLOS, the drive for delineation of the maritime zones and the implementation of international law in the Cyprus’ problem (Sotiriou, 2020). In this context, through the so- called ‘soft legalization’ states’ sovereignty was assisted, norms were formed and security was upgraded without targeting any third country. In fact, the agreements of the two axes of cooperation have been constructed upon the so- called ‘issue- specific legalization’. In addition, tripartite cooperation has shifted towards more enhanced security

schemes of partnership, whilst the Cyprus' question viewed as 'a linkage issue' with a steady reference in the trilateral agreements, is approached through the international law, since energy and the Cyprus' problem are highly interconnected, as regional stability is a sine-qua non prerequisite for the wider gas bonanza. The involved states in both axes, through the recurring pattern of the trilateral summits, as well as, the relevant agreements, have created a common ground to protect their sovereignty and minimize violation prospects, while impacting crucially the Eastern Mediterranean security architecture. The East Med pipeline agreement, for example, signed, in January 2020, despite the obstacles and challenges, that has to confront in order to be materialized, exemplifies the common will of the engaged states to move forward with regional cooperation, which is open to all, under one condition: the respect of the international (Sotiriou, 2020).

Trilaterals

Cyprus-Greece- Israel axis

Cyprus, Greece, and Israel sharing a common strategic perception of the geopolitical sub-system of the Eastern Mediterranean have decided to cope with the future challenges through their geostrategic conjunction in political, diplomatic, economic and military terms, aiming to safeguard regional stability, against any revisionist power. The exploitation of their energy resources within their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) acts as 'a catalyst' upgrading their cooperation, whilst simultaneously, it elevates their geopolitical position in the regional and supra geopolitical system (Mazis & Sotiropoulos, 2016). Greece, Israel and Cyprus, despite their geographical proximity, cultural and historical close bonds, are heading towards a deeper and long-term cooperative alliance, with energy as chief- geopolitical factor of their synergetic scheme, covering gaps of political, geopolitical and operational nature (Mazis & Sotiropoulos, 2016). Undoubtedly, the three stakeholder- countries, rich in energy resources due to their geostrategic position, have structured their collaboration principally on the energy factor, seeking to improve their energy profiles, through joint projects (Tziarras, 2019). Apparently, power/ profit- related (economic) and threat- related (defense/ military) motives dictated the creation of the tripartite cooperation under examination. Initially, this trilateral scheme was formed because of the common rivalry and opposition against Turkey and subsequently due to the energy-factor (Tziarras, 2016). Turkey was, in other words, the primary reason for the formation of this 'quasi alliance', as it is perceived, by all three states, as a security threat (Tziarras, 2016). In addition, the abundance of energy resources has

accelerated the economic cooperation of the three parties, and it is expected to provide future profits to them, as it could minimize energy insecurity and augment the overall business activity (Apostolidi, 2018).

It must be clarified, though, that this partnership does not represent a traditional or formal type of alliance, since the involved parties have not signed a formal military treaty. The term 'quasi-alliance' has multiple interpretations, and, in this case, it denotes a 'permanent or ad hoc informal security co-operation arrangement based not only on formal collective defense pacts but also on tacit agreements between two or among more international regimes, aimed at winning or deterring a common enemy or a perceived common threat'. In addition, its management is dependent on mutual expectations, reflected in communiqués, joint declarations, memoranda, treaties and co-operation, domestic laws or even UN resolutions, instead of military treaties' (Tziarras, 2016).

Despite the fact that this cooperative scheme fulfils the quasi- alliance criteria, its military/ offensive character remains still underdeveloped and this is chiefly attributable to Turkey, which could be 'agitated' in case of a closer tripartite collaboration. The Turkish factor, thus, imposes a 'comfortable' character to this quasi-alliance, through which all three parties pursue their common interests, while maintaining a political flexibility towards Turkey. Besides the Turkish factor, energy resources have a transformational impact on the economy and national power of a state, and they encourage further inter- state collaboration due to energy- related parameters, such as, existing infrastructure, technological know- how and expertise etc. However, natural resources, whose exploitation presupposes political consensus, pose also, a point of vulnerability, which can bring about energy security- threat issues. In this field, Israel appears to be more experienced and advanced, compared to Cyprus and Greece, which possess less expertise. It comes as no surprise, that this quasi- alliance adopts cooperation agreements on a political, economic, military and energy level, with the latter being central and interlinked with other profit-related synergies as well (i.e. common energy- projects, negotiations and agreements on co-exploitation etc.) (Tziarras, 2016).

Considering the above, it is obvious that energy is more likely to augment security concerns and heighten tensions, when states share deeply securitized political relations, since the hydrocarbons are not viewed only as an economic tool but also as a political tool, impacting foreign policy and political position of states, either via dependency relations or through alliances (Apostolidi, 2018). Certainly, energy's two basic characteristics, such as imminence and immediacy, manifested as energy supply disruption or abrupt price fluctuations, evident

in cases of energy insecurity, could influence political and military bilateral and regional securitization relations and play an important role in formulating states' political and economic strategies and alliances (Adamides & Christou, 2015). Yet, as noted early, this quasi-alliance lacks an offensive or strong military-defensive character and remains rather politically 'comfortable' for the participating states (Tziarras, 2016).

The **first trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Israel was held, on 28 January 2016, in Nicosia, whereby the three parties focused principally on energy issues, regarding the construction of a pipeline from Israel, Cyprus and through Greece to Europe, as well as, the planning of an interconnected underwater cable, linking the electricity grids of the three stakeholder- countries to a common electric grid (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). In addition, among other things, during the first trilateral summit, a Trilateral Steering Committee or Permanent Ministerial Committee on Energy was formed for the coordination of the joint energy projects, whilst the involved partners established their cooperation within the broader context of the Euromed, acknowledging the importance of UfM in the region, as well (Editor, 2022). According to the Nicosia declaration, the Cyprus' issue, a central part of the agenda of the tripartite scheme, received the unwavering support to the ongoing negotiation process, under the UN Good Office Mission, for a viable, just and comprehensive settlement, based on international law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, contributing to peace and stability of the region (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). Finally, following the norm, it was clarified that this cooperative scheme was not exclusive in design or nature and was not directed against any other country (Editor, 2022).

The **second trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Israel took place, on 8 December 2016, in Jerusalem, following the respective meetings of the Energy Ministers, who, in the meantime had met three times in the context of the Permanent Ministerial Committee on Energy, in order to prepare a joint forthcoming, ministerial meeting (i. e. Jerusalem, January 2017) with the Italian Energy Minister and the EU Energy Commissioner so as to further examine the feasibility of the East Med pipeline project (Sotiriou, 2020). The second trilateral meeting, a sign of the developed strategic relationship, reflected the close and tightening relations between the countries and confirmed the establishment of a regular framework of collaboration, based on common interests and aspirations of advancing the joint energy projects (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016; Keinon, 2022). Furthermore, the Euroasia Interconnector was highlighted, along with the East Med pipeline, characterized as projects of strategic importance. The Cyprus' problem maintained its significance, as it was underscored the necessity of the demarcation of the Eastern Mediterranean, according to the UNCLOS

and the need to respect the international law and the UNSC resolutions (Sotiriou, 2020). Ultimately, it was stressed, once more, the non-exclusive in design or nature partnership (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

The **third trilateral summit** was convened, six months later, on 15 June 2017, by the three stakeholder-countries, in Thessaloniki, whereby energy issues rose to the top. The partners focused on various types of energy cooperation, including the transmission, the production, the transmission of electricity, as well as the revolutionary projects of the East Med pipeline and the Euroasia Interconnector (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). With respect to the East Med pipeline, the tripartite scheme reaffirmed its full support for its establishment as another gas corridor, linking directly gas findings in Cypriot and Israeli EEZs with the European markets, which was further reflected in the formation of a quadrilateral working group with the aim to monitor the development of the project. Furthermore, emphasis was placed also on the Euroasia Interconnector project and the finalization of the relevant feasibility studies. Both projects were characterized of strategic importance and their economic and political benefits were reemphasized. Among other issues dealing with telecommunications, innovation, entrepreneurship, tourism, protection of cultural heritage, diaspora etc. (Sotiriou, 2020), Cyprus 'issue was, once more, accentuated, since it was put forward the necessity for security arrangements, such as guarantees to be abolished and for the Turkish troops to leave the island.

Not taking long to materialize, the **fourth trilateral summit** was held, on 8 May 2018, in Nicosia. Issues of energy cooperation were, once again, central during this tripartite meeting, whereby all stakeholders reconfirmed their support and commitment for the implementation of the East Med Pipeline, a project exemplifying a viable and strategic option of special interest for all involved sides (Press and Information Office, 2018). In addition, the parties welcomed the two quadrilateral meetings between their energy ministers and that of Italy, along with the participation of the EU Commission, held between the 2nd and the 4th Summit, in Tel Aviv, on 3rd April 2017 and in Nicosia, on 5th December 2017, respectively (Sotiriou, 2020).

During these meetings, a MoU on the East Med was signed, whilst the necessity for an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that would accelerate its development was stressed. The Euroasia Interconnector was also referred to as a means of strengthening the strategic role of the trilateral cooperation and upgrading the regional value of the three countries in the telecommunications sector. In this regard, the conclusion of the remaining studies and the

issuing of the relevant decisions by the regulatory authorities of all three countries were highly encouraged, whilst cooperation on matters of environmental protection attracted particular attention, with the parties signing an Implementation Agreement on the Sub-Regional Marine Oil Pollution Contingency Plan (Sotiriou, 2020). With respect to the Turkish revisionism, the parties rejected all illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, which violate international law and are contrary to good neighborly relations, while underlining, the same time, their full support and solidarity with Cyprus in exercising its sovereign rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Press and Information Office, 2018).

The **fifth trilateral summit** among Cyprus, Greece and Israel was conducted, on 20 December 2018, in Beersheba (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The energy sector monopolized, once again, the interest of the involved parties, as they reiterated their strong commitment towards the realization of the East Med pipeline, a project of strategic option, also highlighting the importance of the intergovernmental agreement, IGA, as a facilitator of the project, which was adopted previously by the three parties and Italy and will be under review by the European Commission, en route to the signing of a final agreement (Sotiriou, 2020). Moreover, all stakeholders confirmed their interest in the Euroasia Interconnector, whose implementation is being encouraged by the respective studies, whilst collaboration is further expected in the areas of the renewable energy, fuel alternatives and electric vehicles (Hellenic Republic, 2022). In addition, support was expressed for the implementation agreement on the Sub-regional marine oil pollution contingency plan and among various issues discussed (i. e. innovation, joint pilot projects, cyber security etc.), the engaged parties reiterated their full support and solidarity towards Cyprus in exercising its sovereign rights within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and expressed their opposition to any violations of these rights in a manner that will endanger the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, will violate the international law or contradict good neighborly relations (Hellenic Republic, 2022). A significant reference was made, also, to the establishment of a permanent Secretariat, based in Nicosia, as a form of a trilateral mechanism, which would coordinate and follow up the decisions and initiatives adopted by various tripartite meetings, tasked with managing the agreements that Cyprus and Greece have concluded with Israel, Egypt, and Jordan (Hellenic Republic, 2022). What is interesting, however, is that the tripartite summits have not only been enjoying the EU support but also have been backed up by the United States. It is reminded that the US Assistant Secretary of State for Eurasian and European Affairs, who called Cyprus to exploit its resources,

characterized Turkey as a minority versus the rest of the world and expounded the US intention of participating into the trilateral summits, which are not exclusive to anyone and not aimed at anyone (Sotiriou, 2020)

On 20 March 2019, only a week later, the **sixth trilateral summit** was held in Jerusalem, which was attended, for the first time, by the US Secretary of State, escorted by the Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources (Sotiriou, 2020). Greece, Cyprus, Israel trilateral process had on this occasion invited the U.S., thus inaugurating a 3+1 summit process. Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, Cypriot President, Nicos Anastasiades, Greece's Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras and US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, agreed to increase regional cooperation and energy independence and to defend against external inimical influences in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East (Geropoulos, 2022). In a joint statement, the leaders also welcomed the recent natural gas findings in the Eastern Mediterranean and their potential to contribute to energy security and diversification, whilst Secretary, Pompeo, following, the significant discoveries, made in February 2019, in the Cypriot EEZ by Exxon Mobil, tried to anchor the US presence in a regional grouping and underlined U. S. support for the trilateral mechanism established by Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, noting the importance of increased cooperation (Sotiriou, 2020; U.S. Embassy in Athens, 2019). Hence, this Summit was viewed more as a complementary to the fifth, rather than a separate one and it reaffirmed its unwavering support to the Cyprus' problem and the UNCLOS (Sotiriou, 2020).

On 7 August 2019, during the first 3+1 ministerial summit between Cyprus, Greece, Israel and the US that was convened in Athens, the participant officials reasserted their cooperation in the energy sector -with a focus on the East Med pipeline project- which can instigate ties and not just tensions, in the Eastern Mediterranean. Following the violations of Turkey, its illegal actions within the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and its territorial waters, in a joint statement, the Ministers of Energy and the US also reiterated their full support and solidarity to the Republic of Cyprus in exploring and developing its resources in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and expressed their concern about the provocative steps underway in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, the United States clarified that the island's oil and gas resources should be shared equitably between both (Cypriot) communities in the context of an overall settlement (Becatoros, 2022).

The **seventh trilateral summit** took place, on 2 January 2020, in Athens, whereby, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis and

Cypriot President, Nicos Anastasiades, signed the agreement for the East Med gas pipeline that will run from Israel through Cyprus and Greece to Europe (Prime Minister Office, 2020). In specific, the Intergovernmental Energy Agreement for the construction of the East Med natural gas pipeline was signed in Athens by the Minister of Environment and Energy Kostas Hatzidakis, the Minister of Energy, Trade and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus George Lakkotrypis and the Minister of Energy of Israel Yuval Steinitz (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The aforementioned inter-governmental agreement is pursuant to the 2017 MoU and the subsequent preliminary feasibility study and anchors the commitment of the three countries to the establishment of the project (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The East Med pipeline is described as a project that upgrades the wider region of Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean and is the crowning point of the new geopolitical partnership between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. It does not turn against any third country but instead turns energy into a catalyst for regional cooperation and stability for the benefit of all. Besides ending Cyprus's energy isolation and the economic benefits for all the stakeholder-countries, the project is also in line with the European Union's strategic energy goals, as it opens a new gas supply corridor, which will contribute to Member States' energy security through diversification of sources and routes.

As expected, on 22 August 2021, the first ministerial trilateral meeting between Cyprus, Greece and Israel was conducted, in Jerusalem, under Naftali Bennett government, in order to prepare the High-Level trilateral meeting expected to take place, on 7 December 2021, in Jerusalem (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). The agenda of the Foreign Affairs' Ministers included ways to enhance regional cooperation, partnership on health issues, in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and joint initiatives in responding to climate emergency situations. In specific, N. Christodoulides, N. Dendias and Y. Lapid discussed how to further strengthen regional cooperation and the format of the trilateral scheme 3+1 among Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and the US, which has significant added value. Furthermore, they examined the follow up, as regards the tripartite partnership, for example, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), after their last meeting, in April 2021, in Paphos, and exchanged views on the developments in the broader Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East region (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). In his statement, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, characterized the meeting as a visible confirmation of the strategic nature of this cooperation, while stressing the non-linear developments in a transforming region, including also the historic normalization agreements between Israel and UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, which have

created a momentum that must be maintained (Republic of Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The **eighth trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Israel was held, on 7 December 2021, in Jerusalem, whereby the three parties underscored that the trilateral cooperation retains its momentum, despite the self-evident difficulties in holding physical meetings due to COVID-19 (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). Their joint declaration exhibits the determination of the three countries to further strengthen their cooperation, as well as, that the new Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, remains committed to the policy of his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu (Tzogopoulos, 2021).

In fact, Bennett's warm words for his colleagues intended to reassure Athens and Nicosia that their trilateral security alliance ranks high on Israel's priority list, ahead of rehabilitating ties with Ankara, since Jerusalem is unlikely to send an ambassador back to Ankara, at least not before the Turks make real progress on closing Hamas 'offices in the country (Bassist, 2021). Energy cooperation was, once again, a central theme, as it was underlined that the collaboration in the energy sector figures prominently on the trilateral agenda. In specific, the engaged partners clarified that the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat for the trilateral mechanisms, in Nicosia, which has been concluded, will streamline the coordination of all the sectoral areas of cooperation and generate the impetus for their expansion, deepening, also, the diversification, as the successful example of the 3+1 cooperation with the US exhibits. In light of the growing emergency situations, they stressed, additionally, the need for security, disaster reduction and prevention, through a forum, such as, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).

It is reminded that the forum, during the upcoming Cypriot presidency, it was stated that will focus on actions, which will increase the relevance of the region in the transition towards greener and more sustainable energy. In addition, it was reaffirmed that energy projects, such as the Euroasia Interconnector and the East Med Pipeline fit skillfully into this global discourse (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). In addition, during this trilateral summit, the stakeholder –countries remained committed to the enhancement of the EU-Israeli relations and cooperation in the framework of the EU –Israel Association Agreement and particularly in swiftly convening the protracted overdue EU- Israel Association Council (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). A specific reference was also made to the latest developments of the historic Abraham Accords, which have been a true game-changer in relation to the domains of cooperation it paves in the region. To this end, the three parties welcomed the recent

agreement between Israel, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, which manifests the potential of the region as a pioneer in cross-border energy cooperation, while both the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, and the Greek Premier, K. Mitsotakis, were pledged to convey to the Israeli Prime Minister, N. Bennett, their willingness to take part in common projects between the parties to the Abraham Accords (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). Furthermore, climate change and its repercussions on the countries' natural environments, economies and way of life was discussed, as well as, ways of expanding ties in the fields of security, economy, technology, tourism and emergency services, such as, cooperation to combat forest fires. As expected, the Cyprus' problem maintained its significance, as it was underlined in the joint-declaration issued, that a Cyprus' settlement in line with international law and UN Security Council Resolutions would significantly contribute to the peace and stability of the region (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). Regarding the revisionist policy of Turkey, which disregards international law and norms, it was underscored that Ankara's aggressive and illegal policy and planning, both at sea with the violation of the exercise of sovereign rights within the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and on the ground, is in full defiance of the special status of Varosha, as prescribed with the relevant UN Council Resolutions (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). Lastly, it must be noted that Cyprus and Israel signed, also, a Memorandum on scientific cooperation, in promoting research exchanges in scientific sectors, aiming at sustainable growth, which includes activities, such as the support of common research projects by scientists of both countries, the joint organization of seminars, scientific symposiums, other relevant meetings, as well as, various cooperative synergies. Thus, the eighth trilateral summit was concluded with a common belief and commitment that the relationship between the three nations is as strong as ever, since they constitute the positive forces, which work together to secure the prosperity, defense and economy of the Eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus News Agency, 2021).

Cyprus- Greece- Egypt axis

Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, having a common strategic perception of the Eastern Mediterranean, as a geopolitical subsystem and common values, initiated their tripartite partnership, on 8 November 2014, whereby all three parties, conscious of the immense challenges to the stability, security and prosperity of the Eastern Mediterranean, were pledged to nurture their cooperation ever stronger for years to come, based on a productive dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Prior, to that, it is reminded that, when President Sisi took over the power in Egypt, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, I. Kasoulides, was one of

the first, who paid a visit to Cairo, in 2013, and in coordination with Athens, both countries welcomed positively the new Egyptian government. In return, Cyprus received the support of Egypt, in October 2014, during a meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, when President Sisi demanded the denial of observer status from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) (Apostolidi, 2018). Diplomatic, as well as, economic reasons have dictated the tripartite cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, namely, the Turkish factor viewed by the three parties, as a common threat, as well as, the prospects of exploitation and monetization of the promising gas reserves found both in Egypt and in Cyprus. Furthermore, Egypt due to its severe domestic energy and economic problems decided to enhance its inter-state relations and commenced discussing possible diplomatic cooperation with Greece and Cyprus to fulfil its energy demands by importing gas from Cyprus. The development of the Egyptian natural gas sector is of vital importance for the country's overall economy (Johansson, 2018). Within this context, Greece also took the opportunity to cooperate in this new scheme, including Egypt, which shared common tense relations with Turkey, as well. The energy landscape changed drastically for Egypt, in 2015, when the Zohr field discoveries upgraded the country's energy profile, creating new opportunities and challenges. Clearly, Egypt has been pursuing cooperative energy diplomacy towards an optimal utilization of the overall Eastern Mediterranean energy resources (Tziarras, 2019). The Egyptian ambition was enabled by the existing energy infrastructures in the country and its strategic goal is to become self-sufficient and be transformed into a key energy hub in the Eastern Mediterranean basin.

Cyprus on its part, views its involvement in the region as positioning the island in the center of a constantly developing geopolitical sub-system. Its regional engagement is reflected in security and stability considerations, shared within the cooperative synergetic schemes with its partners, with whom it has historical and cultural bonds, as well as common interests (Johansson, 2018). Especially after 2013, a shift of the Cypriot foreign policy is being observed from inactivity and reactivity (i. e. sub-optimal and ad hoc foreign policy decisions) towards proactivity (Tziarras, 2019). In particular, under the presidency of N. Anastasiades, the Cypriot government became more active and intervening in such a way that it could capitalize the transforming geopolitical sub-system of the Eastern Mediterranean and could internationalize its foreign policy's horizons to various directions. Cyprus both regionally and internationally corroborated this proactivity, through various options and actions, such as: being more actively involved with all the European institutions (i. e. EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation, PESCO), reinforcing its defense -attaches abroad, intensifying its

cooperation with the US (i. e. signing of a statement of intent on security cooperation), strengthening its bilateral relations, apart from Greece, with Israel, Egypt and Lebanon, pursuing the creation of the tripartite frameworks of collaboration etc. (Tziarras, 2019).

The trilateral cooperation was perceived by the parties involved as a unique opportunity to accelerate the exploitation of their energy resources, as well as a facilitator of regional stability, security and prosperity for the wider region. Israeli and Egyptian support for Cyprus vis-a-vis Turkey's threats confirms that their alliance is, also, a balancing act against the Turkish activity in the Eastern Mediterranean (Tziarras, 2019). Undoubtedly, the tripartite cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt has attained a developing security and defense constituent, as well.

As noted earlier, in the case of the Cyprus, Greece, Egypt axis, their co-operation satisfies the criteria of a formal alliance, applying to the motivation of its formation, namely, the energy-related profits as well as, the common Turkish security threat. It must be underscored that this cooperative tripartite framework was formalized, firstly, with the signing of a military agreement between Egypt and Greece, on 21 November 2017, in order to safeguard peace and security in the region (Apostolidi, 2018). Subsequently, numerous joint aeronautical exercises, such as, Medusa, between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt showcase their commitment of collective action through the strengthening of operational partnerships. Ultimately, the aforementioned cooperation combines the characteristics of a formal alliance, yet all three stake holder-countries remain free to act according to their political and economic interests (Apostolidi, 2018).

The **first trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt was convened, on 8 November 2014, in Cairo, inaugurating a new era of cooperation, sealed with the signing of the Cairo declaration. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Nikos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus and Antonis Samaras, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, cognizant of the immense challenges of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the need for a concerted response, decided to tackle effectively these challenges, building on a significant partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). The energy factor was central in the agenda and it was recognized by all three leaders that the hydrocarbon reserves can serve as a catalyst for regional cooperation, facilitated further by the adherence to the principles of international law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). In this regard, the universal character of the UNCLOS was endorsed, with all three parties agreeing to

negotiations for the delimitation of their maritime zones, where it is not yet done (Sotiriou, 2020).

In addition, the declaration underscored the importance of the respect for the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of Cyprus over its EEZ, calling on Turkey to refrain from seismic survey operations and similar activities within Cyprus' maritime zones. Attention was placed, also, on the Cyprus' issue, calling for as just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the problem in order to reunify the island in alignment with the international law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, which would be beneficial for the people of Cyprus as a whole, as well as, for the wider region (Sotiriou, 2020). In specific, the Cypriot President referred to a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with a single and unique legal personality and nationality as a solution, while clarifying that the rapprochement among the three states is not aimed against any country (Sotiriou, 2020). Concluding, the three leaders underlined that the current tripartite scheme is a model for a broader regional dialogue, aiming to promote further the relations between the EU and the Arab world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). On 29 April 2015, the three partners met again, in Nicosia for the **second trilateral summit**, which further strengthened their well-established partnership in all fields (i. e. political, economic, trade, tourism, culture etc.) in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). The hydrocarbons issue retained its core position in the agenda, as it could act as a catalyst for regional synergies, while UNCLOS was emphasized as a 'vehicle' for enhanced cooperation and negotiation on the delimitation of the maritime zones, where it is not yet done. Furthermore, the Cyprus' problem maintained its significance and the three parties highlighted the urgency for a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement of the issue, according to the international law and the pertinent UNSC resolutions. In addition, tourism and maritime industry were viewed as crucial sectors for the economies of the involved states and alongside with the deepening of the maritime cooperation (i. e. education, training etc.), cruises and joint tourism packages thrived (Sotiriou, 2020). Lastly, the importance of the Euro Mediterranean cooperation, as well as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was acknowledged (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The **third trilateral summit** took place in Athens, on 9 December 2015. The three stakeholder-countries re-emphasized the significance of the hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially that of Zohr field in the Egyptian exclusive economic zone (EEZ), since they could act as a catalyst for peace and stability in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). They reaffirmed their commitment to an accelerated delineation of adjacent maritime zones according to the UNCLOS and reiterated their pledge to continue

their cooperation on common projects, including joint tourism packages, cruises, and maritime connection for the transfer of passengers and cargo (Sotiriou, 2020).

Moreover, the involved parties made a reference to the Cyprus' issue, expressing their unwavering support to the ongoing negotiation process, under the UN Good Office Mission, for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the problem. In an attempt to further strengthen their tripartite collaboration, the three leaders decided to establish a standing Joint Committee of cooperation, which would formulate and promote the practical projects of their trilateral focus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Finally, the increasing importance of the Euro- Mediterranean cooperation was stressed, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration, as well as, the role of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), reflected in the joint communication of the EU on the review of the European Neighborhood Policy of 18th November 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Hence, as expected, it was once again underlined that the trilateral framework is not targeted against or aimed at excluding any third party (Sotiriou, 2020).

The **fourth trilateral summit** was conducted, on 11 October 2016, in Cairo and served as a model for promoting the relations of the EU with the countries of the region. The core topic of the meeting was that of energy cooperation, upgraded by the introduction of the European dimension, which needed diversification of energy resources and routes, security of energy supply, modernization, development of new energy infrastructures and collaboration in the areas of hydrocarbons and renewable sources (Sotiriou, 2020). To this end, the three parties agreed to enhance energy cooperation, through regular ministerial meetings and partnerships between the public and private sector (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In specific, the three leaders reviewed the relationship between the European Union and Egypt in detail, highlighting the mutual benefit from various areas of cooperation between the two sides. In this regard, they reiterated the vital importance of a strong and solid Egyptian-EU relation for peace and stability in both the Middle East and Europe and agreed that a strategic partnership between Egypt and the EU- on the basis of mutual respect, common interests and reciprocal commitments- is an essential framework for addressing pressing common challenges, such as terrorism and extremist ideologies, migration, sustainable development and achieving economic prosperity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In addition, it was reaffirmed that any new discoveries and transport options that would serve as a channel for regional stability and prosperity, would be based on the well-established principles of the international law, notable the UNCLOS, whilst any issues pending regarding the demarcation of adjacent maritime zones should be regulated accordingly (Sotiriou, 2020). Ultimately, with respect to

the Cyprus' issue, a new dimension was added, as the three parties highlighted that the solution to the problem should address the concerns and aspirations of the Cypriots without anachronistic and obsolete security arrangements, such as guarantees with the right of military intervention without the explicit approval of the UNSC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

On 22 November 2017, the **fifth trilateral summit** was held in Nicosia, which was called, for the first time, 'an institution' sharing common perception and common views on important regional issues. In this manner, the soft legalization was developed through the establishment of a channel of communication and mutual support, which was not against third parties (Sotiriou, 2020).

The energy factor was, once again, a basic pillar of the trilateral agenda, upon which significant initiatives should be taken, including common energy plans of the three states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy cooperation both in the transport of hydrocarbons but also in the electrical interconnection between the engaged countries was characterized as strategically important and viewed as a bridge between Europe and Africa. A special reference was made, also, to the Euroafrica interconnector, interlinking North African market with Europe, through Cyprus and Crete, as well as, to Egypt's prospect of becoming an attractive investment destination in the renewable energy (i. e. solar energy), which is environmentally friendly (Prime Minister Office, 2017). As expected, the Cyprus' issue maintained its place on the agenda, especially after the deadlock of the Crans -Montana meeting, and all parties reiterated their firm support to a sustainable solution of the problem, based on UN decisions, with Cyprus becoming a united federal state with no guarantees and occupation troops for the benefit of all Cypriot people. In addition, the need to respect international law was highlighted as a model of cooperation in the region, whilst a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), in the field of cruise was signed, with multiplier benefits to tourism, ports, monuments and culture (Prime Minister Office, 2017).

On 10 October 2018, the **sixth trilateral summit** was convened in Crete, with a collective effort to further strengthen the existing tripartite bond. The three parties reviewed common challenges, faced in the energy field, such as the need for diversification of energy resources and routes, the security of energy supply and the need to modernize and develop new energy infrastructure, with a view to enriching the prospects for further promoting trilateral energy cooperation, especially in the areas of hydrocarbons, electricity, and renewable energy sources. The discovery and future exploitation of significant hydrocarbon fields in the

Eastern Mediterranean, highly impacting the stability of the region, propels energy security, which is seen as the cornerstone of the trilateral partnership (Press and Information Office, 2018). The importance of private sector energy projects, such as the Euroafrica Interconnector, and the evolutions concerning the East Med pipeline were examined as well, whereas the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, (EMGF) was decided to be established, with its headquarters in Cairo (Sotiriou, 2020).

Within this context, the three involved states agreed to establish a Permanent Secretariat, in Nicosia, acting as a coordinating mechanism of their common efforts. Greece and Egypt, also, agreed that technical talks between the two countries on delineating their EEZ must be protected. Furthermore, the stakeholder- countries welcomed the signing of a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in the fields of entrepreneurship, education, technology, investments, customs etc. (Press and Information Office, 2018). Lastly, the trilateral scheme reaffirmed its unwavering support towards Cyprus' sovereign rights over its EEZ, in alignment with the UNCLOS, calling on Turkey to stop its illegal activities within the Cypriot maritime zones and refrain from similar actions (Press and Information Office, 2018). In particular, the three leaders stressed the need of a comprehensive, just and viable solution to the Cyprus' problem, based on the relevant UNSC resolutions, international law and EU law, demanding, to this end, the termination of the anachronistic security arrangements and the departure of foreign forces, which constitute a sine qua non for Cyprus in order to function as a normal sovereign state, member of the UN and the EU, free of foreign dependencies (Press and Information Office, 2018).

The **seventh trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt took place, on 8 October 2019, in Cairo, whereby, the three parties reassessed the latest developments and progress scored in the fields of defense, security, energy, investment, tourism, environment, culture and education, whilst underscoring their commitment to cement further their political and economic cooperation (State Information Service, 2019). A special attention was placed on the energy cooperation through a number of relevant agreements, as well as, on the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). The latter is viewed as an important mechanism for coordinating gas policies and harmonizing the energy sector with sustainable development, which is of a pivotal importance to achieve stability in the region. To this end it was agreed to intensify consultations in order to upgrade the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) to the level of a regional organization. In this context, they welcomed the signing of the framework agreement between the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company and the Euro-

African Interconnection Company, on the 22nd of May 2019, aiming to establish an electrical network between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece (State Information Service, 2019).

In addition, they agreed to activate the permanent secretariat for the tripartite cooperation mechanism, headquartered in Nicosia, while expressing their aspiration to work together to achieve a strong partnership between the EU and Egypt that will benefit the interests of all parties and engage strategically in areas of common interest (State Information Service, 2019). Moreover, the three parties underlined their stern concern over the current escalation in the maritime parts of the Eastern Mediterranean and denounced the ceaseless Turkish measures in the Cypriot exclusive economic Zone (EEZ) and its territorial water, representing a violation of the international law, as well as its attempts to make illegal drillings in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Unsurprisingly, the tripartite framework reaffirmed, once again, its unwavering support to the efforts exerted by the Cypriot government to reach a fair and applicable solution to the Cypriot issue, in light of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international law (State Information Service, 2019).

The **eighth trilateral summit** was held, on 21 October 2020, in Nicosia, whereby, under the unprecedented challenge and impact of COVID-19 on the social, economic and healthcare systems globally, the three partners exchanged views and experiences and re-examined the progress achieved in sectoral cooperation, inter alia, in the fields of defense and security, energy, investments, tourism, diaspora, protection of the environment and of cultural heritage, research, innovation, and education (Republic of Cyprus, 2020). Energy cooperation was, once again, at the center of the agenda, as the three parties welcomed the signing of the statute of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) by all seven founding members, as a regional organization, based in Cairo, open to all countries sharing common values and willingness to cooperate for the security and welfare of the entire region. EMGF's main goal is to unlock the full gas resource potential in the region and to assist the monetization of the reserves of its member- countries, in accordance with the international law and in full respect of its members' rights over their natural resources. To this end, the stakeholder- countries decided to proceed with the appointment of country representatives to the Secretariat established, in Nicosia, to become functional before the end of 2020 (Republic of Cyprus, 2020).

Within this context, the tripartite scheme highlighted the significance of the Euroafrica interconnector, as a highway for the transmission of vast amounts of electricity generated by gas from the Eastern Mediterranean fields but also from renewable energy sources to Europe

(Republic of Cyprus, 2020). In this regard, the involved- parties, announced that are willing to sing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) soon, since the project is expected to upgrade the Eastern Mediterranean energy corridor, as an alternative source of energy supply from the region to Europe and vice versa (Republic of Cyprus, 2020). As expected, the tripartite framework reiterated its full support to the efforts of the Cypriot government to reach a comprehensive, just and viable solution to the Cyprus' problem, based on the relevant U. N. Security Council Resolutions and international law, while condemning, at the same time, Turkey's actions in Varosha in violation of relevant Security Council resolutions (Republic of Cyprus, 2020).

Similarly, the engaged states, expressed their concern over the escalation within the maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean and the increased militarization of the area and condemned Turkey's illegal drilling and seismic operations in Cyprus' EEZ/continental shelf, in marine areas already delimited (Republic of Cyprus, 2020). In the same vein, they underscored that the delimitation of the Continental Shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law (Republic of Cyprus, 2020). Accordingly, the three parties called on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage into negotiations, in good faith and in full respect of international law, with the objective to reach an agreement for the maritime delimitation between their relevant coasts, or to submit the issue to the International Court of Justice (Republic of Cyprus, 2020). Ultimately, the engaged partners welcomed the signing and entry into force of the agreement on the delimitation of EEZ between Greece and Egypt, a milestone pact, which has been concluded in full compliance with international law, as reflected in UNCLOS, contributing to the stability and security in the entire region (Republic of Cyprus, 2020).

Finally, the **ninth trilateral summit** was convened, on 19 October 2021, in Athens, whereby, a significant agreement was signed among the involved parties for the establishment of a trilateral electricity interconnector between the grids of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, which strengthens their economic cooperation and enhances the security of energy supply, not only of the countries involved but also of Europe (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). The Electricity Interconnector project, acting as a bridge between Egypt and Europe, is an important component of the strategy to accelerate the development of the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor, providing an alternative source of energy supply from the region to the European continent and vice versa (Tsimitakis, 2021).

Furthermore, the parties uttered their desire to continue strengthening their cooperation, through a series of agreements, on the exploration and transportation of natural gas and stressed that they remain convinced that the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves can serve as a catalyst for regional stability and prosperity. A special reference was made, also, to the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), whose adoption was, once again, welcomed, whilst it is being viewed by some analysts, at the same time, as a forum, ‘inhibiting’ the hegemonic Turkish stance (Καθημερινή, 2021). In this context, the trilateral support was also reiterated for the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat, as a mechanism, which exemplifies the uniqueness of the relations between the countries (Republic of Cyprus, 2021).

In addition, the parties highlighted the importance of respecting the sovereignty and sovereign rights of all states in their maritime zones, in accordance with the international law, as reflected in the UNCLOS (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). In this context, the illegal drilling, and seismic operations by Turkish vessels in the Cypriot EEZ/ continental shelf, in maritime areas already delimited, were strongly condemned. The energy cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, disturbs Turkey, in other words, which continues its provocative behavior, as it covets the natural resources, existing, in the region (Le Figaro with AFP, 2021).

Consequently, the three stakeholders -countries called on Turkey to abstain from provocations and unilateral actions in breach of international law, including from harassment of survey vessels licensed by Greece or Cyprus, thus contributing to create conditions conducive to dialogue (Nedos, 2021). With respect to the Cyprus’ issue, a recurrent topic of the trilateral agenda, the three partners reaffirmed their strong support to a just, comprehensive, and viable settlement, in line with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, that call for a bizonal, bicomunal federation with a single sovereignty, a single international personality and a single citizenship, as well as, in accordance with the EU acquis, values and principles (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). Lastly, regarding Varosha, the parties- involved recalled the Security Council Presidential Statement of 23 July 2021, which corroborates the status of Varosha, as reflected in previous United Nations Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992), condemned the announcement in Cyprus by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaders, on 20 July 2021, on the further reopening of a part of the fenced-off area of Varosha and called for the immediate reversal of this course of action (Republic of Cyprus, 2021).

Additional trilateral schemes

Cyprus, Greece, UAE

The **first trilateral meeting** between Cyprus, Greece and United Arab Emirates was convened, on 16 November 2019, in Abu Dhabi, whereby the three parties exchanged views on the latest regional developments and discussed a series of issues of common interest, such as Turkey, Syria, Libya and Iran (Emirates News Agency, 2022). Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan underscored the UAE's willingness to strengthen its partnership with Cyprus and Greece in multiple areas of cooperation for the benefit of all the involved countries. Furthermore, the three participants highlighted the importance of the meeting in enhancing the collaboration with the UAE in all fields and they praised the UAE's influential role in promoting international peace and security (Cyprus News Agency, 2019).

The **second informal trilateral** meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Cyprus, Greece and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was held, on the sidelines of the Sir Bani Yas Forum, on 13 November 2021, in Dubai. During the meeting, ministers N. Christodoulides of Cyprus, N. Dendias of Greece and Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan of the UAE, reconfirmed their willingness to further enhance cooperation. They also exchanged views on the situation in Syria, the latest developments in Libya, considering the Paris conference on Libya, where all-three countries participated. They also examined the EU-UAE relations, and the role, which Cyprus and Greece could play in establishing a stronger and more substantial EU's engagement in the entire region. In addition, they reviewed progress to further deepen and expand regional cooperation in the wider Middle East and the Gulf region, based on a positive approach. Ultimately, the three ministers further assessed the next steps towards this direction and the possible participation of other states in the region (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

It is worth mentioning also, that Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on 23 February 2022, signed memoranda of understanding (MoU) on maritime transport, cyber security and diplomatic training, on the occasion of the visit of the Cyprus President, N. Anastasiades, to Dubai for the EXPO 2020, heading a delegation, comprised of the Ministers of Finance, Energy, Defense, Agriculture and Transport, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Shipping and Research, the Deputy Minister to the President, as well as, the Deputy Government Spokesperson (Konioutou, 2022). More specifically, Defense Ministers of Cyprus

and UAE decided to further enhance the defense and military cooperation between the two countries, through concrete activities, such as joint exercises, as well as, through the exchange of know-how on defense issues (Koniotou, 2022b). Also, they analyzed regional security issues, such as the security challenges, which the UAE tackle, due to the recent terrorist attacks, with the Cypriot Minister underscoring Cyprus' solidarity towards the UAE. Lastly, the two Ministers examined the prospects of developing further a trilateral cooperation on defense issues, among Cyprus, Greece and the UAE (Koniotou, 2022b).

Cyprus, Greece, Jordan

The **first trilateral summit** between Cyprus, Greece and Jordan, which took place, on 16 January 2018, in Nicosia, established the role of the three countries as pillars of stability, peace and security in the region, according to the joint statements of the Greek Prime Minister, A. Tsipras, the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades and King Abdullah II of Jordan, upon the conclusion of the meeting (Keep Talking Greece, 2018). The summit was seen as an opportunity to exchange thoughts on the complexities of both the immediate and wider neighborhood, whereby the three parties affirmed their determination to lay the groundwork for the strengthening of their cooperation in multiple areas of common interest, cognizant of the multifaceted challenges in the wider region (Keep Talking Greece, 2018). Hence, further to the two preparatory trilateral meetings, at the level of Secretaries General/Permanent Secretary of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, held in Nicosia (2016) and in Athens (2017), the involved parties formulated joint- proposals in fields, such as: renewable energy resources and energy efficiency, management of water resources, agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, transport and merchant shipping, protection of antiquities and health (Prime Minister Office, 2018).

Top priority of this tripartite collaboration was energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy due to the impact of climate change and for this reason financing and securing investments on relevant energy technologies was considered to be crucial. The signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on renewable energy resources constitutes an expression of this commitment, which paves the way for joint solar energy projects (Prime Minister Office, 2018).

In addition, the stakeholder countries expressed their support for a comprehensive, just, negotiated, and lasting settlement of the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, based on the two- state solution and in accordance with international law, relevant UN resolutions and the Arab

Peace Initiative. Unwavering support was also given to the continuation of the negotiation process, under the Good Office Mission of the UN Secretary General, for a just, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus' problem, in line with international law, the principles upon which the European Union is founded and the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions (Prime Minister Office, 2018).

Among the issues discussed were Syria, Iraq, the fight against terrorism, the protection of antiquities, the preservation and development of historical and archaeological sites, migration and the need for the EU to support Jordan with regard to the burdens, related to hosting over 1.3 million Syrian refugees, the implementation of the EU-Jordan Compact, within the framework of the Association Agreement and the new European Neighborhood Policy, the role of UfM and the Euro- Mediterranean cooperation, water scarcity, synergies involving both the public and the private sector, cooperation in tourism, transportation, health sector etc. Lastly, the constructive contribution of Jordan in the Middle East Peace Process and the efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al- Hussein, in safeguarding Jerusalem's holy sites and preserving its legal and historical status-quo, were highlighted (Prime Minister Office, 2018).

On 14 April 2019, **the second trilateral summit** was convened, in Amman, whereby Abdullah II Hussein, the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, N. Anastasiades, President of Cyprus, and A. Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece, agreed to maximize further their cooperation for their joint benefit (Press and Information Office, 2019). The engaged parties agreed that the core value of their tripartite collaboration is the respect for international law, including the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and they underlined the importance of the respect of the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction each state has over its maritime zones, in accordance with international law (Press and Information Office, 2019).

After reviewing the progress achieved in the sectors endorsed at the first trilateral summit, such as, renewable energy resources and energy efficiency, agriculture, management of water resources, aquaculture, tourism, merchant shipping, health and protection of antiquities, they reaffirmed their determination to further intensify their cooperation in these sectors, as well as, in additional fields of mutual interest (Press and Information Office, 2019). The three partners, also, stressed that the gas discoveries in the region will act as a catalyst and will highly impact energy and economic development and they welcomed enthusiastically the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) during the first meeting of the

Ministers of Energy, which was conducted, on 14 January 2019, in Cairo, as a beneficial platform for its members. In this regard, they agreed to establish a Permanent Secretariat, in Nicosia, which will anchor and facilitate this cooperation and they even decided to appoint a national coordinator in each country for their trilateral partnership (Press and Information Office, 2019).

Moreover, they were pledged to encourage positive economic cooperation with the aim of promoting trade exchanges and attract investment in various sectors, as well as, to institutionalize high-level interagency discussions on foreign, defense and security policy, while launching a ministerial trilateral cooperation forum involving the Ministers of Finance and Trade (Press and Information Office, 2019).

The tripartite summit, serving as a consultation mechanism on foreign policy issues and as a forum of enhancing peace, security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and wider region, welcomed the signing of memoranda of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of education (i. e. environmental education, sustainable development, information technology), as well as, in the investment sector (i. e. between Jordan Investment Commission (JIC), Enterprise Greece S. A. and Invest Cyprus) aiming at strengthening their educational and investment relations. The trilateral talks covered, also, issues such as Syria, Iraq, terrorism, refugee crisis, cultural cooperation (i. e. prevention of theft, clandestine excavation and illicit import, export or transfer of ownership of cultural property and promotion of its restitution, based on a relevant agreement and in accordance with the Nicosia Convention), diaspora etc. As expected, a special reference was made to a comprehensive, just, negotiated and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-state solution and in accordance with international law, relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as, to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus' problem, through a solution that will reunify the island and safeguard Cyprus's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity for the benefit not only of the people of Cyprus but also of the entire region (Press & Information Office, 2019). Lastly, the three parties reaffirmed their determination to pursue their collaboration in the context of international organizations, such as the UN system and praised the importance of the of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and UfM, as well as, the contribution of the first European Union-League of Arab States (LAS) Summit, which took place, on the 24th and 25th of February 2019, in Egypt (Press and Information Office, 2019).

The **third trilateral summit** was conducted, on 8 December 2020, in Amman, falling within the scope of a strong partnership, which was agreed to be further expanded on the basis of a

positive agenda and with a view to strengthening peace, security, stability and prosperity in the entire region (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In particular, the engaged parties decided to accelerate the holding of joint, high-level meetings between the three countries on issues of foreign policy, defense and security, as well as, to enhance economic cooperation and trade (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

They welcomed, once again, the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) as a shining example of a partnership based on the international law, as well as the activation of the Permanent Secretariat for the trilateral mechanism, headquartered in Nicosia, which is expected to act as a catalyst, boosting regional cooperation. In addition, the Cyprus' problem kept its position in the agenda and the ongoing efforts by the UN Secretary General aimed at the resumption of meaningful negotiations, while the continuing illegal activities of Turkey in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf, as well as, on the ground, (i. e. provocative opening of the fenced area of Varosha) were condemned (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Furthermore, the talks covered issues, such as, the latest developments in the broader Middle East and the Gulf region, including the prospects for the Middle East peace process, the current state of play in EU-Jordan relations, the refugee crisis, Syria, Libya, Iraq and the possibility of implementing a “3+1” format with Baghdad, as well as, the disbursement of 250 million euros to Jordan under the EU macro-financial assistance, which both Cyprus and Greece strongly support (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Lastly, it must be highlighted that Cyprus has tripled its contribution to UNRWA for Jordan, helps the Jordanian National Commission for Women Committee and is involved in multiple projects, which will add momentum to this dynamic cooperative relationship (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

On 28 July 2021, the fourth trilateral summit took place, in Athens, whereby the three parties, acknowledging the disruptive impact of the pandemic on the global economy and the need to mitigate uncertainties, reiterated their determination to promote the existing synergies in all economic sectors and actively encourage new efforts, employing the dynamics of digital transformation of countries to overcome the challenges and difficulties posed by constraints due to COVID-19 (Prime Minister Office, 2021).

In this context, they underscored the need of bringing together global skills, resources and initiatives under an inclusive perspective, thus forging positive ties and linkages among countries in the region (Prime Minister Office, 2021).

In this framework, the three partners stressed, also, the significance of the Permanent Secretariat headquartered, in Nicosia, and its chief- role as a facilitator of cooperation, while being pledged to pursue their collaboration in various fields and sectors, such as, culture, education, trade, food, security, tourism, agriculture, water, environment, healthcare, investment, ICT and energy (Prime Minister Office, 2021).

Furthermore, with respect to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, the engaged parties underlined their support for a just and lasting settlement, on the basis of the two- state solution, in accordance with the international law and the relevant UN resolutions, ensuring the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital (Prime Minister Office, 2021).

A parallel reference was also made to the Cyprus' issue, due to the latest developments in Varosha as well, whereby the three partners reaffirmed their support for a comprehensive, just and viable solution to the Cyprus' problem, in line with the relevant UNSC resolutions and the international law (Prime Minister Office, 2021).

In this context, they called on all countries, in the region, to respect the sovereignty and jurisdiction of each state over its maritime zones, in accordance with the international law, in particular the Law of the Sea (Theodoulou, 2021). Finally, among the topics discussed were the EU–Jordan relationship, terrorism and violent extremism, the refugee crisis, the situation in Libya and in Syria, the role of the Euro- Mediterranean cooperation and that of UfM, cultural heritage, whilst it was underlined that a variety of issues of mutual interest and concern will be further extended, through accelerated, common initiatives (Theodoulou, 2021).

Additionally, it must be highlighted, that the cooperation among Cyprus, Greece and Jordan, was expanded in the defense and security sector, as well. More specifically, the first trilateral meeting among the three partners, at the level of Defense Ministers, was convened, on 1st December 2021, in Nicosia, whereby the involved parties had the opportunity to discuss and exchange views related to the process of establishing and activating the trilateral mechanism on issues of defense and security, as well as, ways of cooperation among the armed forces, at the trilateral level (Cyprus News Agency, 2021).

In this context, Cyprus Defense Minister, Ch. Petrides stressed that the first trilateral meeting among Cyprus, Greece and Jordan, at the level of Defense Ministers, corroborates their long-standing and firm relations, created through their history and efforts for a better and safer future and he expressed his sincere thanks to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the

Jordanian Armed Forces, Major General, Yousef Al-Hnaity, as well as, to the Greek Minister of National Defense, N. Panayiotopoulos, for their presence in Cyprus (Cyprus News Agency, 2021).

Within this context, it must be reminded, as well, that trilateral military exercises are conducted regularly serving as a backbone for the maintenance of East Mediterranean peace and stability. The most characteristic one, is the annual military training exercise code-named Medusa, involving the Egyptian, Greek and Cypriot naval, air and special forces, which in 2020 further expanded to include military forces from the UAE and France. An additional, important exercise is the annual naval drill, code-named Noble Dina, which is conducted between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, involving naval vessels and helicopters that execute search and rescue exercises, as well as, anti-submarine warfare, which has attracted France's security interest. In fact, the trilateral military cooperation mechanisms have been transformed into a 3+1 format, with the participation of partner countries, like the United States and France, which are discerned by a great deal of interest in the regional security developments over the Mediterranean Sea (Dimou, 2021).

Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon

On 10 April 2019, the first trilateral meeting at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, was held in Beirut, whereby the three parties, in a joint statement, acknowledged, inter alia, the importance and value of the tripartite mechanism and reaffirmed their strong commitment to further deepening their cooperation and to identifying synergies in various areas of common interest (Financial Mirror, 2019). They also stressed that this collaboration is based on respect for international law and the aims and principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the United Nations, while pointing out that the tripartite partnership is reliant on a positive agenda and it is not directed against any other country. According to the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, the intention of Cyprus is to turn that promising mechanism into a productive framework of interaction between the three countries and their societies (Cyprus News Agency, 2019).

Furthermore, the decision to establish a Permanent Secretariat, in Nicosia, with the aim of improving the effectiveness and coordination within the tripartite mechanism, and a vision of making the Eastern Mediterranean a region of peace, security and cooperation, was welcomed by all participants and it was announced that the initial priority- areas for cooperation remain tourism, higher education, culture, economy and trade (Cyprus News

Agency, 2019). In addition, the EU-Lebanon relations were also discussed, with an emphasis on its neighborhood policy, and it was made known that an upcoming first trilateral summit between Cyprus, Greece and Lebanon was about to be scheduled (Cyprus News Agency, 2019). Lastly, it must be noted that the three partners signed a joint agreement to establish an Athens –based International Organization of Sports and Tourism (Greek City Times, 2019).

The second trilateral meeting, at the level of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Greece and Lebanon, took place, on 15 April 2021, in Athens. The engaged parties reviewed the progress made in areas of common interest and reaffirmed their determination to further expand their productive cooperation for the benefit of their people and of the entire region. Cyprus and Greece invited Lebanon to participate actively in the Permanent Secretariat, headquartered in Nicosia, acting as a facilitator of their collaboration, while announcing that a trilateral summit will be convened, as soon as the political situation is improved, in Lebanon (Φilenews, 2022).

In addition, the three engaged partners exchanged views on the developments and challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, with an emphasis on Syria and Libya (In.gr, 2022). Lebanon was also encouraged to participate in energy cooperative schemes, based on respect of the international law and UNCLOS. As expected, lastly, the trilateral talks covered issues, such as, the Lebanese crisis, the EU-Lebanon relationship, the pandemic challenges, while a reference was also made to the Cyprus’ problem and to the Turkish factor (Φilenews, 2022).

In conclusion, it must be reminded that, on 6 October 2021, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, after meeting his Lebanese counterpart, Abdullah Bou Habib, in Beirut, in the context of a working visit, he welcomed the formation of a new Lebanese government and reiterated Cyprus’ readiness to develop a trilateral cooperation with Greece, even more (CNN Network, 2020).

Quadrilaterals

Quadrilateral cooperation scheme is considered to be a significant way of strengthening multifaceted bilateral relations, with an emphasis on the defense and economic sector, which is gathering momentum, lately, in the Eastern Mediterranean. This scheme of trust underlines the convergence of the involved countries’ views on a number of complex and difficult issues

and enables them to act together and take initiatives in order to address common challenges and make good use of the vast potential of the Eastern Mediterranean (Zachariadis, 2021). Evidently, the meetings' pattern is part of the regular coordination mechanism between Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and France, under the so –called 3 plus 1 format. Hence, the strategic quadrilateral cooperation is based on common principles, such as respect for the international law, the Law of the Sea, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the prohibition of the use of threat of use of force, as set out in the UN Charter and the respect for the sovereignty and sovereign rights of all states (Zachariadis, 2021). Lastly, it must be highlighted that the quadrilateral cooperation does not have the character of a zero-sum game, nor does it aim to exclude any country (Zachariadis, 2021).

Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, France

The first quadrilateral meeting between Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and France took place, in Cairo, on 8 January 2020, whereby the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the four parties, joined also by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, discussed the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, in light of increased tensions and threats against peace and stability (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). While being pledged to undertake collective action in order to face the new emerging challenges in the wider region, they deemed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between Turkey and President Fayez Srraj of the Presidency Council of Libya, as a violation of the UNSC resolutions and the international law, undermining regional stability. Besides being characterized as null and void, the MoU, which delimits maritime jurisdictions in the Mediterranean Sea and infringes upon the sovereign rights of third states, does not comply also with the Law of the Sea. As expected, the engaged parties underscored the necessity of respecting the sovereignty rights of all states in their maritime zones and condemned the Turkish actions in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and its territorial waters, calling upon Turkey to cease all its illegal exploration activities. In general, this quadrilateral meeting was, to a large extent, devoted to the Libyan crisis, which should be resolved via a comprehensive political solution and not through security memorandum or decisions to send troops to Libya, which constitute a serious violation of the UNSC resolution 2259 and other relevant resolutions, as well as, a threat to regional security (France Diplomacy, 2021). In this context, the stakeholder-countries demanded de-escalation and expressed their concern regarding the Turkish part, which should cooperate, instead, in good will and constructively, according to the international law, contributing to the stability of the region. In addition, the ministers

reiterated their support to the UN initiatives and the Berlin process and they affirmed that priority should be given to security measures and synergies, as well as, to economic development, in conformity with the international law (France Diplomacy, 2021).

Following the first quadrilateral, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and France met again, in Athens, on 19 November 2021, for the second quadrilateral, to reassess the multifaceted challenges, impacting peace, stability and security in the region. In their joint communique, the four parties underlined the strategic nature of their cooperation, which lays the foundations for advanced partnership in multiple fields (Press and Information Office, 2021). Moreover, they reaffirmed their convergence towards security and stability considerations and discussed ways of enhancing their cooperation to achieve common objectives in fields, such as, energy, climate change, pandemic, migration etc. (Press and Information Office, 2021).

Within this context, the four parties also referred to the economic development as being a priority of their joint collaboration, alongside with the security cooperation. In specific, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, stressed the importance of the four countries' active participation in the energy plans, which are under development in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as, their willingness to participate in the effort to shape an alternative energy corridor for Europe (Financial Mirror, 2021). During the quadrilateral meeting, the Cypriot Foreign Minister briefed his counterparts on Turkey's illegal actions both in the fenced-off city of Famagusta and in the Cypriot EEZ, which were characterized as illegal actions, following Turkey's revisionist policy in the region. With respect to the Cyprus' problem, it was underlined the need for the international community to send the right messages for the resumption of negotiations based on the agreed framework (Financial Mirror, 2021).

A special reference was made, also, to the migration issue, which was one of the topics discussed during the quadrilateral meeting, noting that Cyprus is once again the EU member state with the highest number of asylum applications in proportion to its population and yet holds a responsible stance, unlike other countries that instrumentalize human suffering. Finally, the developments in the Middle East, Syria, Lebanon and the Sahel were also examined, as well as, the results of the Paris Conference on Libya, for the organization of which France was congratulated (Financial Mirror, 2021).

Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, France & UAE

Building upon the prior consultations between Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and France, within the framework 3 + 1, the four Ministers of Foreign Affairs, joined by their counterpart from the UAE, convened a tele-meeting, on 11 May 2020, to examine a series of regional issues, with an emphasis on enhancing security cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the evident and continuous provocative actions in the region (France Diplomacy, 2022). The participants denounced the illegal actions (i. e. drilling operations) of Turkey in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and its territorial waters, as breaching the international law and the UNCLOS and also condemned the Turkish violations of the Greek national airspace, while urging Turkey to respect the sovereign rights of the maritime zones of all states in the region. In addition, they condemned collectively the instrumentalization of civilians by Turkey in crossing illegally Greek land borders and sea boundaries (France Diplomacy, 2022).

With regard to Libya –Turkey memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction area in the Mediterranean and the memorandum of understanding on security and military cooperation (MoU), signed in November 2019, the engaged -parties reiterated that they both violate the international law and the UN arms embargo in Libya, while reminding that the first one infringes upon the sovereign rights of third states, does not abide by the Law of the Sea and does not produce any legal consequences for third states (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Focusing on the Libyan crisis, the involved counties condemned the Turkish military interference in Libya and urged Turkey to respect the UN arms embargo, while stopping the influx of foreign Syrian fighters. Ultimately, they all stressed the need for a comprehensive political solution to the Libyan crisis, which highly undermines the stability of the wider region and reaffirmed their support to the Berlin process (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Cyprus, Israel, Greece, UAE

The first joint meeting within this framework between Cyprus, Israel, Greece, and the United Arab Emirates, that was held in Paphos, on 16 April 2021, was of symbolic importance, as it signified a new era for the region, driven by the common vision of the wider Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and Gulf as an area of stability, prosperity and peace. In specific, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, was joined in Paphos by his Greek and Israeli counterparts, N. Dendias, and, G. Ashkenazi, respectively, with, A.

Gargash, filling in for Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan from UAE, who joined on video call (Pitta, 2021).

The Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, explained that this meeting, acting as a factor of stability, exemplifies all parties' commitments to continue fostering a frank dialogue in a new area, which represents a positive and not restrictive narrative of the neighborhood, showcasing an inclusive agenda, promoting cooperation, stability, and prosperity. In addition, N. Christodoulides briefed his counterparts on the latest developments on the Cyprus' problem, adding that a reunified Cyprus must be a functional, viable sovereign state, with no foreign interference and anachronistic systems that have no place in the 21st century (Pitta, 2021).

With regard to energy cooperation, the engaged parties highlighted that unlocking the full energy potential of the region by enhancing the sustainable, efficient, and environmentally conscious developments of natural gas must be a priority (The Arab Weekly, 2022). In this context, the importance of the East Med Gas pipeline and renewable energy was underlined, as well (Greek Times, 2021). Apparently, the meeting was characterized by the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, as a new strategic membership that stretches from the shores of the Arabian Gulf to the Mediterranean and Europe and as the first tangible step towards expanding the positive impact of the Abraham Accords to the Cypriot and Greek partners, while the Emirati participant, underscored that it is a sign of the changing face of the Middle East, following the historic normalization of the ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Among the issues discussed were also the situation in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, civil protection, genetics, molecular medicine, digital innovation, tourism, climate, defense, pandemic and education, while talks covered also economic and political cooperation (Pitta, 2021). Lastly, it was highlighted that the new regional grouping was open to all parties and countries of the region to join, without a direct mention to Turkey (The Arab Weekly, 2022).

4.1. Cyprus' bilateral cooperation dynamics

In the speedily realigned and competitive geopolitical context of the last decade, bilateral relations are of foundational importance to the states aspiring to safeguard their influence and security. In such a constantly transforming international environment, bilateral relations can act as a channel of dialogue, through which tensions, misapprehension and miscommunication can be mitigated more aptly (British Council, 2021).

Apparently, resilient and flexible bilateral relations build trust, among different nations, through the most attractive assets of each state, such as, the arts, science, education, heritage, sports, cuisine etc. and they carry an outstanding value in today's geopolitical landscape of the Greater Eastern Mediterranean (British Council, 2021). In such a context a states' capabilities and the strategic relevance of its location impacts, undeniably, the chief-challenges it confronts, as well as, its overall ambitions (Bendebka, 2020). Hence, Cyprus, as a small state, is more predisposed to pursue regional spheres of influence and within this framework regional cooperation, as previously analyzed, is viewed as a means of protection and a wise decision in order to upgrade a states' power and its regional position in the wider region (Bendebka, 2020). The Greater Eastern Mediterranean requires, more than ever, new initiatives and synergies, in the form of a targeted regional cooperation so as to 'suspend' conflicts and 'fuel' growth and development. It is, therefore, crucial and essential to realize the dynamics of the multiple inter-state linkages and bonds in invigorating regional cooperation, which are reflected - besides the bilateral relations- also in the trilateral and quadrilateral cooperative frameworks, in which Cyprus participates as a productive stakeholder. (Bendebka, 2020)

Saudi Arabia

Given the fact that Cyprus exemplifies, for the Gulf monarchies, the south-eastern gate to the European Union and a viable channel of communication with European institutions, it becomes evident that Riyadh's growing interest in Cyprus, is driven by a combination of geopolitical dimensions, such as, gas, investments, tourism and maritime security (Ardemagni, 2019). With respect to the Cyprus- Gulf relations, it must be reminded that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) paved the way for the Gulf monarchies towards cooperation with the island of Cyprus, lying at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, in the framework of their maritime- oriented foreign policy (Ardemagni, 2019).

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, in general, are interested in Cyprus' pivotal geographical position and they see the island as potential linchpin for trade and investments, as well as, as a highway towards Europe and an interlocutor between the Gulf monarchies and Brussels (Ardemagni, 2019). On the other hand, Cyprus can be benefited from the Gulf - states through their successful strategy on economic diversification and attract investments and know- how in the energy sector (Ardemagni, 2019).

Thus, within this geopolitical environment, in 2018, Saudi Aramco expressed its business interest in the Cypriot EEZ, which was seen, as a stable energy hub, compared with the

wider, turbulent Middle East region (Ardemagni, 2019). More recently, on 19 January 2021, Foreign Minister, N. Christodoulides, met with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, in Riyadh, whereby ways to further strengthen the Cyprus- Saudi ties were examined, in the form of joint cooperative actions in the fields of trade, tourism and entrepreneurship, as well as, in the form of a series of bilateral agreements. In this context, the two parties agreed to undertake an initiative of strong political dialogue and organize the first meeting for political consultations, in Riyadh, in the near future. In addition, they discussed the latest developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and highlighted the necessity for a more inclusive regional cooperation, in accordance with the international law and good neighborly relations. As expected, the EU-Saudi relations were examined as well, with an emphasis on Cyprus' role in fortifying them. The Saudi Minister, on his part, underscored Riyadh's willingness to develop relations with Nicosia, on all fronts, focusing on tourism and investments.

To this end a bilateral Business Forum was agreed to be launched, whilst relevant agreements on double taxation and air services, have been implemented (Ardemagni, 2019). Furthermore, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs also met with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Adel al-Jubeir, with whom he exchanged views on regional and international affairs of common interest. The visit was concluded with a meeting with the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Dr. Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf, during which, the situation in the Gulf region was analyzed, after the signing of the Al-Ula agreement, as well as prospects of common interest and of enhanced cooperation between Cyprus and the Council (Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Moreover, it must be underlined that the Saudi Foreign Minister, during his earlier visit to Nicosia, on 6 August 2020, reaffirmed the Saudi solidarity and support to the legitimacy and sovereignty of Cyprus, indirectly siding with the Cypriot side vis-à-vis Turkey, whose aggressive behavior was, once again, manifested within the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Ardemagni, 2019). Certainly, in the current ecosystem of the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies must overcome their conflicting controversies and align in a common front towards Cyprus' drilling in its EEZ, while natural gas constitutes still a matter of contention between Cyprus and Turkey (Ardemagni, 2019). In any case, the last decade, the diplomatic partnership between Cyprus and the Gulf states was highly intensified, consolidating their bilateral relations, as it is reflected, for example, in the opening of the Emirati embassy, in 2016, in Nicosia, or in the visit of the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, in February 2019, in Muscat, Oman, whereby a memorandum of

understanding (MoU) in higher education and science, was signed. Following a similar pattern, a series of memoranda of understanding for bilateral cooperation were also signed, in 2018, in Kuwait city, between Cyprus and Kuwait, whilst, in April 2019, the celebration of the fifth anniversary of Qatar Airways' direct flights from Larnaca to Doha took place in Nicosia, attended by many high level representatives of the Gulf states (Ardemagni, 2019).

It is worth mentioning, also, that a scientific delegation of Cyprus' research and innovation foundation participated in the International Technology Exhibition, Gitex Technology Week, held in Dubai, UAE between 17 and 21 October 2021, with the aim to attract investments on technology for start-up companies and to create strong synergies in the field (Cyprus News Agency, 2021). Lastly, on 13 February 2022, during the most recent meeting between the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, that took place, in Nicosia, with his Cypriot counterpart, Ioannis Kasoulides, the Saudi Foreign Minister, underscored the excellent relationship, depicted in almost 11 memoranda of understanding (MoU) in various fields and noted the extensive new opportunities that Vision 2030 offers to this constructive partnership. The Cypriot Foreign Minister, on his part, stressed the long- standing bilateral relations, growing incrementally since 1961, were being reviewed and invigorated, in a productive meeting, focusing on how to build further on the already existing momentum (Koniotou, 2022).

Qatar

Over the past years, political and economic relations between the Republic of Cyprus and the State of Qatar have witnessed outstanding development and continue to grow. The initiation of the Cypriot- Qatari relations can be traced back to 2004, when the Cypriot embassy was inaugurated in Doha, for the first time and, in 2007, respectively, when the Qatari embassy was opened in Nicosia. Their bilateral relations developed speedily in various sectors, with an emphasis- as noted earlier- on energy cooperation and constructions. In addition, through the exchange of mutual visits and successive contacts, the Cypriot- Qatari bilateral relations were significantly upgraded. In specific, during the visit of Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, in Cyprus, in 2010, a series of agreements were signed between the two parties, whereas, in 2008, during the visit of Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabor Al-Thani, then Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, again in Cyprus, the bilateral relations of the two countries were further empowered. Since 2014, during which the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, visited Doha, the exchange of contacts and visits among the two stakeholder-countries has been multiplied, whilst their energy cooperation has been intensified, as

corroborated by the visit of a delegation of the Qatar Investment Authority in Cyprus, in 2014, as well as, in 2017, which has, since then, been ‘institutionalized’ in the energy sector.

Within this geopolitical context, it is reminded that Qatar Petroleum and the American Exxon Mobil signed, in 2017, a contract for the exploration of block 10 gas -field, which entered into force the following year (Ardemagni, 2019). More recently, on 10 December 2021, the Cypriot government and the consortium of Qatar Energy and ExxonMobil signed an Exploration and Production-sharing contract, as well as, a hydrocarbon exploration license for block 5, in the consortiums’ second -license in the Cyprus exclusive economic zone (EEZ), following the adjacent block 10 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022). Moreover, on 13 December 2021, at the inauguration of the new building of the Qatari embassy in Nicosia, during the National Day of Qatar, the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, underscored that the enhancement of the relations with Qatar and the Gulf region, constitutes a strategic objective of Cyprus and a core foreign policy priority. At the same time, the participation of Qatar Petroleum in Cyprus’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and in particular, in Block 10, in the consortium with Exxon Mobil, as well as, the recent licensing to the consortium in Block 5, is a testament of the deepening and widening of their partnership and a vote of confidence to Cyprus’ energy strategy (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Cyprus, a devoted proponent of deepening EU-Qatar relations, through this multifaceted cooperation with Qatar, which is expected to flourish to its full potential for the benefit of both countries, according to the President of Cyprus, N. Anastasiades, seeks to attain a core goal of its foreign policy. Within this context, addressing common challenges and coordinating with Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council, is of prior importance for Cyprus, which evaluates this upgraded bilateral partnership highly (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Hence, the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, expressed the Cypriot appreciation to Qatar for its support on the Cyprus’ issue, characterized the inauguration of the new building of the Qatari embassy as a strong symbol of enhanced bilateral relations, while the Qatar ambassador, Ali Yousef Abdulrahman al Mulla, on his part, representing Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, highlighted the desire of the Qatari leadership to further strengthen the friendly and cooperative partnership with Cyprus (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Bahrain

The government of Cyprus considers the further development of the relations with Bahrain particularly important, since it upgrades Cyprus foreign policy's multilateral approach (Koniotou, 2022). In particular, on 13 September 2021, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, N. Anastasiades, met with the King of Bahrain, Hamad bin Isa Khalifa, in the framework of his official visit to Bahrain, whereby both parties examined in detail issues regarding the Eastern Mediterranean region, the Cyprus' problem, bilateral relations related to tourism, commerce, renewable resources, climate emergency, agriculture, transportation, as well as, the EU- Bahrain partnership (Republic of Cyprus, 2021).

In fact, the Cypriot President was accompanied by a large delegation, comprised by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, the Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry, N. Pilides, the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, C. Kadis, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, S. Perdios, as well as, the Government Spokesman, M. Pelekanos (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). In addition, following the talks, a series of memoranda of understanding (MoU) were signed between the two countries, one on the exemption of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports among the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides and Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani, respectively, as well as, a memorandum on economic and technical cooperation among the Cypriot Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry, N. Pilides, and the Minister of Finance and National Economy of Bahrain, Shaikh Salman Bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa.

Thus, it was highlighted that the collaboration will involve the fields of energy, investment, financial services, professional services, as well as, transport, tourism, industry, construction, technology, agriculture, education and scientific research (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). Moreover, a special emphasis was placed on the well-known Cypriot initiative on climate change, as well as, on the reciprocal support and solidarity between the two countries at the international fora. Also, upon the completion of the talks, President, N. Anastasiades, extended an invitation to the King of Bahrain to visit Cyprus (Republic of Cyprus, 2021). Not surprisingly, on 12 October 2021, following the aforementioned official visit, in Manama, the Cypriot cabinet approved of a visa waiver agreement for the holders of diplomatic, special and service passports. The specific agreement, it must be, finally, mentioned, is expected to enter into force for five years and it will be automatically renewed for consecutive periods of five years, unless one state communicates to the other that it wishes to terminate the agreement (Koniotou, 2022).

Cyprus & the Gulf Cooperation Council

It is worth mentioning, also, that Cyprus and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are a step closer to signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU), aiming to further enhance their relations. During the third meeting between the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides and the GCC Secretary General, Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf, that was held, on 27 October 2021, in Nicosia, it was announced that the two parties are at the final stages of concluding a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will encapsulate the context for a structure cooperation in thematic working groups, tasked with formulating a roadmap of joint priorities (Republic of Cyprus, 2022).

In statements following the meeting, N. Christodoulides, characterized the visit of Al Hajraf, as a reflection of their joint political will and commitment- evident also in Cyprus' extensive diplomatic network in the Gulf region- to further enhance their strong ties and relations in concrete ways, for the benefit of the peoples, the countries and of the region, as a whole (Republic of Cyprus, 2022). It was reaffirmed, also, that Cyprus, as an EU's Member State, is closest to the Middle East and the Gulf and enjoys excellent relations with all countries of the wider region which, constitutes part of the EU's South Neighborhood. In addition, Cyprus works towards promoting enhanced engagement and cooperation, on the basis of shared interests and a positive agenda, without exclusions, which constitutes a core pillar of its foreign policy (Republic of Cyprus, 2022).

On his part, Al-Hajraf, reiterated that Cyprus and the GCC have enjoyed a trusted relation that was built on mutual interest, mutual respect and mutual understanding on what is going on around the region, while praising Cyprus' crucial role in maintaining stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as, the GCC's role in ensuring security in the Gulf region. Concluding, the GCC Secretary General highlighted the importance of 'keeping the momentum' and reconfirmed that both parties are committed to taking the relation further, capitalizing on the opportunities that need to be seized (Republic of Cyprus, 2022).

India

Cyprus, promoting itself as a regional hub for research and innovation, is interested in intensifying its ties with India, by strengthening the visibility of its domestic research and

development ecosystem. India, on its part, has ambitions of widening its footprint in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, through enhancing its partnership-schemes with various actors of the wider region (Chouldhury, 2022). In general, Indo-Cypriot relationship is characterized as strong, strategic and indispensable, both historically and traditionally, and it is based on the international law and the relevant rules of the international system. Cyprus supports the enhancement of the EU-India partnership as a reliable interlocutor, since both pillars are of great geostrategic importance for the island (Sibal, 2022).

Without a doubt, Cyprus is for India synonymous to a 'gateway' for Europe and the EU and their intensified business relation is gathering momentum (Sibal, 2022). Within such a context, on 21 October 2021, during the 9th Cyprus-India Intergovernmental Meeting on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Industrial Cooperation, which was held in Nicosia, the two partners reaffirmed their determination to further enrich and deepen their bilateral cooperation in various, new areas, such as, energy, renewables, innovation, and research.

The specific meeting aimed, at the outset, at reinforcing their bilateral ties in traditional fields of cooperation, such as, trade, economy, environment and tourism. Clearly, the outcome of the meeting corroborated the existence of favorable conditions for the increase of trade transactions and the strengthening of cooperation, especially in the investment and tourism sectors. It must be mentioned, also, that, according to the press, Cyprus and Greece are expected to become inter-connected with India, with the help of the construction of a new, international transport corridor, crossing some Western Asian states. This ambitious, future project will include the participation of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel and it is viewed as a joint effort to interlink the Mediterranean region with India, through the Gulf-states, in the midst of the Turkish threats (National Post, 2022).

Furthermore, it must be reminded that the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Christodoulides, on 22 September 2021, met in New York, with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, with whom they exchanged views on regional and international issues, such as, the latest developments in Afghanistan and their impact on neighboring countries and the wider region, as well as, the evolutions concerning the strategic alliance between Australia, USA, UK (AUKUS). Additional ways of reinforcing Cyprus-India economic relations, India's participation in regional co-operation schemes in the wider Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and Gulf region, as well as issues related to strengthening EU cooperation with India, were co-examined. Ultimately, the Minister of

Foreign Affairs of Cyprus thanked his counterpart for the unwavering support of India on the Cyprus' problem.

China

Cyprus and China are partners of mutual respect and win-win cooperation, which support each other on issues concerning their major interests and concerns (Xinhua, 2022). They are committed to maintain mutual trust and friendship, safeguarding the basic norms of the international system, while injecting new impetus into mutually beneficial cooperation, through the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), as well as, a firm EU-China relation (Xinhua, 2022).

Both countries are strong advocates of peace, development, equity, justice and freedom and they have built their relationship on shared values. On the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations, they issued a joint statement, after both Presidents had agreed previously, to upgrade their relations to a Strategic Partnership, paving the way for a more constructive cooperation in the political, social and economic sphere (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021).

In specific, in the eve of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Cyprus, the President of China, Xi Jinping, and the President of Cyprus, N. Anastasiades, during their telephone conversation, they both stressed the positive momentum of the development of China-Cyprus relations, while exchanging in- depth views on regional and international issues of common interest (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). They, also, acknowledged the significant progress, which has been made in their multifaceted cooperation in various fields and in their partnership in multilateral affairs, over the past 50 years (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). In this context, the two Presidents agreed to elevate their relations to a Strategic Partnership, signifying mutual respect of each other's choice on the development path, as well as, domestic and foreign policies, based on their own national conditions (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). They both reiterated that China and Cyprus should continue demonstrating mutual support for the issues, bearing on each other's core interests and major concerns (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades,

2021). From the one hand, Cyprus highlighted its steadfast abidance to the One-China Principle and China, on the other hand, was pledged being supportive of the Cypriot efforts, aiming to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity, through a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Cyprus' issue, under the framework of the relevant United Nations Resolutions and international law (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021).

As expected, they underscored, also, the significance of the respect of the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights of all states, in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Charter and the UNCLOS (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). By implementing effectively the existing bilateral mechanisms, (i. e. diplomatic consultation, Joint Economic Committee, Joint Scientific and Technological Committee etc.) as 'facilitators' of their bilateral cooperation in various fields, the two parties agreed to enhance high-level exchanges of views on regional and international affairs (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). Moreover, both sides reaffirmed the continuation of the Belt and Road cooperation, under the framework of the earlier signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) by reinforcing their economic, trade and investment partnership and fostering an optimum business environment, encouraging openness, justice, fairness and non-discrimination (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). A special reference was made to their mutual determination to promote market access to high-quality food and agricultural products and implement innovative business platforms (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). In addition, positive progress of bilateral cooperation was registered in sectors, such as, culture, education, tourism, health, sports and youth, despite the pandemic, while views were exchanged, also, on ways of boosting educational and cultural cooperation, through students exchanges, regular flight connections, the establishment of a Cultural Center of China in Cyprus etc. (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021). Among the issues discussed, were also the cities' cooperation (i. e. sister cities, including Fuzhou and Nicosia, Guangzhou, Weinan and Limassol, Xian and Paphos, Ningbo and Larnaca), judicial and law enforcement aspects (i. e. bilateral/ multilateral agreements on extradition and judicial assistance), solidarity within the international, multilateral fora in various agendas (i. e. UN etc.), as well as, the enhancement

of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021).

In view of the aforementioned, it becomes apparent that Cyprus, as a member state of the EU and an important country in the Eastern Mediterranean region, is a firm believer that EU and China should promote dialogue and partnership, on the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit and win-win results. Hence it acts as a trustworthy interlocutor between them, aiming to establish 'win-win' cooperation. (Cyprus News Agency, China supports Cyprus solution based on UN resolutions, Xi Jinping tells Anastasiades, 2021).

Following the upgrade of the Chinese-Cypriot relations, China's non-negotiable support to the Republic of Cyprus' independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty was reaffirmed, on 4 December 2021, during consultations between delegations of the two countries, presided over by the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades and Chinese member of the Political Bureau of the CCP, Yang Jiechi, who visited Cyprus.

In specific, China expressed openly its support to the main principles of the solution of the Cyprus' problem, as defined in UN Security Council resolutions. In this context, the Cypriot President praised China's interest in Cyprus, (i. e. as reflected, also, in the informal 5+1 meeting on the Cyprus issue, that was held in the past, in Geneva), expressed appreciation for China's fair stance on this issue and hoped that China would continue to hold such a stance, given the fact that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Beijing defends positions of principle, as they are established by the international law (China Daily, 2022). Additional strengthening of the bilateral partnership between the two countries and deepening of their ties were also examined, with a focus on fields like investments, tourism, agriculture, environment and transport, which demonstrate joint- strategic characteristics. Ultimately, it must be underscored that regional and international developments of mutual interest to both countries were also analyzed (Press and Information Office, 2021).

4.2. The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) platform as a new energy, security & political coalition

EMGF's profile & objectives

A new framework for regional strategic cooperation unfold, in 2019, when Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority accorded to institutionalize regional energy cooperation and set up the Eastern Mediterranean Forum (EMGF), a multinational platform aiming to shape a regional gas market, to certify the security of supply and demand

and to formulate a resource-development mechanism in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean (Mitchel, 2020).

The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) is a multilateral institution, externalized as a regional platform of dialogue between governments and as an interstate avenue of communication within the energy industry. (moderndiplomacy.eu, 2022) More specifically, the Ministers of Energy of the aforementioned seven governments conducted a meeting, on 14-January 2019, in Cairo, to create this new body, acting as an umbrella for cooperation and dialogue on gas-resources- related issues.

In fact, the final stride for the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) formulation, was actualized by the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah El Sisi, (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021), who ratified its founding charter, as per the official statute-signing, (enterprise.press, 2022) and came into force as a regional intergovernmental organization, officially, on the 1st of March of 2021, (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021b), after its founding members signed the charter, on 23 September 2020. From 14 January 2019 until 25 November 2021, six ministerial meetings transpired, (EMFG, 2021), whilst, on 25 November 2021, Osama Mobarez, Undersecretary of the Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, was unanimously elected as acting Secretary General of the EMGF-Secretariat. It is reminded, also, that Cyprus assumed the presidency of the EMGF, on 1st January 2022, taking over from Tarek El Molla, the Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Nicolaou, 2021).

Apparently, the roots of the EMGF can be traced back to the first trilateral summit between Cyprus, Egypt and Greece, which was held, on 8 November 2014, in Cairo, marking a new era of cooperation. It comes as no surprise that the initial idea for the establishment of this new intergovernmental organization was made known, on 10 October 2018, during the sixth trilateral summit between Cyprus, Egypt and Greece, which was convened in Crete (EMFG, 2021). Certainly, the chief drivers that motivated these states to embark on this common-undertaking are interconnected with the regional energy- resources. The discovery of vast gas- findings in the region, which led to the re-consideration of the term energy security, contrived a new type of energy interdependence, and accordingly triggered a shift of the geopolitical strategy of the involved actors (Varol, 2020).

In other words, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel and Greece, which had launched earlier the so called ‘energy triangles’, in the form of the trilateral cooperative schemes, as well as, all the other members of this platform, entered into this new initiative, which constitutes a paramount

evolution in both regional and global politics, in order to become more energy secure (Varol, 2020).

The Forum, which has been spearheaded and led by Egypt and has been conceptualized as part of an attempt to reconstruct the Eastern Mediterranean into a principal energy hub, focuses on enhancing collaboration policies and strategies in the energy sector, technical and commercial exchange, infrastructure development and financing facilitation for project exploration (Wardandy & Magdy, 2021). Within this context, its founding members are also tasked with exchanging information and seismic data on potential gas findings in areas, which extend across maritime zones (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021). During the first ministerial meeting of the EMGF (14 January 2019), it was clarified that the new organization, headquartered in Cairo, aims –besides shaping a new regional gas market-at optimizing resource development, rationalizing the cost of infrastructure, providing competitive prices, and improving trade relations, among other goals (EMFG, 2019).

Hence, in a joint press release, the Ministers guided their senior officials to commence systematic talks on the EMGF structure with a view to according on the details drafted in the recommendations (i.e. main objectives of the EMGF etc.), while underscoring that the stakeholders could deepen their partnership through additional cooperative synergies (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019). Ultimately, the potential of energy as ‘a tool of cooperation’ for the wider region was frequently being emphasized, indicating new economic and diplomatic opportunities and mutual gains for all the involved partners (Weiss, 2019).

On 22 September 2020, during the signing- ceremony of the statute of the EMGF, it was stressed that the Forum aims to function as a platform, interlinking gas producers, consumers, and transit countries so as to formulate a shared vision and establish a systematic policy of dialogue on natural gas. This, in the long run, will lead to a sustainable regional gas market and unleash the resource potential of the region for the welfare of its people (EMFG, 2020). By respecting the rights of its members over their natural resources and in accordance with the international law, the Forum reinforces the joint -efforts to monetize their reserves and make operational the related infrastructure through an interactive cooperation with the gas industry and other stakeholders, including investors, traders and financing entities (EMFG, 2020). Unsurprisingly, the EMGF is seen as a facilitator of regional stability and prosperity, promoting interstates’ relationships (EMFG, 2020).

In addition, the EMGF will be subjected to monitoring by international and regional organizations and it will support producing countries by enhancing their cooperation with consuming and transitory parties in the region, taking advantage of the existing infrastructure and developing further infrastructure alternatives to accommodate current and future discoveries (Farouk, 2019). It will also enable consuming countries by securing their needs and allowing their participation with the transitory countries in the development of gas policies in the region, thus enabling the establishment of a sustainable partnership between the actors, at all stages of the gas- industry (Farouk, 2019).

As expected, private and public sector companies have also become members of the relevant advisory committee, such as, international or national oil companies, or any enterprise dealing with natural gas production and selling process (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021). To this end, alongside with the High level working group, which streamlines the objectives of the Forum, the parallel function of the Gas industry advisory committee (GIAC), a platform of dialogue among governments and the corporate world, is indicative, also, of the entrepreneurial dynamics deployed around the EMGF (EMFG, 2020).

Furthermore, it must be highlighted that any country of the Eastern Mediterranean is permitted to participate, if, it embraces the common objectives, whereas the founding members should either produce or consume natural gas (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021). Within this context, encouraged by the U. S. administration that viewed energy development as a ‘vehicle’ for strengthening ties between its allies (Mitchel, 2020), the Forum is backed up not only by the US, which adds prestige to the organization, but also by the EU and the World Bank, which all have an observer status, whilst France, also, joined the organization (Enterprise Ventures LLC, 2021).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that, on 16 February 2022, EMGF Secretary General, Osama Mobarez, announced the phase two of the strategy of the EMFG, through a strategic roadmap and a best-practice functional- model, incorporating the EMGF’s overall vision (Zawya, 2022). Alongside with the strategic objectives of the EMFG within the natural- gas value chain and the facilitators (i. e. energy transition, advocacy, private sector involvement, data sharing etc.), the forum- apprehending the importance of the natural gas in the energy transition-is pledged to extend its’ collaboration beyond the energy sector, in additional fields, notwithstanding its foundational role, as a peace enabler and an engine for economic growth in the wider Eastern Mediterranean (Zawya, 2022).

EMGF's significance

Considering the above, it becomes clear that an Eastern Mediterranean energy community is emerging. However, it is still premature to say whether this intergovernmental organization will be converted into a political-economic union, even though the European Coal and Steel Community, in 1950, an energy security alliance, paved the way for the establishment of the European Economic Community (Ben-Ami, 2021). Within such a context, it is evident that energy security and energy interdependence of the engaged states are related highly to the formulation of the EMGF. Energy security, defined, in brief, as accessibility, availability and sustainability of resources, refers to states possessing sufficient energy resources for domestic and military needs and it deals- in its long-term aspect- with investments to supply energy, in accordance with the relevant economic development (Varol, 2020).

Among the forty-five different definitions of energy security, the one referring to the balance of economic, national security and environmental concerns must also be mentioned, as well as the definition denoting that energy security is an integral part of states' national security yet vulnerable to global geopolitical developments. Be that as it may, nowadays, energy security has acquired a competitive and disruptive dimension and is susceptible to regional alliances rather than global partnerships (Varol, 2020). Undoubtedly, diplomacy and power are tools of energy security, whereas geopolitical evolutions shape each state's energy strategy. With respect to the complimentary concept of the energy interdependence, it must be highlighted that it entered the scene after the agreements on energy projects signed among Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, and Greece (Varol, 2020).

In fact, the term refers to a mutual dependence and situations characterized by reciprocal affects among states or among actors within states and it focuses on the joint gains or losses due to the asymmetrical or symmetrical nature of the concept (Varol, 2020). Even though, the stimulus for their joint partnership was, initially, energy cooperation, the members of the EMGF share additional common geostrategic perceptions beyond energy-related issues, such as, security considerations, cooperative relations in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, human/civic interaction among the states in the region, as well as, a collective usage of a shared regional space (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019).

As previously discussed, the EMGF depicts, likewise, the common perceptions on security considerations of the involved states, within the range of the Eastern Mediterranean region, which becomes 'a shared orientation' due to the flexible alliances, based on economic,

energy and security interests, the redefinition of the Eastern Mediterranean according to geo-economic and not only geo-political interests, as well as, the new emerging Mediterranean identity, encompassing a shared regional cooperative modus- operandi (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019). In this new regional coalition, the participating states have focused on their strategic interests and the potential linkages, putting their disagreements aside.

However, the EMGF may accelerate broader cooperation but also generate regional instability (Varol, 2020). Undeniably, the EMGF faces two main challenges: the Turkish assertiveness in the region, as well as the Israeli- Palestine conflict. In any case, the exclusion of players from the Forum, who are un-productive towards developing closer ties with the founding -members of the EMGF, demonstrates the existing limitations of cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019). Hence, the establishment of the EMGF has been criticized by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, as well as, by trade unions in Jordan, that are not in favor of the normalization process with Israel (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019).

Key actors & their prospects

It is understandable that each state has its own reasons for participating in the Forum. For Egypt, aspiring to become an energy- hub in the region, EMGF is seen as an opportunity to further upgrade its leading position in regional and international matters (i. e. Forum headquartered in Cairo) and cope with its domestic economic crisis (Varol, 2020).

Israel, via the EMGF platform, wants to achieve a wider level of strategic depth in the wider region, already realized, in a certain degree, through its collaboration with Greece, whereby, the latter offers access to its airspace to the Israeli air-forces for training in exchange of Israeli gas or through the multinational military exercises, hosted by Greece, as the one, that took place, on 21 April 2021, with the participation of the Israeli and the Emirati aircraft (Ben-Ami, 2021). For Israel, development of cooperative relations in the Eastern Mediterranean is part of the so- called peripheral alliance, which was configured to surmount Israel's regional isolation. (Varol, 2020)

Cyprus and Greece, on their part, have incentives to expand their engagement with the members of the Forum and seek central roles in the region, ‘capitalizing’ their membership in the European Union as ‘interlocutors’ among the Arab states and the EU (Varol, 2020).

Non- participants

Even though, the EMGF is open to other countries, Lebanon, Turkey or Syria do not participate, predominantly due to disputes surrounding gas-fields (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019). Apart from the gas findings, the Forum emanates from Turkey’s incremental assertiveness in the Mediterranean and the concern this arouses in the entire region, whilst being viewed, simultaneously, as a response of the engaged- players to Egypt’s intent to become a regional energy hub, due to its gas liquefaction facilities (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019).

On the one hand, Turkey has been interlocked in maritime conflicts with Cyprus and Greece and has claims to energy reserves in ‘disputed’ waters (Ben-Ami, 2021), while being ‘trapped’ in declining relations with Israel (i.e. Mavi Marmara incident), situation, which is lately being reversed. On the other hand, Lebanon is absent from the Forum since it does not hold any official diplomatic relations with Israel, despite its interest in settling existing maritime border issues with its neighbor and proceed with its exploration plans (Weiss, 2019).

The case of Turkey

Focusing on Turkey, it is noteworthy to mention that it has adopted, by and large, patterns of inter-state enmity in the regionalization process towards the formation of the EMGF and still continues its unilateral responses, such as, legal and military actions to secure its maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean (İpek & Gur, 2020).

Without a doubt, with actions, such as the signing of the accord between Turkey and Libya’s internationally recognized government, led by Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, in 2019, Turkey showed that it was partly seeking to ensure that no EMGF project in the area could exclude it, as an actor (Ben-Ami, 2021). In a broader sense, Libya, a theater of ideological confrontation among various international and regional actors, is the place where Turkey applies, also, its regional strategy that is as much about energy as geopolitics (Ben-Ami, 2021).

Moreover, Turkey's plans to conduct large -scale naval drillings in the Aegean, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, especially, since March 2019, can be interpreted as an additional answer to the establishment of EMGF (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019).

Consequently, against the backdrop of the EMGF construction, Turkey and North Cyprus (TRNC) find themselves totally isolated from the 'energy equation' (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). It is reminded that the EMGF was inaugurated at a critical time, among significant gas discoveries in the region. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the group of seven founding members of this body has been in various levels of conflict with Turkey (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). In addition, it is worth mentioning that Turkey, after 2016, applied a more assertive foreign policy by launching the so-called gunboat diplomacy, assisted by internal high technology defense platforms (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). Certainly, post-2016 period endorsed a shift in Turkey's foreign policy -discourse regarding the Eastern Mediterranean and the EMGF countries' balancing strategies against Turkey (Gur, 2020).

Despite the reassurances reflected in the press release of the first EMGF Ministerial meeting, that the Forum is not formed against any other country and that it is open to additional memberships, (EMFG. 2019), from the Turkish standpoint, it represents, undoubtedly, not only an economic alliance, regulating the regional gas market but also a platform aiming to systematize regional political, diplomatic and military cooperation, in order to get across direct messages to Turkey (Cubukcuoglu, 2020).

Interpretation of the Turkish 'isolation'

Furthermore, it must be highlighted that the 'isolation' of Turkey from the EMGF is attributed, by many scholars, predominantly to the constructivism theoretical perspective on regionalism and less to the realistic application of balance of power theory to regional level, whereby regional subsystems are considered to be an extension of the wider international system, which is determined by anarchy and security considerations (Gur, 2020). According to the constructivist theory, though, the role of social mechanisms, such as normative power, cognitive priors, common ideas, similar political mentality etc. are viewed as facilitators of regional order or cooperation (Gur, 2020). This theory is applicable to the construction of the EMGF, through the regionalization process, since ideas concerning Turkey have been institutionalized via the so -called cognitive priors about Turkey and its political leadership as an answer to exogenous norms and conditions (Gur, 2020).

Despite the emphasis given to realism-liberalism approach on energy geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean, underlying the economic factors in energy-related issues, as well as, the security concerns (i.e. changing balance of power/threat dynamics, reduced US presence in the region etc.), the significance of ideational factors is of equal importance and constitutes a persuasive elucidation for the establishment of the EMGF (Gur, 2020). Within the context of the constructivism perspective, the Turkish isolation is ascribed to its conflictual, non-cooperative policy discourse, after 2016, to its state-centric approach determining the Turkish state's preferences, which disregarded the multinational companies' (MNCs) preferences on foreign energy policy, as well as, to the specific political options of AKP, emphasizing on political Islam (Gur, 2020). In view of the aforementioned, it becomes evident that Turkey should redefine its cognitive priors through new ideas, multilateralism and effective diplomatic moves in order to stop its unilateral actions and contribute to maritime jurisdictions disputes' resolution in the region, in accordance with the international law and the UNCLOS (Gur, 2020).

Future Challenges for Turkey

Within this geopolitical context, it is decisive for Ankara to alter its negotiation geometry with its neighbors and consign the complex, multipartite nature of the EEZ dispute (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). Turkey should try to approach all stakeholders and become more cooperative and productive to capitalize on a legitimate, multilateral framework for security in the Eastern Mediterranean, instead of being isolated or marked as a spoiler (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). Accordingly, Turkey should reshape its foreign policy and apply a value-creating strategy with chief-coastal states in the neighborhood and not be left out of the regional cooperation (Cubukcuoglu, 2020). Energy security challenges, in other words, can be directed through an ongoing political engagement among combatant parties in order to resolve fundamental differences over conflicting claims of maritime delimitation or of multilateral maritime security governance in the region (Cubukcuoglu, 2020).

Nonetheless, the exclusion of regional actors, such as Turkey or Lebanon, from the EMGF might limit the Forum's collective action, whilst its narrow scope of cooperation, focusing on natural gas, might restrict the Forum's outreach. In addition, signs of unilateral and non-coordinated state responses (i.e. drillings, naval arms races, legal and military actions in EEZs etc.) are indicative of protracted conflicts and of challenging prospects for future institutionalized regional cooperation (İpek & Gur, 2020). Ultimately, it must be underscored that foreign policy is being shaped not only based on future outcomes but also by taking

cognitive priors and existing norms into consideration, which have impacted highly, as already seen, the relationship between Turkey and the members of the EMGF (İpek & Gur, 2020)

5. Cyprus' participation in major, regional energy projects: The East Med pipeline project: viability, barriers & challenges

The East- Med pipeline development background

The origins of the East Med Pipeline date back to the onset of this century and the gradual discovery of numerous vast gas reserves in the East Mediterranean. It was first conceived, during the time that the Arab Spring was emerging. Upon discovery of the Leviathan gas field, in 2010, and the subsequent confirmation, in 2012, that it was recoverable from a technical point of view, consolidated plans for the construction of a pipeline were outlined (Van Pallandt, 2020).

Israel, the prime mover towards energy development in the region, besides being the first country, which discovered substantial gas findings, was also the motivating force in the economic and political game for its monetization (i. e. export routes, infrastructure projects etc.) (Tsiplacos, 2019a; Tsiplacos, 2019b). In fact, the Israeli Minister of Energy, Yuval Steinitz, is regarded as the proposer of the idea and promoter of the undertaking (Barkat, 2019). In the succeeding years, the Israeli, Cypriot and Greek energy ministers institutionalized joint task forces to evaluate the feasibility of the so -called East -Med pipeline project to deliver gas from Israel and Cyprus to the European markets, through Greece and a joint Israeli-Cypriot LNG plant near Vassilikos, on the southern coast of the island. The East Med pipeline received approval from the Cypriot, Greek, and Italian Governments, in 2015, and falls, since then, within the second PCI list of the European Commission, pertaining to the Southern Gas Corridor projects (Ministry of Economic Development, 2016).

As seen, in the previous chapter, the embryonic planning of the East- Med pipeline commenced during the first trilateral summit between Israel, Greece and Cyprus that took place, in Nicosia, on 28 January 2016 (Tsiplacos, 2019b). In June 2017, Italy became a partner to the joint venture as well, and a working group for the supervision of the project was set up. As discussed in chapter 4, in 2017, the Ministers of Energy of Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a joint declaration to confirm their support for the development of the project. Part of the groundwork for the East-Med pipeline, though, was undertaken, during the fifth (Hellenic Republic, 2018). and the sixth trilateral summit, (Jerusalem, 20 March 2019) between Israel, Greece, Cyprus, actively backed up by the US, whereby US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, expressed the American support for the trilateral

mechanism, established by Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, underscoring the importance of the enhanced cooperation in the energy sector (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece, 2019).

In their joint press statement, all four leaders were positioned optimistically towards the prospects correlated with the East-Med pipeline and highlighted that energy security partnership remains a core- constituent of the trilateral relationship (Mitchell, 2019). In between the two trilateral summits, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between IGI Poseidon and Israel Natural Gas Lines (INGL) was signed, in November 2019, followed by another MoU with TMNG, a subsidiary of Israeli oil and gas engineering company, Tahal Group, in December 2019 (NS Energy, 2021).

In addition, significant regional developments have eventuated, since 14 January 2019, when Cypriot, Egyptian, Greek, Israeli, Italian, Jordanian and Palestinian Ministers of Energy met, in Cairo, with the intention of establishing the Eastern Med Gas Forum (EMGF), a platform for regional energy cooperation, previously analyzed (Winter & Lindersrauss, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the construction of the East-Med pipeline, which has been in planning for several years, supported by the US, as reflected also in the words of the US Energy Secretary, Dan Brouillette, was seen as ‘a multiplier’ of even closer cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, which would evolve into a true economic and political alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean, reinforcing the security and stability of the entire region (Ellis, 2020). Furthermore, it must be stressed that the adoption of the East Med Act, even by inter-party consensus, confirmed the United States’ interest in security and energy matters of the region and it exemplified the geostrategic importance of the East- Med pipeline, having an outstanding collective benefit, not only for the involved countries but also for the entire region.

In specific, the ‘Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act’ of the 9th April 2019 (Senate Bill 1102), approved by the US Senate and Congress, recognizes new realities in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, introduces energy cooperation as a means to de-escalate tension and conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean and paves the way for sizeable investment opportunities and activities, re-shaping the global energy map. (Greek City Times, 2019). In fact, it involves US and its three chief-regional partners, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, which are committed to further develop the exploration of significant hydrocarbon resources in their territorial waters. The legislation, which reshapes the US strategy in the region, would enable the U. S. to utterly support the trilateral partnership of Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, through

energy and defense cooperation initiatives and would deepen the joint efforts to promote peace, security, and prosperity (American Hellenic Council of California, 2019).

In particular, the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act is a historic transformational development, which positions Greece, Cyprus and Israel on the front line of American policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and transfigures the Greece-Cyprus-Israel trilateral into a true 3+1, with the United States on the security front. Moreover, it ends the prohibition on arms- sales to the Republic of Cyprus and foresees the establishment of a United States-Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center to facilitate energy cooperation among the US, Israel, Greece and Cyprus, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance for Greece, as well as, enhanced International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance not only for Greece but also for Cyprus (Ekathimerini, 2022).

The act lays out an institutional framework for significant developments in the region, it represents a shift of the US strategy, and it institutionalizes important trends and partnerships with Greece, Cyprus and Israel, as well as, with several Arab countries, including Egypt and Jorda (Sokou, 2019). The East- Med Act, however, it is not constructed upon an anti-Turkish policy- since there is room, also, for Turkey if it behaves as a constructive actor - but is based on a new US policy in the region that deepens cooperation with reliable and democratic allies. On 7 August 2019, at the first ministerial energy summit, in Athens, the energy ministers of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel -Kostas Hatzidakis, Georgios Lakkotrypīs, and Yuval Steinitz, as well as, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources, Frank Fannon, reaffirmed their support to the utilization of the East- Med pipeline, as a project that offers a strategic link between Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean (Tsiplacos, 2019b).

Apparently, 2020 commenced with a milestone, carrying an undeniable geo-political significance (Van Pallandt, 2020). After many years of reflection, on 2 January 2020, during the seventh trilateral summit , that was held in Athens, the Israeli Prime Minister, B. Netanyahu, the Greek Prime Minister, K. Mitsotakis, and the Cypriot Prime Minister, N. Anastasiades, signed the agreement, which anchored their commitment to establish the strategic East-Med gas pipeline, lasting about 2000 km (of which about 550 km onshore and about 1550 km marine), that will allow the transfer of natural gas discovered in the EEZ of Israel and Cyprus to Europe and connect the Eastern Mediterranean basin to one export system (Israel Ministry of Energy, 2020). This inter-governmental agreement, signed by the Israeli Energy Minister, Yuval Steinitz, the Greek Environment and Energy Minister, Konstantinos Hatzidakis and the Cypriot Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism Minister,

Georgios Lakkotrypis, was in accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MoU) of 2017 and the relevant preliminary feasibility study. The project is viewed as the pinnacle of the new geopolitical partnership between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, ending Cyprus's energy isolation and it is also in line with the European Union's strategic energy goals, as it facilitates a new gas supply corridor and contributes to EU Member States' energy security through diversification of sources and routes. More specifically, the original capacity of the pipeline is 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually (Horn & Fang, 2022) with the potential to double it in the future, while the budget of approximately 6\$ billion, it is expected to satisfy about 10% of the EU's energy needs (Paphitis & Hadjicostis, 2020). It must be noted, also, that the Italian absence from the East-Med contract signing, in Athens, viewed as a 'setback', was attributed to conflicting opinions within the Italian government, yet Rome is expected to sign the agreement at a later stage (Deutsche Welle, 2022). To this end, in this joint effort, the engaged countries invited openly any other country interested- apart from Italy and Egypt- to participate and strengthen the alliance (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Evidently, the geopolitical transformation of the wider area, which has led to the strategic alignment of Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, renders the East Med pipeline, a project of utmost significance for these states and for regional stability. The East-Med, in one hand, constitutes the qualitative catalyst in the strengthening of the allied relationship between Greece-Cyprus-Israel in the long-term and on the other hand, it is expected to play a notable role in the delivery of the energy mixture and the empowerment of EU's energy security, while the development of the alliance between Athens, Nicosia and Jerusalem consists *inter alia* -geostrategic counterweight for the Turkish revisionism in the entire region (Mazis & Sotiropoulos, 2016).

Thus, East Med Pipeline project is expected to play a fundamental role in deepening the tripartite collaboration and enhancing the region's global status in terms of energy geopolitics (Makousis, 2018). Undeniably, the energy geopolitical factor is the qualitative dynamic catalyst in this tripartite allied relationship fueling the construction of the East Med project, contributing to the energy mix and supply diversification goals of the EU, while being a geostrategic counterpoise to the Turkish revisionism (Makousis, 2018).

Certainly, the significance of the East- Med pipeline project as an 'energy- catalyst' for economic, political, and environmental benefits, it is not restricted only in the enhancement of the regional and geostrategic role of Cyprus and Greece in the Mediterranean. It also reinforces the multilevel cooperation with Israel and interconnects the Eastern Mediterranean

with Europe. Furthermore, it constitutes a security guarantee in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean, which has been overloaded with conflicts, deadlocks, and rearrangements. In addition, its implementation will make an essential contribution to the security of the EU's energy supply, which supports East-Med as a PCI project, having subsidized its final study up to 50%. Given the EU's Green deal agenda for the energy transition, it becomes clear that the East-Med project will offer undisturbed access to cheap natural gas, a bridge fuel, and it is expected to restructure the energy landscape. Moreover, the project is not viewed only as a pipeline for energy and economic progress but predominantly as a pipeline for peace and cooperation, that respects international law and 'cements' international legitimacy. Consequently, the East-Med pipeline is a link for cooperation between nations and does not constitute a point of friction or a threat to anyone but as a strategic project of geopolitical value, is open to any state, which abides by the international law and the rules of good neighborliness (Prime Minister Office, 2020). In this context, at the end of the year 2020, the US reiterated its previously expressed support towards the East-Med project, by compressing sanctions, at the outset of 2021, to block Nord Stream II, as well as, to Turk-Stream (Szymczak, 2021).

On 8 March 2021, an addendum to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) of 2019 that was outlining working groups'- related aspects was signed, in Israel, between GI Poseidon S. A. and the Israel Natural Gas Lines Company in favor of a coordinated development path of the East-Med Pipeline, interconnecting the Israeli transmission facilities with Italy and Europe, via Cyprus (Enerdata, 2021). The East-Med Pipeline, in other words, it is expected to finish off the existing infrastructures in the East Mediterranean Sea, carrying into effect a beneficial, long-term 'backbone line' of the wider area, in the frame of post Covid-19 era. Undoubtedly, the project will exemplify an enabler for viable, future energy Mediterranean sources, among all interested markets, taking into consideration the hydrogen technologies, as well (Enerdata, 2021). Lastly, it must be reminded that, on 12 July 2021, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel ordered jointly the research vessel 'Nautical Geo' to conduct seismic surveys within their respective EEZs', as part of the groundwork for the East-Med gas pipeline project and in response to the Turkish announcement of undertaking surveys between the Asia Minor coast and the TRNC, as well as, in the south of Crete (Maritime Executive, 2021).

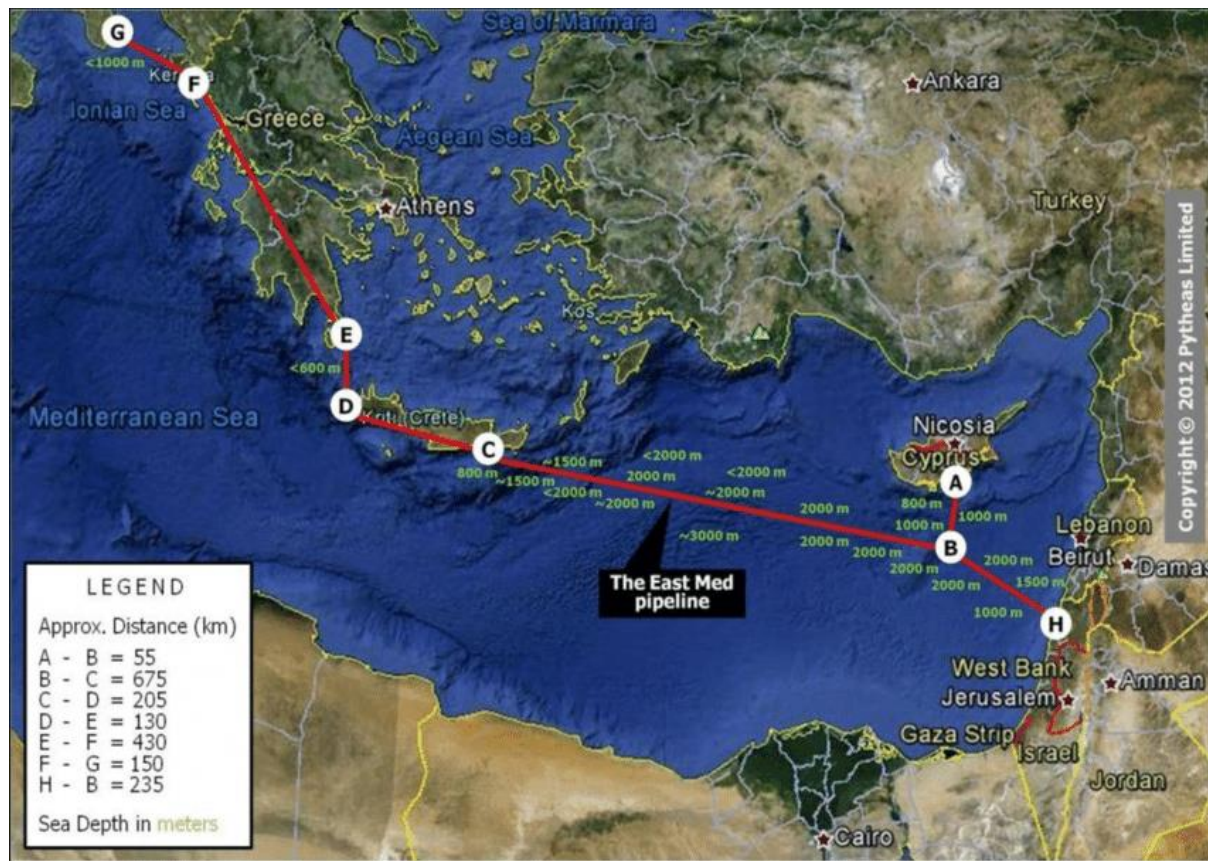


Figure 10. Origination of the East Med Pipeline.

Source: (Samaras, 2012, p. 20).

The planned 1900 km long project is at the epicenter of international attention and if realized it would be the world's longest and deepest subsea gas pipeline, delivering sizeable energy resources from Israel and Cyprus to Europe's gas network, via Greece and Italy, by 2025 (Gerden, 2021). In specific, a 1300 km offshore gas pipeline will interconnect Israel, Cyprus and Crete, then, will cross- via the Peloponnese- 600 km in Western Greece, en route to its last 210 km section across the Ionian coast, ending up to Italy, via the Poseidon connection. The pipeline will have exit points in Cyprus, Crete, and mainland Greece, as well as, joint-points with the Poseidon pipeline, delivering natural gas from the Levantine Basin in Israel and from the gas fields in Cypriot waters to Greece and Italy (NS Energy, 2021). Its final connection will facilitate the East Med pipeline to become a pivotal export- option and transfer diversified gas from the Levantine basin to the European markets, underpropping the local production, sustaining Europe's energy security and expanding the European supply capacity (IGI Poseidon S.A, 2021). As mentioned, the pipeline's initial capacity of 10 billion cubic meters could be stretched up to 20 billion cubic meters, in a succeeding phase. This £5.1bn (\$6. 7bn) project, as already known, has been labeled, since 2013, a Project of Common Interest (PCI) by the European Commission, entitled for public funds through the

European Investment Bank (Deutsche Welle, 2022). As a PCI project, the East-Med enjoys advantages from the fast-track procedures provided by EU Regulation 347/2013 (IGI Poseidon S.A, 2021). Its' development stages are, also, co-funded by the EU's Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) program, including the so -called pre- FEED studies, aiming to upgrade the accuracy of the project's route. So far, it has received €2m (\$2. 27m) from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) program to finance the pre-front, engineering, and design activities, while a second CEF grant of €34. 5m (\$42m) was offered to the project, in 2018, covering the 50% of the FEED studies' cost (European Union, 2015).

Furthermore, the East Med pipeline is being contrived by IGI Poseidon, a joint venture between Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) and Edison International Holding. Due to the project promoters' groundwork based on various scientific surveys, the pipeline is technically feasible, economically viable and commercially competitive as a project. In particular, the relevant pre-FEED phase was successfully finalized, in 2018, corroborating the project's 'added value' and its 'complementary character' towards other export-options, including LNG, while giving, simultaneously, the green light to the IGI Poseidon to proceed. All the collected scientific data by the deep marine survey and the environmental research combined with the pre- FEED studies for the onshore, offshore and the facilities are being co-examined and updated frequently in order to assist the final investment decision (FID), in 2022, on the €6-B project (DEPA International Projects, 2021). The tender for the engineering, procurement, installation and pre-commissioning activities for the offshore sections of the pipeline is underway and once finalized all relevant data will be available for the project, estimated to be concluded, in 2025, in an attempt to fast-track Europe's diversification. (DEPA International Projects, 2021; Gerden, 2021). With regard to the contractors, a Consortium of INTECSEA and C&M Engineering, along with IHS-Cera, have conducted the pre-FEED technical studies, while JP Kenny has realized the pre-feasibility study (NS Energy, 2021).

On the other hand, at a national level, the construction of the East-Med Project enjoys the entire support of the three stake-holder- countries, welcomed also by Italy, which is reflected in the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement, in January 2020, setting the framework for the East-Med's realization. As mentioned, the engaged parties, strongly committed to pursue the setting-up of the project, in accordance with all the necessary environmental standards and regulatory decisions, have established a joint committee as a 'monitoring mechanism' for the implementation of the agreement (DEPA International Projects, 2021). It

must be reminded, lastly, that the countries in partnership have underscored repeatedly, that the actual benefits of the project could be summed up as: enhancing Europe's energy security through sources' diversification, locations and transport routes, assisting the development of Europe's own gas resources within the EU territory, as well as, advancing the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean basin with a view to adding stability to the region and lessening the European dependence on the Russian gas (Van Pallandt, 2020). Ultimately, the project is also of great geostrategic importance-albeit never discussed- since even the UAE, for example, have already invested \$100 million in its development (Weiss, 2019).

Viability, Barriers & Challenges

Viability

The East Med does not represent a mere gas supply pipeline but an all- inclusive strategic plan involving capital and other means, as well as the setting- up of security conditions in the region (Tsiplacos, 2019). The project is the pinnacle of an alliance that has been in the making for a long period. Undeniably, the East Med pipeline deal carries multiple financial and technical challenges and requires the political and economic determination of various actors to succeed.

Apparently, advocates of the pipeline view this collaboration between Cyprus, Greece and Israel as an anchor of stability in the East Mediterranean (Weiss, 2019), fueled by common interests. In this context, the East Med pipeline should not be assessed only by the project's economic profitability but also by the political stability that this strategic alliance can nurture. It comes as no surprise that all stakeholders have embedded that mutual interdependence is the path to economic development and peace, being related less with the political differences and more with mutual economic interests (Weiss, 2019).

More specifically, the Natural Gas Supplier Corporation of Greece, (DEPA) describes the project as technically feasible, according to the cost- benefit ratio analysis and the relevant studies it has conducted (Weiss, 2019). The East Med pipeline, which upon completion would be the longest undersea pipeline globally, exemplifies more a political project than a commercial enterprise. Geopolitical and technical challenges, such as pipeline's route passing through disputed waters between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus or active geological fault lines and deep trenches, could be overcome, in theory. The pipeline, despite the competition emanating from alike existing or planned energy projects, aspires to become a showpiece of technological innovation and ambitious construction. As stated, it has received backing from

the US Administration, which would favor a Europe being less dependent on the Russian gas, while the European Commission pledged Euro 1.927.924 million for its design and development. Based on current projections, taking the Cypriot gas also into consideration, it is estimated that the pipeline will be able to deliver ten billion cubic meters of gas per year (Van Pallandt, 2020). According to recent estimations made by the Israeli Minister of Energy, Yuval Steinitz, on 11 March 2021, the East Med could be completed within the next five years. Moreover, an initiative undertaken by the Greek Environment and Energy Minister, Kostas Skrekas, on 6 April 2021, has incentivize Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia and North Macedonia to add their signatures to a joint letter, prepared by the project's three core countries, addressed to the European Union's Energy Commissioner, Kadri Simson, underscoring the importance of the pipeline for regional energy security and energy transition stability (Liaggou, 2021).

Despite the cost- related project demands (i.e., high capital investment, infrastructure costs etc.) and technical challenges (i.e. sea- depth etc.), which are analyzed in the following section, a positive evolution is the fact that many of the energy companies that have expressed interests in exploring the Levantine gas fields are supermajors (i. e. Big oil/ gas companies) that operate ultra-deep pipe laying vessels. Yet, the unstable global energy market impacts highly the companies' investment intentions (Stratakis&Pelagidis, 2021). Hence, responding to the frequent question of 'whether the East Med is an unconvincing pipe dream or not', feasibility studies assert that the project is realistic and viable both technically and commercially. It must be underlined, however, that these studies are dependent on projections on future gas trends in the region. Regarding the demand side, the studies presume a significant increase in EU gas import requirements, whilst with respect to the supply side they forecast that sizeable amounts of Eastern Mediterranean gas will be available for export to the European markets.

The first projection seems rational, though risky, since the European gas import requirements might increase in due course, while the second projection, indicating that the region is about to become a major exporter, is still doubtful, since the gas export potential will be dependent on the domestic gas demand, as well (Van Pallandt, 2020). In other words, the project's viability is based on two preconditions, regarding the demand and the supply side. Automatically, the second question that comes in mind is 'what is the business case for the East Med pipeline'? The most common answer is its ability to set out and deliver gas to multiple locations, ensuring energy security, while acting as a geopolitical vehicle to tie countries together in mutually beneficial projects. In reality, the answer is thought provoking,

since it remains unclear whether in a region overloaded with divergence, disputes and problems, the concept of a pipeline, which could connect and ensure peace and stability, is based on reality or on a fabrication of wishful political thinking (Tsiplacos, 2019).

Thus, the East Med pipeline is viewed as a political project, and it is being branded as a pipeline needed to provide Europe with diversification of supplies away from the Russian gas (Deutsche Welle, 2022). A key factor, fueling this collaboration is the challenge to secure export routes for the region's gas. If nothing else, the East Med has brought Israel, Cyprus, and Greece into an alliance within a region fraught with conflicts. Up to this point, though, the East Med remains just a political agreement of intent, and not a reality (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Especially, during the last decade, the growing cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Israel, in various strategic areas, has led also to deepening their military ties (i. e. Quad schemes) in the conflict prone Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, geopolitical, and regional stability through resolution of regional disputes is a prerequisite for further integration and exploitation of the gas potential of the region (Ellinas, 2019).

Politics, in other words, seem to have removed commercial and geopolitical evaluations from the discussion. The interest in the project, it is based on diplomatic and regional geopolitical factors. The possible addition of Egypt into this venture could offer the direction of resources from Cyprus and Israel into Egypt, where gas could be liquefied and exported directly to Europe. Undoubtedly, the years of consultations between Cairo, Nicosia, and Tel Aviv, in which all parties were targeting connecting their offshore reserves to the onshore LNG liquefaction plants in Egypt (Idku/Damietta) seem to be having fruitful results. In fact, drawing together the two chief- military powers, namely, Egypt and Israel with Cyprus (and Greece) could function as a regional block able to mitigate any third-party interference (Verpcy for Financial Mirror, 2018).

The Eastern Mediterranean security situation it is known to be already under pressure and complex due to the various threats, revisionist behaviors, military power projections, potential military confrontations, and extremist proxy groups.(i.e. Turkey, Syrian civil war, Russian and Chinese presence, Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.) (Verpcy for Financial Mirror, 2018). Within this context, on the other hand, Cypriot-Israeli approach is understandable, as it mitigates potential risks involving the pertinent capitals, while securing a full- grown approach with Egypt. In case the East Med pipeline is constructed, this would not impact Egypt, which remains, so far, un-disturbed, yet removing Egypt from the equation presents a possible affront to the East Med's largest gas producer (Verpcy for Financial Mirror, 2018).

Hence, regional politics will continue to play a pivotal role in the feasibility of these partnerships and the Eastern Mediterranean states will need to fortify their energy diplomacy and support more common interest projects and energy- related initiatives (Davis, 2022). It goes without saying that regional dynamics could shift again towards additional gas discoveries. Be that as it may, factors, such as conflicting national policies, maritime disputes, divergent corporate interests etc., they all have impacted the development strategies and timelines. Nonetheless, a substantial new gas discovery could be a ‘game changer’ as littoral states explore mutually beneficial commercialization routes for Eastern Mediterranean offshore gas resources, beyond the current focus on regional demand and Egyptian export facilities (Tsimitakopoulos, 2021).

Clearly, the Eastern Mediterranean has still strong prospects for more gas discoveries, as reflected in Cyprus with ExxonMobil or in Egypt with Noor, yet, unleashing this potential by securing export markets remains a challenge due to global markets, price viability and the complex geopolitics of the region (Ellinas, 2019). In addition to looking for exports, which is proving to be challenging, Eastern Mediterranean countries should consider ways to maximize use of this gas regionally, an approach that would likely be more commercially viable and perhaps even lead to increased intra-regional cooperation in the area (Ellinas, 2019).

Concerning the EU’ stance, it must be stressed that the European Commission has agreed to invest around \$100 million in a feasibility study for the \$7 billion gas pipeline project. The European position is still clear, as Brussels wishes to diversify its energy supply, to counterbalance the Russian and FSU gas supplies (Verpcy for Financial Mirror, 2018). Apparently, the EU sticks with the East Med pipeline project and has not abandoned it. The risks -related to the pipeline should pose a concern to the EU, the support of which has been vital to the project. The venture enjoys the Project of Common Interest (PCI) fast-track status, since 2013, and the EU has contributed half of all investment. It must be clarified that this support derives from the TEN-E Regulation that incorporates the construction of new fossil gas infrastructure (i. e. pipelines and import terminals).

In other words, under the TEN-E, proposed infrastructure can obtain PCI status and access a Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) subsidy fund. In addition, a project can utilize its PCI status to secure money from other public sources, like the European Investment Bank, which will continue to finance gas PCI projects, even as it phases out, lending to fossil fuel projects. European gas pipeline companies have benefitted considerably from TEN-E, since it grants

them operability through the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSO-G) (Global Witness, 2021). Moreover, for the EU, the materialization of an Eastern Mediterranean gas hub, conceived as a crossroads of physical flows and not as a trading platform, based on Cyprus-Greece resources and Egypt's LNG infrastructure, would be beneficial for both energy and foreign policies and could assist EU to avoid becoming hostage to either Russia's monopolistic visions or Turkey's regional aspirations. The project's main purpose is to diversify energy routes, as well as sources of supply. Thus, the Mediterranean region, given its new vast gas fields, can play a chief- role not only as a new source but also as a new supply route for the EU, whose planning and decision- making related to natural gas in the region remains active (Tsiplacos, 2019).

Furthermore, with respect to the environmental challenge, the advocates of the East Med pipeline project underscore that natural gas is the cleanest of the fossil fuels and it is a bridge, transitional fuel towards more renewables. In addition, natural gas is growing in importance, and it is expected to remain a key energy source for at least two decades, as it is will be to contain the heat-trapping gases. If gas replaces coal, this will be beneficial for all countries, pro- gas advocates state. On the contrary, environmentalists assess gas-development in the Eastern Mediterranean as wrongheaded and biased, since gas deteriorates global warming, endangers the region's ecosystem, expands the footprint of oil and gas infrastructure and adds a new explosive in a region that's already a minefield (Mazis & Sotiropoulos, 2016).

In view of the above, it is evident that the domestic economies of the individual states within this trilateral alliance will benefit enormously from the project. Cyprus, for instance, is expected to acquire approximately 4.5BCM of natural gas in the Aphrodite field, which is currently being developed within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Israel, on its' part, will have substantially larger amounts from Levi at hand and Tamar fields. Both countries will benefit greatly from exporting to the European markets, through Greece. The latter's economy, will also improve due to the investments related to the infrastructure needed for the pipeline, while, at the same time, the linkage of the pipeline to the operational Egyptian Zohr field is still an alternative. Furthermore, EU will benefit through the diversification of its energy sources and offer energy security to its Member States. In the long run, the East Med Pipeline may provide nearly double the expected output of 10 BCM for export if the offshore exploration has positive outcomes (Friedman, 2019). On the contrary, Turkey and Russia will both miss out and fall behind due to these developments. Greece and Turkey have a historically difficult relationship, while Cyprus and Turkey are still at loggerheads due to the islands' status quo. Israel and Turkey, on the other hand, once close allies, after the Mavi

Marmara incident ‘frozen’ their relations, a situation which is being reversed lately due to the Turkish charm offensive towards Israel. Finally, Russia, the main supplier of natural gas to the EU, that maintains close ties with Turkey, will be absent from a progressively strategic region, whereby, the East Med pipeline is supported by the United States, as well (Friedman, 2019).

Barriers & Challenges

At first glance, the construction of the East Med project would appear to be a positive development for both Europe and the East-Mediterranean region. Yet is the euphoria entirely justified? (Van Pallandt, 2020). Many opponents of the pipeline underline that unsurpassable economic, engineering, environmental and political obstacles, must be overcome, if the project is to be materialized. Also, according to the Israeli media the pipeline was about to get underway, but the situation is fraught with many question marks about its practicality. In addition, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) considers the project to be hyper-expensive and unrealistic, given the geopolitical situation, the high costs and the technical challenge (Weiss, 2019).

Economic challenges

To start with the economic challenges related to the East Med pipeline, the longest of its type, it must be highlighted that it is an expensive and difficult to execute project, with a cost estimated at around \$7 billion. Yet, most experts consider this to be an optimistic forecast, expecting it to be about \$8-10bn (Weiss, 2019). The prime obstacle that has to be surmounted by the involved stakeholders is the cost of constructing East Med pipeline. In specific, the project demands a high capital investment due to certain technical challenges, such as the unprecedented depth of 3 km in Southern Crete that the pipeline must reach. Cost- concerns remain, also, with regard to the gas price that must be competitive in the international gas market. For example, high infrastructure costs could imperil the final gas prices that will have to contest the cheaper Russian or Qatari gas, setting up challenging conditions (Stratakis & Pelagidis, 2021).

Commercial challenges

Closely correlated with cost- related parameters, is the project’s commercial feasibility, as well (Friedman, 2019). Despite the optimism to stabilize the region and foster security through energy cooperation, critics of the East Med pipeline argue that it is purely a political

project, not based on real commercial considerations (Weiss, 2019). With an estimated \$7 billion price tag, it is doubtful whether the Cypriot and Israeli gas would remain competitive by the time it reaches Europe, corroborating the argument that the East Med pipeline is mostly significant for geopolitical reasons and not for its profitability, considering its astronomical cost (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

Even though Cyprus, Israel and Greece are politically onboard, it does not mean that they possess the funds for the pipeline's construction, which will be solely financed by private investors. Such a pipeline, besides the investors that must attract, requires customers, who will not be willing to restrict themselves into long-term pipeline commitments, when they can flexibly and cost-effectively turn to LNG via port terminals (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Since the plan for commercial companies is to construct the pipeline, it is vague how the project can be financed without gas- agreements with secured customers in Europe. Attracting IOC interest is, undoubtedly, highly dependent on the ability to export (Friedman, 2019).

Evidently, export of gas from the Eastern Mediterranean is a particularly controversial issue (Friedman, 2019). The pipeline project must, therefore, attest that it can attract the necessary capital for its construction and be economically sustainable, regardless of the financing obtained from the EU institutions (Tagliapietra, 2020). While the initial stages of the project have been assisted by the European Union's funds, the next stage will be deprived of gigantic funding. The European Investment Bank has announced that it will no longer provide financial resources for non-renewables projects, indicating that the funding may have to derive from private investors (Van Pallandt, 2020). The project must also be competitive vis-à-vis other sources of gas to Europe (Tagliapietra, 2020).

The latter is highly related with the exports, which are pivotal in unlocking the gas's value. Analysts question the viability of the East Med pipeline because of the export difficulties and the price it would ultimately be delivered at. The project still needs to secure buyers in Europe for its gas and companies prepared to invest in it. This depends on markets that control demand and prices, inviting companies to provide investment and technology to enter purchase, sales, and construction contracts. In any case, the feasibility of the project depends on the number of potential buyers or on the number of long-term contracts that could be signed, providing a steady demand flow and ensure certain production levels, that would support the return on investment in the medium term, for the energy companies involved. (Stratakis & Pelagidis, 2019).

Considering the aforementioned, it becomes clear that the construction of the East Med pipeline, viewed by many as a political narrative, could turn out to be nothing more than a pipe dream, as its commercial viability is questionable (Global Witness, 2021). No concrete action is expected until profits margins can be secured, in a global market with constantly fluctuating prices (Davis, 2022). In addition, the spike of global energy prices, brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, has undermined the East Med pipeline (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Regardless of the challenging economics, the accelerating clean energy transition in Europe make the pipeline even less realistic today (Tsafos, 2022). It is commonplace that energy markets are becoming interestingly involved with the penetration of the renewables towards much less consumption of fossil fuels.

Therefore, competition to secure markets is expected to be fierce, given the current economic circumstances, with only the most competitive projects succeeding. It comes as no surprise, for example, why, Israel facing a serious predicament, is being oriented towards the construction of solar energy infrastructure (Barkat, 2020). Lastly, it must be stressed, that from a commercial point of view, a deep-water offshore gas pipeline like the East Med, is considered to be less attractive and functional and might be given fewer financial options. A fundamental rule for a pipeline is that there must be a fixed market absorbing the volumes provided, indicating, also, that political intentions are not enough (Verpocy for Financial Mirror, 2018).

Technical challenges

The technical challenge of laying the world's longest offshore pipeline at a depth of 3000 meters is also disheartening. The Greek Public Gas Company S. ADEPA responsible for the development of the project has assigned its' subsidiary IGI Poseidon with the initial technical feasibility and economic viability studies. The pre-feed studies, as mentioned, have been finalized, the technical study, involving marine surveys and route accuracy measurements has been launched, while the final investment decision is still pending. Despite these optimistic projections, the challenge to get the project up and running by 2025 remains (Van Pallandt, 2020).

It is, therefore, unclear whether the East Med pipeline will ever be constructed, not only due to its price tag but also due to engineering hurdles of laying a pipeline in deep waters, as those in the Mediterranean Sea. The pipeline would be placed at a depth of about 1 mile under the sea and it is projected to deliver between 8 and 10 billion cubic meters of gas a year to Europe, fulfilling roughly 10-15% the EU's natural gas needs. Experts doubt whether such

a phenomenally expensive pipeline makes any sense, underscoring that the consensus in laying a pipeline, disregarding the geopolitics, just on the fundamentals, from Cyprus to Greece, is also technically complex (Van Pallandt, 2020).

Clearly, the engineering technology required for such a project would be tested first in real-life conditions and the relevant seismic and volcanic activities present major construction and transportation risks, as its undersea route reaches a depth of 3.3 kilometers between Cyprus and Greece and any damage to the pipeline would be vigorous to repair (Tziarras, 2019).

Gas- related quantitative challenges

A restricted and not an unlimited gas potential of the region has been revealed, during the last years, reflected in investment decisions delays in Israel, descending reviews of gas findings in Cyprus, as well as gas shortages in Egypt. Natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have raised hopes, at the outset, that the region could satisfy EU energy needs, contributing to its goals' fulfillment (Baconi, 2017).

The gas of the Eastern Mediterranean remains to a large extent, so far, undeveloped and exploration sticks 'frozen', in some cases, due to the lack of export route for gas quantities that could be produced, which exceed domestic needs in any of the engaged -states. Hence, it is disputed that notwithstanding the enthusiastic hype regarding the new gas discovery in the Cypriot EEZ, the gas-potential will not restructure altogether the power equilibrium in the Eastern Mediterranean and will impact barely the EU-energy diversification strategy (Tziarras, 2019). An additional problem, correlated with the project is that the gas to overlay its cost has not yet been supplied, which practically means that it is uncertain whether its expenditure can be justified, based on the still obscure gas volumes (Tagliapietra, 2020).

On the one hand, many experts underscore those countries in the Eastern Mediterranean have considerable potential to become leading forces in global energy scene, indicating that gas reservoirs can be utilized within the region, even if export- plans are unsuccessful (Baconi, 2017). Undoubtedly, the region has witnessed significant gas findings, in the past decade, such as Tamar and Leviathan in Israel, Aphrodite in Cyprus and Zohr in Egypt, yet there are multiple conflicting demands and pressures, such as, the need to supply the local market, the unpredictability over the capacity of current infrastructure, regional/ political constraints, as well as, the necessity to facilitate future exploration activities (Tsiplacos, 2019).

On the other hand, many experts believe that the principal hype around natural gas discoveries in the region has been over-exaggerated and the initial euphoria has been replaced by skepticism, since the reserves, in all likelihood, will remain stranded, unless outstanding developments (i.e. new discoveries or diplomatic breakthroughs) occur (Baconi, 2017). Nonetheless, the question of whether the gas quantities are sufficient remains still unanswered since opinions are divided on the matter. It is said, for example, that Cyprus' gas reserves are too small to be commercially viable and that Israel requires many buyers to commence extensive production (Baconi, 2017).

Discoveries in the Cypriot EEZ were characterized as 'disappointing' after they were initially heralded as massive reserves. It comes without saying, that according to some experts, the economic feasibility of the pipeline is dependent also on the amount of the gas discoveries found in Cyprus (Tsiplacos, 2019). With gas volumes expected to be 10bcm/yr from the Levantine Basin, most of the gas -quantities will emanate from Israel. The Phase 2 of the Leviathan, which will become operational by 2025, it is estimated to adjoin another 9bcm/yr to production with all gas predetermined for export. If all the Leviathan Phase 2 gas is exported via the East Med pipeline there will be no space left for the Cypriot gas, deriving from the Aphrodite field. In fact, the Israel-Cyprus disagreement that commenced in 2018, escalated into serious dispute over a part of the Aphrodite reservoir, extending into the Israeli territorial waters, on the grounds that approximately 10 billion cubic meters of gas quantities were 'debatable' and at stake of the total reserve.

Undeniably, the delay in signing a unitization agreement is attributable to this obscure gas quantity between the two parties and Israel does not permit Cyprus to further develop Aphrodite so as to avoid any gas-loss, coming from the Israeli area, Ishai. Cyprus and Israel, though, through a constructive dialogue related to the division of the Aphrodite block are expected soon to resolve the issue (Tziarras, 2019). The latter was also reaffirmed by the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, on 18 November 2021, indicating that a scientific study, expected by the previous license holder (Noble Energy), will settle the matter (Parikiaki, 2021).

It is reminded that Cyprus, in 2019, signed a preliminary agreement with Shell- Noble (acquired by Chevron) -Delek for the allocation of revenues from the utilization of the Aphrodite field (Kathimerini Cyprus, 2019). While the budget ranges from 6 to 10 billion euros, the minimum volumes of guaranteed gas deposits have not been corroborated, raising doubts as to whether the field can recompense (Ekathimerini, 2021). In this context, Cyprus,

whose gas- fields are not yet operational, has tried to interconnect its discoveries to the East Med pipeline, yet the project is about to be cancelled, according to the US (Hazou, 2020; Zaken, 2021).

With respect to the East Med pipeline, the minimum quantities of attested required natural gas deposits for exports should be equivalent to 280-300 billion cbm. These quantities, except for the Egyptian Zohr, are not available- for the time being-, despite the periodic optimistic announcements (Stratakis & Pelagidis, 2021).

Hence, it is evident that without Egypt, Israeli and Cypriot gas reserves will not be adequate enough for Europe and Egypt's aspiration of becoming an energy hub is highly dependent on the integration of Israeli-Cypriot volumes into its system. Regional cooperation, either bilaterally or with Egypt, is the only way the two countries will be able to export. As known, the two options for regional export include: building a pipeline that connects Israel and Cyprus to southern Europe, or constructing a network of pipelines into Egypt, from which gas could be liquefied and exported (Baconi, 2017). Undoubtedly, the prospects of energy security and regional cooperation require further exploration, as initial optimism regarding these discoveries has been lessened by the political, economic, and logistical realities. As seen, the East Med pipeline is a long-term project and if it is built, the markets in Southeast Europe might be saturated with gas, rendering the project redundant (Ellinas, 2018). Hence, within a horizon of 10 years, the current energy landscape is likely to be totally different (Bureau, 2020).

Be that as it may, the chief- question revolves less around the size of the new discoveries and the international investments in the area and more around the assessment of how global gas markets and prices will impact these discoveries, exciting or diapering the hopes of an emerging export-oriented gas hub in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ellinas, 2019).

Geopolitical complexity/ Legal challenges

Turkey, a disruptive player acting as a spoiler in the region, opposes Cypriot offshore energy development and has strongly criticized the East Med pipeline project, which is being constructed without any Turkish or Turkish Cypriot participation. Ankara is against the construction of the East Med pipeline on the grounds that it is being intentionally excluded from the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean (Elass, 2020). After the formal signing ceremony for the East Med pipeline, in 2020, the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that 'any project, which aims to ignore Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, who

have equal rights over the natural resources of the Cyprus island will not be successful (The Maritime Executive, 2021).

Turkey fears being cut out of a lucrative new gas horizon in its neighborhood. Despite its 5,000 miles of Mediterranean coast, Turkey's maritime claims are bordered by numerous Greek islands that are contiguous with Turkey and its maritime boundaries are restricted by the large island of Cyprus (i.e. 45 miles off the Turkish coast) (Bureau, 2020). Following the East Med pipeline agreement, which positioned the energy project 'at the center of the conflict', the setting up of a regional gas market platform like the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) by Italy, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, has further infuriated Turkey, being excluded from this cooperation (Ashaboglu, 2020).

In November 2019, another political obstacle to the success of the pipeline was added (Van Pallandt, 2020). In a diplomatically smart move, Turkey negotiated a deal with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord, in Tripoli, for military support in exchange for giving Turkey access to a portion of Libya's maritime EEZ. With the implementation of this deal, the East Med pipeline now passes through Turkey's new maritime boundaries (Ashaboglu, 2020). Since the Turkish and Libyan Prime Ministers signed an Accord for the delineation of their spheres of influence over the high-seas, serious tensions have arisen between Greece and Turkey regarding their respective sovereign rights in the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, through the Libyan Accord, Turkey 'occupies' sections of the sea for itself, which are part of the Greek exclusive economic zone (EEZ), according to the international Law of the Sea (Van Pallandt, 2020).

Undeniably, Turkey instigated the afore-mentioned escalation by claiming extensive maritime territories as its exclusive economic waters, ignoring the international community, which acknowledges these areas as being parts of Greece and Cyprus to undertake its own drilling and military operations. Moreover, it is viewed as a disruptive way to obstruct the construction of the East Med pipeline (Bureau, 2020; Barkat, 2019). In August 2020, this Greek-Turkish dispute reached a dangerous high and ever since the East Med project is expected to further incite regional tensions. The pipeline's planned route passes through disputed areas of the Mediterranean claimed by all three countries and would compete with Turkey's TANAP pipeline, which delivers Azerbaijani gas into Greece and Europe (Global Witness, 2021).

President Erdogan has reiterated that he is against any development of the Cypriot gas fields within the EEZ without some sort of resolution to the conflict. The Turkish position is

reflected in the Turkish naval actions in the past, as well as in the commencement of its own explorations (Friedman, 2019). Not surprisingly, Turkey continues to send exploratory and drilling vessels into the Eastern Mediterranean, in an attempt to protect Turkish assertions to the continental shelf and ‘demolish’ what is perceived as strategic containment of Turkey by its rivals. Apparently, this strategy has put Turkey at loggerheads with Cyprus and Greece, with whom it has a history of maritime boundary disputes but also with other regional and international actors (Mitchel, 2020). Ankara feels threatened by the energy players in the EMGF and believes that is being marginalized by the energy-related ambitions of Cyprus. Its intentions include drilling for gas not only on the shores of the disputed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) but also across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, wishing to stop pipeline projects in the region. Having a constant feeling of its exclusion from the energy equation in the region, Turkey attempts to counterbalance the effect of the tripartite alliances by means of NAVTEX issuances, to claim supposed rights in Greece’s continental shelf or to undertake seismic research within the Cypriot EEZ or extensive military drills, within the context of the ‘Blue Homeland’ doctrine (Markousis, 2019).

The EU, on its part, has threatened sanctions over Turkish drillings within the sea boundaries of Cyprus, an EU member state, and refused accepting the legally questionable Libyan-Turkish EEZ (Wolfrum, 2020). Nonetheless, Turkey is unlikely to refrain from sending ships into disputed areas, if, other states are involved in energy- projects that are undermining its interests (Tsafos, 2022). Moreover, Ankara recently shifted gears from threats to fabricating fake news in the Israeli media, in which Cyprus ‘disappeared’ from any Mediterranean rights within its exclusive economic zones (EEZs), while Turkey was also having with Israel an imaginative deal over maritime borders. It is reminded that Turkey has followed the same tactic towards Egypt, right after the Philia forum in Athens, by spreading its latest story, that Turkey was singing a maritime deal with Egypt (Dalay, 2019).

In addition, some analysts highlight that the East Med pipeline could also get entangled in new, complex legal issues, considering the Turkey-Libya maritime agreement, since the project involves a pipeline extending along a maritime area, which is subject to Turkish authority (Kafkassam, 2020). To avoid entering the Turkish territorial waters, this presupposes deep sea route, which could increase costs. Furthermore, old tensions and hidden agendas might undercut the project’s potential and incite new economic and political conflicts, such as the recent escalation between Turkey and Cyprus. The, are indicative of the ongoing strife concerning the exploitation of these resources and the political environment in

which the East Med project is to be materialized, which already impacts the regional security architecture (Makousis, 2019).

At this point, the role of EU is crucial, as it should react and defend its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while, on the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Turkey is an important partner concerning the migration issue. Thus, the EU must define its common interests as a starting point for developing a more strategic approach to its own energy security and diversification of energy sources. Lastly, the EU should explore regional prospects by empowering its energy diplomacy, undertaking more projects of common interest (PCI) and collaborating towards a settlement of the Cyprus' conflict (Weiss, 2019).

Environmental challenges

Recently, outspoken environmental pressure groups, NGOs, as well as, several Israeli politicians and trade unions, have raised environmental concerns over possible toxicity of emissions from the location of gas processing platforms of the Leviathan reservoir, 10 miles only out to the sea (Van Pallandt, 2020;Elass, 2020). Yet, the official position of the Israeli Government is that the economic benefits and the prospects of Israel becoming an 'energy superpower' exceed the human and environmental concerns of those protesting the East Med pipeline (Van Pallandt, 2020). Moreover, according to the report of the British NGO, Global Witness, the East Med gas pipeline will be a threat to communities and the climate, as it is incompatible with the Paris climate goals, the European Green New Deal and the European Convention on Human rights. It exemplifies a major barrier for the fight to stop the climate crisis, since this mega pipeline is designed to carry up to 20 billion m³ (BCM) of fossil gas annually, emitting methane, a supercharged greenhouse gas, which has an estimated global warming impact over 86 times higher than that of CO₂ in the next 20 years.

If the East Med is built, the gas delivered could emit nearly 1.4 billion tonnes of carbon by 2050 (Gant, 2021). In other words, the East Med pipeline will be an environmental disaster, passing through the Mediterranean Sea, which is a biodiversity hotspot, with sensitive ecological areas, including risk areas for earthquakes (Timmermans, 2020). In addition, the pipeline will incentivize militarization in the Eastern Mediterranean and it will be a menace for peace in the region (Global Witness, 2021). Thus, the British NGO pointed out that the control of fossil fuels leads to violent resource disputes and wasteful drilling and urged the EU to remove the East Med pipeline from the list of critical energy infrastructure projects, as

it contributes to climate breakdown and makes the world a less safe place (Sanchez-Nicolas, 2020).

Such adventure, in fact, would gravely undercut the EU's agenda on climate emergency. Indeed, if the East Med was to operate at full capacity from 2025, it would produce more carbon than France, Spain and Italy emit all together, annually (Global Witness, 2021). Notwithstanding the EU's speedy response, the fact that it still supports a climate- project like the East Med pipeline corroborates that rhetoric and reality clearly don't coincide (Ambrose, 2020). According to Dan Rabinowitz, formerly head of Tel Aviv University's Porter School of Environmental Studies, 'the East Med pipeline is a discussion, which will certainly be outdated in a few years'. The project is, thus, a talk of the past since we have now embarked on the era of the renewables due to the technological advancements. Israel is investing, therefore, extensively in solar energy and almost 70% of its' new power stations are implementing renewable energy. Within this context, the Israeli Energy Minister, K. Elharrar, announced, on 15 December 2021, that, in 2022, Israel will focus on green energy and will not embark on the fourth stage of granting licenses for natural gas exploration, which is a transitional fuel and 'can wait'(Surkes, 2021). In view of the above, it becomes clear that, accelerating the time of transition to renewables can save both the climate and the economy, as reflected in the Gulf States case, where using large- scale renewable technology, mitigates the effects on climate (Papadopoulos, 2021). Lastly, at a time when renewable energy sources are cheaper than fossil fuels, the capital invested in energy projects, like the East Med pipeline, could be used, alternatively, to fund real solutions to the energy poverty crisis confronted by many countries (Gant, 2021).

EU's challenges in the Green Deal era

The EU is politically and financially supporting the East Med pipeline. For many years the European Commission has been exploring the possibility of committing to the pipeline but at this stage is unlikely to back it financially any longer. Additional EU funds remain obscure, since investments in fossil fuel projects are being abandoned in favor of green alternatives (Deutsche Welle, 2022). On the one hand, the EU is still a financial contributor of the East Med project, and, on the other hand, it has been uneasy to back up its policy preferences, especially where national imperatives overpower the decision-making process, in non-EU member states, such as Israel and Turkey (Tsiplacos, 2019). During the European Green Deal era, whereby the trend in European gas consumption is portraying signs of decline, there

seems to be no space for public support for fossil-fuel projects, anymore, in Europe (Tagliapietra, 2020).

Whilst the momentum driving the construction of the East Med pipeline is slowly weakening, the expedited increase of the renewable's advances. Moreover, with Russia transferring gas into the European markets, it is questionable whether by the time the East Med pipeline is materialized, that there will be still enough demand for its natural gas, which could verify the expansive investment in this project (Van Pallandt, 2020). Hence, it becomes evident that the EU support towards the extraction and transport of fossil gas from the Eastern Mediterranean via the East Med pipeline is at odds with the European energy needs and goals. New gas infrastructure projects risk to become stranded assets, or to foist the futile use of fossil fuel for decades. The East Med mega fossil project is conflicting with the forceful target of reducing EU CO₂ emissions of 55% by 2030 and constitutes an environmental threat (Timmermans, 2020). If the EU is to play its affirmed role in fighting the climate emergency, such a project seems futile to become a reality. The East Med pipeline exemplifies an expensive, climate-wrecking project the EU does not need but still supports, through Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation, which is currently under review and should be amended to ensure that the EU stops granting gas infrastructure preferential treatment (Global Witness, 2021).

The provisional political agreement that was reached between the Council presidency and the European Parliament's negotiators, on 15 December 2021, regarding the revision of the TEN-E regulation makes sure that no new fossil fuel projects will receive future funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and -among other things- it specifies that the already planned natural gas projects will become hydrogen -assets oriented via the specific conversion and will be in this transitional phase until 31 December 2029, whilst eligibility for EU financial assistance for such projects will end, on 31 December 2027. Especially, in the case of Cyprus, it will be allowed to proceed with one interconnection under development or planning, which has been granted the Project of Common Interest (PCI) status in order to secure the permanent interconnection of the island with the trans-European gas network (Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2021).

Many environmentalists, on their side, underline that cancelling East Med pipeline is not enough and that the relevant PCI list of the European Commission, including all the EU backed gas projects, should be drastically amended to remove, once and for all, all gas projects, exemplifying its shifting interest from gas to electricity projects (Ellinas, 2018).

Furthermore, there are also voices in favor of a smooth functioning of the gas market, which propose a change of course with respect to new gas infrastructure. According to the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, for example, LNG projects will become more competitive in the future and the preferred modus of gas trade and transport, whilst the global demand for clean energy will be unstoppable (Van Pallandt, 2020).

Beyond the shadow of any doubt, anew formidable situation will come out in the market, boosting clean technologies, such as green hydrogen, for which, a vast global investment wave is expected (Stratakis & Pelagidis, 2021). Considering the, it is understandable that whether the East Med pipeline will eventually be realized or not, it will be decided not only based on the cost of the undertaken but also on the selected policy imposed on the Eastern Mediterranean region. Lastly, it must be taken into consideration that: ‘depreciation is long lasting, but the practice corroborates that pipeline, in general, cause troubles’.

Post -Pandemic challenges

The pandemic’s impact on the global energy market has disrupted the conditions for Eastern Mediterranean states to profitably export their gas and has provoked a massive rethink amongst policymakers (Wolfrum, 2020). The COVID-19 virus has altered the ecosystem dramatically and trust in the energy sector is lessened, indicating that the future of the East Med pipeline is uncertain or even gloomy. Notwithstanding the initial common determination of building a common regional energy market, the Eastern Mediterranean states are no longer bound to building pipelines, since, among others, the COVID-19 has brought their energy plans to a halt. The economic ramifications of the pandemic and the impact on the global energy prices have led to far-reaching reconsiderations by governments and private investors on cost-intensive energy infrastructure projects (Wolfrum, 2020).

The intent to enhance regional cooperation by means of this energy integration has also declined (Wolfrum, 2020). Be that as it may, energy is expected to be a key driver of regional cooperation in the forthcoming decade. Even though, COVID-19 seems to have eliminated significant progress in the region, it ironically may have saved the Eastern Mediterranean states from myopic investments. Policymakers have benefited from a ‘do over’ and can now re-evaluate their regional prospects (Mitchel, 2020). Nonetheless, given the recession attributable to the pandemic, a considerable amount of foreign investment (FIDs) globally, is still running the risk of being postponed (Tawil, 2020).

As the COVID-19 effects make the energy constituent less reliable, the Eastern Mediterranean countries now focus on security cooperation to deal with competition and threats. As discussed previously, this new trend leads to additional securitization in the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Wolfrum, 2020). Undeniably, the impact of the pandemic on the security structure of the region is reflected in the continuous security cooperation between various regional actors (i. e. Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), Quad multinational military exercises etc.), which facilitates the energy partnership i.e. gas-trade coordination, price-setting, aligning energy policies, merging infrastructures, securing energy supply, etc.).

As COVID-19-related economic repercussions have rendered the cooperative component of a common energy market in the Eastern Mediterranean un-essential, the regional security cooperation is re-appearing. Recent developments confirm that enhanced security cooperation is currently gathering momentum in the region, instead of an energy forum. As the concerted energy-based attempt for energy cooperation is disillusioned securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean is rising highly (Wolfrum, 2020).

At the same time, the security requirements of the already existing or to be constructed Critical Energy Infrastructures (CEI) are being emphasized. Offshore drilling rigs, either fixed or floating, underwater drill sites, underwater pipelines for connecting the rigs to the drill sites, pipelines delivering the gas produced from platforms to the coast and finally the East Med constitute a wide-ranging energy infrastructure grid (Tsiplacos, 2019). Hence, it must be underscored that disputes over maritime boundaries, especially the Turkey-Greece-Cyprus ones over their respective EEZs, obstruct exploration of natural resources and restrict cooperation with respect to export options. In a context like this, Turkey will most likely opt for drilling and not reposition itself from its energy-related approach towards regional hegemony (Wolfrum, 2020).

Notwithstanding the disruptive pandemic aftershocks that have altered the regional cooperation equation, the Eastern Mediterranean states must view this crisis as a window of opportunity and embrace a shared future, promoting cooperation and conflict resolution. Ultimately, the Eastern Mediterranean countries' post- coronavirus regional energy strategy should be based on two pillars: keeping the gas local and creating more gas- friendly domestic economies and infrastructure (Mitchel, 2020).

5. 1. The LNG alternative option

As expected, alternative scenarios are also on the table. At the outset, there were two main options examined. The first one, the so-called Turkish option, was to construct a 550 km submarine pipeline commencing from the Leviathan field, passing through Cypriot waters and reaching southern Turkey, whereby the Israeli gas would be shipped to Europe via existing or some additionally constructed pipeline networks (Tzogopoulos, 2017). This option, which was estimated to cost less than half of what East Med would cost, was cast aside not only due to the lack of resolution on the Cyprus' problem but also due to Turkey's hegemonic practices and its tendency to approach its energy policies in terms of political manipulation (Troulis, 2019).

The second one, the so called Eastern Mediterranean option, indicated a different route through the activation of commercial shipping for the transport of gas by special vessels (LNG carriers) to European or Asian terminals (Ekathimerini, 2021). In specific, this second more feasible and reasonable option could be realized through the 'joint use' of the existing Egyptian LNG facilities, enabled by the proximity of the Egyptian, Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas fields, in coordination (Tagliapietra, 2017).

Constructing a regional gas market based on the Egyptian LNG infrastructure represents the most logical course, acting as a 'multiplier' of economic and commercial benefits for all stakeholders, as well as, a 'buffer' to geopolitical tensions. Such an approach would also provide Eastern Mediterranean gas suppliers flexibility in terms of destination markets in the future, a chief- factor, considering the obscure role of gas in the decarbonizing EU's energy system (Tagliapietra, 2020). Moreover, it would create economies of scale, necessary to render competitive the regional gas exports. In addition, it would function as a first test for the commercial gas cooperation between Egypt, Israel and Cyprus (the triangular gas export strategy), which could scale- up, in due course, facilitated by additional gas discoveries and the need for a more wide-range infrastructure (Tagliapietra, 2017).

In fact, Cyprus and Israel could deliver a volume of their production to Egypt, where the gas would be liquefied and exported as LNG to the European markets, despite the existence of two disadvantages: the possibility that the Zohr field might have the necessary volumes to cover both the LNG facilities, as well as, the de facto decline of the Cypriot and Israeli gas (Greek News Agenda, 2017). In reality, if Cyprus exports all of its gas reserves to the Idku LNG

terminal, it will have no other gas to offer to the EU than the quantities to be liquefied in Idku, although it cannot command the final destination of these exports. (Tsakiris, 2014)

This alternative or complementary export route of the tanker- shipped LNG, through the two Egyptian LNG facilities, is more flexible than gas transported by pipelines, which are more vulnerable. Furthermore, LNG distribution can be redirected easily to multiple markets, making redundant large -scale investments in pipelines (Barkey & Laipson, 2020). Even though, Egypt is not member of the East Med pipeline agreement, the possibility that gas from Egypt's Zohr field will eventually be part of it, is factual (Barkey & Laipson, 2020).

In addition, it must be reminded in a form of a parenthesis that the much-discussed LNG facilities in either Cyprus (joint) or Israel (single) could work in theory but the high cost of constructing them, is still problematic (Tzogopoulos, 2017). Locating an LNG terminal or even an FLNG within Israel is politically risky, given intense public concerns about potential environmental and human consequences of a terrorist or military attack on such an attractive target. The latter though being commercially attractive, is quite expensive and dependent on a specialized technology, with high construction costs (Andoura & Koranyi, 2014). Clearly, Cyprus seems to be the most auspicious location for an LNG terminal for Leviathan gas, on its southern coast at Vassilikos, since a gas liquefaction terminal would cost only one-third to one-half as much as Cyprus's other export option for Aphrodite gas, a pipeline to Crete and mainland Greece (Andoura & Koranyi, 2014). In conjunction with the LNG terminal, a new gas-fired power plant at Vassilikos could assist Cyprus overcome its severe electricity shortage and offer cheaper power, allowing Cyprus to emerge as a natural gas transit- hub for the Eastern Mediterranean, thereby elevating Cyprus's strategic significance (Andoura & Koranyi, 2014).

More specifically, Israel after the withdrawal of the Australian company Woodside from the development of the Leviathan field, in May 2014, was repositioned towards the prospect of an LNG export facility, which was undercut as a prospect, since it involved security risks, regarding the infrastructure in the Israeli EEZ. Unsurprisingly, in 2015 both Israel and Cyprus turned to Egypt, for the so –called triangular gas export strategy, involving the delivery of Cypriot Israeli gas to Egypt through offshore or on shore gas pipelines (Tziarras, 2019). Accordingly, in February 2015, Cyprus and Egypt signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the use of Egypt's facilities, as well as, for exploring the possibility of building a pipeline to interconnect the Aphrodite gas resources to Egypt's LNG infrastructure. In June 2015, the Cypriot President and Minister of Energy visited Israel to discuss the possibility of

merging pipelines from Israel and Cyprus to deliver gas to Egypt, ‘invigorating’ Cypriot Israeli energy cooperation after Israel’s rejection of the joint LNG facilities at Vassilikos.

Subsequently, Israel resumed energy talks with Cyprus for a unitization agreement to delimit the Aphrodite gas field and expedite the development of Leviathan in conjunction with Aphrodite (Prontera & Ruzel, 2017). More recently, as regards the Aphrodite gas field, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, on 18 November 2021, underscored that she met with those licensed for the field and that they are proceeding with a study for the financial and technical data, which they have inherited by the previous license holder (i. e. Noble Energy) (Parikiaki, 2021). Yet, some analysts believe that all the economic, geopolitical and political pre-conditions are in place for Cyprus to acquire its own LNG plant, seen as a necessity of extreme national importance, offering geopolitical leverage and deterrence to the island, as a strategic energy player (Tirillos, 2019). The LNG plant at Vassilikos could assist Cyprus to become an energy service- center, an enabler of regional cooperation and even invite Turkey to invest and buy natural gas, via relevant contracts (Tirillos, 2019). On 25 November 2021, the Deputy Managing Director of China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering, stressed the importance of Vassilikos project and pledged his determination to bring natural gas to Cyprus, which is scheduled to be delivered at the end of June 2023. This comes as no surprise, since Cyprus and a consortium led by China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Co Ltd signed a contract for the construction of the nearly €300 million infrastructure for the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG) at Vassilikos port for electricity generation, a project described as the biggest ever in the energy field of Cyprus (Cyprus News Agency, 2021).

On a practical level, the option of using the Egyptian LNG facilities, in Damietta and Idku, seems a more realistic option, even though it is still unknown how influential the Zhor field might be for the Egyptian energy ecosystem or how difficult the construction of a new pipeline or the reversal of the existing one, linking Israel to the Egyptian LNG facilities, would be (Tzogopoulos, 2017).

On 4 March 2021, a fabricated story, concerning an alternative route of the East Med pipeline, sidelining Cyprus, circulated in the Greek Media. According to it, Egypt’s President, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, presented to the Greek Premier, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, an alternative idea, whereby, the East Med pipeline would still start from Israel’s Leviathan gas field and instead of going to Cyprus, through an offshore pipeline, it would head to Egypt by land and then ascend to the island of Crete, passing through the area of the demarcated Greek-Egyptian

exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Liquefied natural gas (LNG) ships would then be able to transport the gas either to Alexandroupolis or elsewhere, having Europe as a destination. This ‘unconfirmed changes’ in the project appeared to be clearly at the expense of Cyprus, being cautious toward such a scenario, Since it could lose bargaining leverage on the complex geopolitical chessboard of the Eastern Mediterranean (Michalopoulos, 2021). A cost- benefit analysis of the second option proves that LNG is more flexible, offering more opportunities for expansion, export orientation, volume, versatility and client- diversification. It also decreases supply risks, due to the lack of need for a physical connectivity, especially for the European markets, constituting an alternative energy route. LNG’s drawbacks include susceptibility towards political and technical threats, the necessity for large coastal sites, raising environmental concerns, as well as cost-related issues (Manolis & Loverdos, 2013). In specific, liquefaction costs from green field projects, for instance, are on a rise and according to projections the case for LNG depends on containing costs at \$1, 050/ton. Consequently, the higher the liquefaction costs are, the less attractive they render LNG as an option (Manolis & Loverdos, 2013).

However, cost of new LNG liquefaction projects is more manageable, compared to the construction of mega pipeline projects. Especially, the option of Small-Scale LNG (SLNG), using vessels of 70, 000-150, 000 tons of LNG is far more flexible and able to utilize the upcoming LNG spot market approach, bringing prices for consumers down (Verpey for Financial Mirror, 2018). Lower capital costs, as well as, the potential to utilize spare capacity in the existing LNG facilities in Egypt, constitute a significant advantage for LNG. In addition, LNG provides access to multiple markets and due to the low liquefaction cost, exports from Egypt’s LNG plants, Idku and Damietta, are attainable.

On the other hand, the cost of grand-pipeline projects, usually, increases, as it involves various intergovernmental agreements and it is not surprising that the pipeline- projects are, frequently, not coming to fruition. Pipelines have become very complex due to geo-politics and transit costs and only a few major new pipelines are likely to proceed (Fattouh, 2022). However, LNG projects include multi-billion-dollar investments, the returns from which take decades to materialize. Such projects and investments require, for sure, certainties (Ellinas, 2019). With Israeli and Cypriot gas exports to Egypt appearing more probable, there is hope for Egypt to emerge as an energy hub in the region, dissevering gas from multiple sources, while upgrading its infrastructure for a more efficient distribution and export outcome (Ellinas, 2019).

Moreover, according to forecasts and projections, global demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is in a state of flux, will increase, opening opportunities for LNG exports from the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as, for international competition (Ellinas, 2019). LNG projects will dominate future gas trade and due to the high frequent LNG cargoes daily, long term contracts will become even more perplexing (Fattouh, 2022). Undeniably, IOCs will promote LNG as their preferred choice and favor shared facilities to reduce costs with the aspiration to establish gas hubs (Fattouh, 2022). In the long run, low liquid natural gas prices could become the norm and energy projects that require expensive infrastructure will find it difficult to compete not only with the existing liquid natural gas providers but also with the booming renewable energy industry.

Evidently, the Eastern Mediterranean is a region with restricted gas reserves and relatively higher cost of production. The development of gas reserves could assist in covering regional domestic demand. Since regional energy demand is still rising, utilizing common infrastructure (i.e., Egyptian LNG facilities) to reduce costs, in cases, where gas discoveries are small, is both foundational and beneficial. Given the stimulating commercial feasibility of the gas re-exports from Egypt, under the current international market conditions, the case for East Med gas to be traded regionally is also an option (Fattouh, 2022). During a time, when uncertainty prevails with respect to the impact of the EU's Green agenda and the geopolitical frictions on the regional energy planning, there are lower- cost projects that could be prioritized instead to boost regional integration and use of resources for energy transition.

Besides regional pipelines, interlinking regional markets, projects like Euro Asia and Euro Africa Interconnectors, have attracted interest because of their ability to leverage local gas supply to facilitate regional electrification and intermittence of regional and European renewables projects. Furthermore, many countries in the region are introducing more forceful renewables targets, which require investments in clean energy, including hydrogen projects. (Stromquist, 2021) In view of the above, it becomes clear that the best bet for East Med producers is to pave the way for a sustainable, regional gas market that supports a mixture of gas and renewables to move toward cleaner power generation models, upgraded electricity access and interconnectivity (Stromquist, 2021).

In conclusion, the East Med pipeline project appears not to be a game changer at a global level, its impact is mainly regional, and, in all likelihood, it will become a game changer for the involved states, if the confirmed gas reserves are eventually developed and monetized (Fattouh, 2022). Hence, Turkey's denial to comply with the EU conditionality impedes the

project's materialization, while its 'opposition to abide by the international law represents a serious stake. To sum up, the sustainability of the East Med pipeline as a 'fourth artery' is related with the inclusion or the exclusion of routes, that would infringe core Europeanization principles, such as market economy, as well as, adherence with the international law (Troulis, 2019).

Latest developments regarding a possible abandonment of the East Med pipeline project

According to a State Department's-statement, which was released, on 9 January 2022, the United States is no longer supporting the construction of the East Med gas pipeline project, as Washington's interest is now switching to renewable energy sources. The US, instead, is now backing projects, such as the planned Euro Africa and Euro Asia electricity interconnectors, which are expected not only to connect vital energy markets but also help prepare the region for the clean energy transition (Michalopoulos, 2022). In addition, J. Payatt, the US Ambassador, in Athens, characterized, via Twitter, the revelations mentioned in the above non-paper as baseless, regarding Washington's decision on the pipeline. 'The issue is the commercial feasibility of the project' he underscored, explaining that the non-paper refers to the Euro-Asia and Euro-Africa Interconnectors, which are economically viable and able to promote common climate goals (Nedos, 2022). Thus, the reservations focus mainly on the viability of the project for economic but also environmental reasons. Washington, in other words, stresses that priority should be given to interconnection power lines to interlink power plants and markets in the region (Konstantinidis, 2022).

The EU on its part, views natural gas as a transition fuel and the focus of support from its budget will be placed, from now on, on investments in climate energy solutions, such as hydrogen. In view of this, the EU considers the commercial viability of the East med pipeline questionable and dependent on other factors, related to shipments and import demand. (Michalopoulos, 2022). Moreover, the Greek government, via its spokesperson, clarified that the East Med's venture is supported by Greece, underlying that it is not the government that decides, which solution is economically and technically feasible, but the market. At the same time, it was highlighted that Greece is a transit hub and not a producer (Euractiv, 2022).

However, according to the Geek media, the US non-paper described the East Med pipeline as a primary source of tension, destabilizing the region by provoking frictions between Turkey and other regional states (Soylu, 2022). Further, the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, underscored that the East Med pipeline is a project still under study and research and reminded

that Cyprus, in 2018, signed a bilateral agreement with Egypt, concerning the gas transfer from Aphrodite to Idku, whilst stressing that if the plan is not feasible he and his associates are willing to consider alternative options, which will not affect anyone's interests. The Cypriot position remains firm, he reiterated: if the program is practically feasible, meaning that the geological demands can be met and, at the same time, it is also economically viable, there will be the political will to implement it. The President of Cyprus added, also, that that's the reason why Cyprus has signed a relevant transnational agreement, which, is -in its' self-a text in support of the Cypriot positions against the Turkish claims in the Cypriot EEZ (Πιμπίσιης, 2022). In a written statement, issued, on 17 January 2022, regarding the East Med pipeline project and the public debate of whether it is still an option, the Cypriot President pointed out that the political will and decision of Greece, Israel and Cyprus on the issue, was subject to the studies of economic viability, submarine morphologies and the environmental impact of the project. Concluding, N. Anastasiades, underlined that the governments of the countries involved, including the European Union, have been working out alternatives in case the project is considered infeasible for any reason (Cyprus News Agency, 2022a). Be that as it may, it remains unknown, for the time being, how Israel, which launched the East Med pipeline project, may respond. Finally, it should be recalled that, in the recent past, the new Minister of Energy, Karin Elharrar, had stated that Israel will stop its natural gas search and production, in 2022, and will prioritize renewable energy resource use.

Lastly, Europe's natural gas shortage, the skyrocketed gas and oil prices, all signs of the ongoing global energy crisis, amid the Russia- Ukraine war, have revived talks over the East Med pipeline, Chevron Chief Executive, Michael Wirth, underscored, on 8 March 2022, during the CERAWEEK energy conference (Gad, 2022). Hence, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey are still trying to come to terms with the gas pipeline from Israel to Europe, which could help alleviate the shortage (Best & Murray, 2022).

5. 2 The Euro Asia Interconnector

Electricity interconnectors or high-voltage cables that link the electricity systems of adjacent countries, facilitate power to be traded between states, while decreasing energy waste and electricity costs. They distribute electricity produced by fossil fuels and renewables and they manage effectively intermittency or energy disruptions, inherent in the renewable energy or even accidents and emergencies by ensuring stability and reliability of supply. By contrast to pipelines, interconnectors deliver electricity in both directions, and they safeguard electricity

systems. Their principal purpose is to reduce electricity costs for consumers, which is dependent highly on a transparent regulation system, which permits reliable trading or selling, as well as, abundant supply of electricity. It is worth mentioning, also, that the demand for renewables is accelerating and interconnectors are viewed as vehicles of green energy's maximization (Mitchel, 2021).

In an era, where tripartite energy cooperation-schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean region, are re-orienting from 'energy dependence' to 'energy interdependence', projects like Euroasia and Euroafrica interconnectors are seen as challenges that amplify the degree of economic and political integration and pose new domestic and foreign policy considerations. Infrastructure projects can create new perspectives for bilateral or multilateral relations with other geopolitical actors or reaffirm the established trust. Such international projects are 'windows of opportunities' for the engaged parties that seek to find creative solutions to their energy needs but they presuppose an ongoing political, commercial, and social dialogue, in a way that balances- often- conflicting agendas. Nowadays, intermittent renewables and current turmoil in energy markets highlight the importance of the booming business of knitting together the world's electricity grids, through flexible providers, in other words, interconnectors. In this concerted attempt to interlink the world's electricity grids, Europe appears to have a leading role due to the European know-how in laying submarine cables (i. e. French Nexans, Italian Prysmian, Danish NKT etc.) Certainly, the goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions encourages European states to interconnect with each other and utilize the renewable energy sources of neighboring countries. The specialized, enabling technologies combined with the construction of new ships, suitable for laying submarine cables at high depths, widens the energy perspective of the Eastern Mediterranean in this domain (Aurora, 2021).

Hence, constructing a regional market by taking advantage of the interconnections between power systems is, indeed, an effective means of enhancing flexibility of transportation in power systems, entailing the utilization of multiple resources within a single area, to assist the balance of supply and demand. Consequently, operators in different systems can buy and sell electricity and other grid services from one another, shaping an interlinked ecosystem of regional markets (IRENA, 2019).

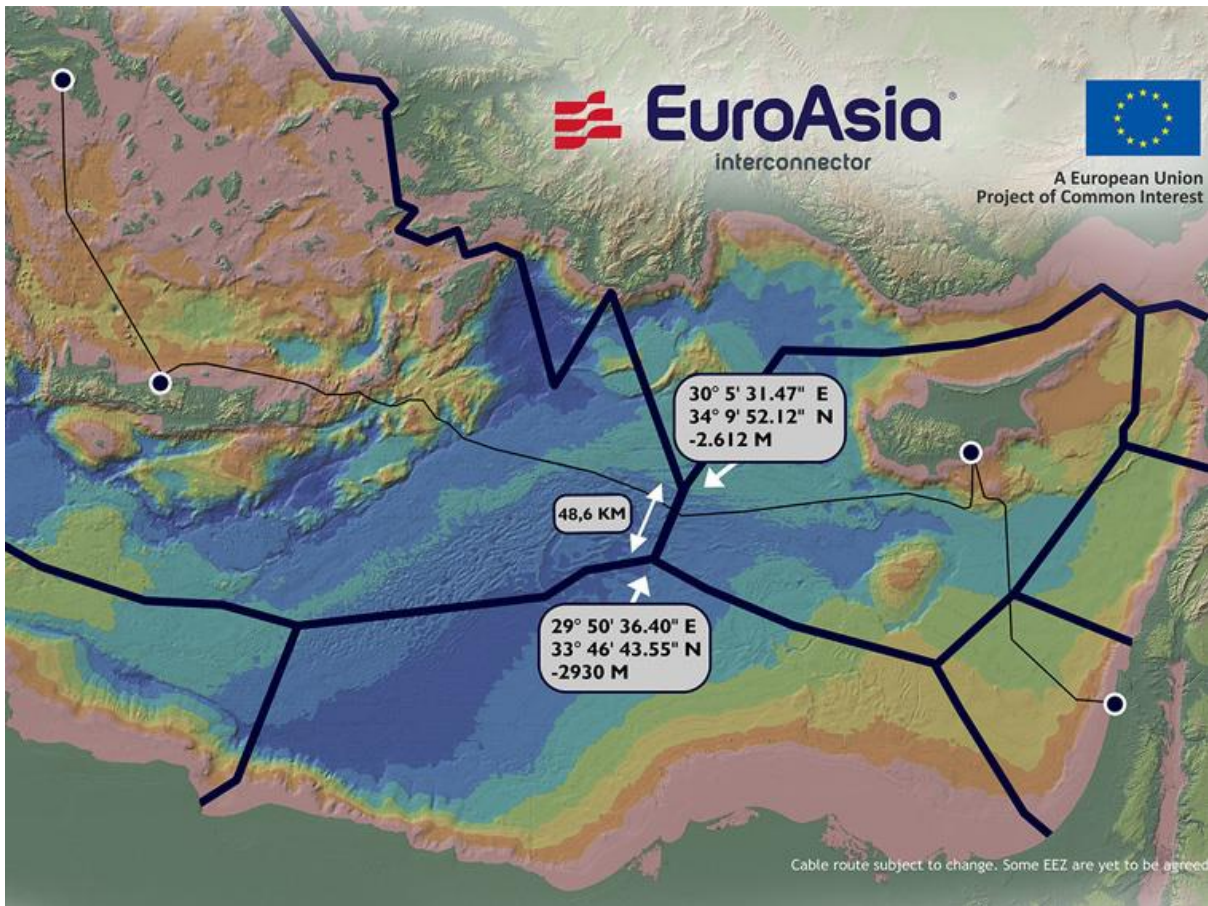


Figure 11. Euroasia interconnector.

Source: (NS Energy, 2016)

More specifically, the Euroasia Interconnector is a leading European Project of Common Interest (PCI) tabbed as an EU ‘electricity highway’, linking the national electricity grids of Israel, Cyprus and Greece through a 1, 208 km subsea HVDC cable, with HVDC onshore converter stations at each connection point and a total capacity of 2000MW. It is viewed as an ‘energy bridge ’interlinking Asia and Europe and as an alternative route for the distribution of electric energy to and from Europe (EuroAsia interconnector, 2022). The Euroasia interconnector is part of the so called East Med corridor, which also includes the East Med Pipeline (Kontakos, 2018).

The project’s starting point is Hadera in Israel, then through a sub-sea route Cyprus (Kofinou station) is approached and as it heads west, it takes a sub-sea route to Korakia point in Crete, Greece, covering 1, 208 kilometers in total length, with a lowest sub-sea point at 3, 000 meters below sea-level (EuroAsia interconnector, 2021).

It is ranked highly by the EU as a project, pertaining to the European policy. In fact, Euroasia interconnector is a joint endeavor by ‘Euroasia Interconnector Ltd’, which is the

official project promoter and developer and by the ‘European Union-Euroasia Interconnector Ltd’. The overall project is a part of Quantum Corporation and Quantum Energy Group, a Cyprus-based company. Other companies partnering with Euroasia Interconnector Ltd. include the Public Power Corporation S. A. of Greece, the Israel Electric Corporation, Belgian transmission system operator Elia Group, Siemens, et al. (Mitchel, 2021).

In addition, Euroasia interconnector Ltd will finance the construction of the electricity interconnection between Israel, Cyprus and Greece with initial transmission capacity of 1, 000 MW, with the financial cost of Stage 1 estimated at 2.5 billion euros. The implementation dates, as provided by the European Commission, for the commencement of Stage 1 of the electricity interconnection between Israel, Cyprus, and Greece with total transmission capacity of 1, 000 MW are: **a.** Cyprus- Greece commissioning in December 2022 and **b.** Cyprus –Israel commissioning in December 2023 (EuroAsia interconnector, 2021).

Certainly, the significance of the project becomes apparent through its economic and geopolitical benefits. Firstly, it ends Cyprus’ energy isolation, while it secures, diversifies and strengthens the EU’s security of supply, thus lessening European dependence on both Russian energy and fossil fuels. Moreover, it guarantees the security of energy supply not only of the three states involved but also of the European system, through a reliable network and continuous flow of energy. Likewise, it enables the EU to achieve its energy policy and climate objectives, such as, affordable, secure and sustainable energy for all citizens, as well as the long-term de-carbonization of the economy in accordance with the Paris Climate Accord and the European Green Deal (Mitchel, 2021).

Furthermore, the Euroasia interconnector yields economic assets of approximately 10 billion euros, and it is expected to stimulate investments in renewables, which will help Cyprus, in particular, to become an important trading outpost for electricity in the region. As an established physical link between the Eastern Mediterranean and the European continent, the project will also act as a reminder of Europe’s commitment to member states on the union’s periphery (i. e. Cyprus and Greece) with respect to Turkey’s stance over maritime rights (Mitchel, 2021).

However, according to Professor, Th. Tsakiris, the gas interconnector between Israel-Cyprus-Greece tackles a geopolitical risk, beyond the technical and commercial challenges, given the fact that it will have to confront the Turkish claims over the Cypriot and Greek exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterranean and without a tripartite

agreement between Greece, Cyprus and Egypt on their respective EEZs , its construction is politically difficult to be achieved (Tilliros, 2016).

It must be underlined, also, that this tripartite ‘comfortable’ quasi-alliance, portrays, since 2011, some of the basic components of a traditional alliance, such as power, profit, deterrence considerations, based on ‘complementary’ interests, yet, it has been lacking a more substantive military-oriented character in the form of a formal alliance and remained restricted to military drills, declarations of security co-operation, memoranda of understanding, etc. (Tziarras, 2016).

Last but not least, with a gas-pipeline underway to connect the three centralized power stations, there are questions regarding whether or not Euroasia interconnector will replace the gas pipeline project of East Med, aimed at connecting Cyprus to mainland Europe (Aristotelous, 2018).

Initial thoughts about the Euroasia interconnector go back, at least a decade, when the Israeli Minister of Energy, Uzi Landau, set the geopolitical and economic objective of connecting Israel with Europe and examined the option of selling electricity to the European market, while solidifying, at the same time, the diplomatic relations between Israel, Greece and Cyprus. In addition, the offshore natural gas discoveries further confirmed the need of Eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation. In 2012, the Israel Electric Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Euroasia interconnector Ltd.’s precursor, DEH Quantum Energy, in order to attest the feasibility of an electric cable between Israel and Cyprus (Mitchel, 2021).

On 4 March 2012, Israel affirmed its commitment to implement the Euroasia interconnector energy bridge project, connecting Greece, Cyprus and Israel, during a meeting, in Telaviv, whereby, the Minister of Energy of Israel, Uzi Landau, highlighted the importance of the submarine cable to Israel’s strategic plan for economic development and energy security, whilst the Chairman of PPC- Quantum Energy, Nasos Ktorides, stressed that this partnership could bring benefits to its three members, since Greece would enhance its energy efficiency, Cyprus would acquire energy flow and Israel would become an important energy carrier in the European continent. Likewise, after the project had received a certificate of registration, on 30 May 2012, under the name Euroasia interconnector, as a community trademark, following numerous, successive steering committee working meetings, on 30 April 2013, it was announced by the European Energy Commission that Euroasia interconnector was selected among the PCI infrastructure projects for €5, 85 billion of funding, which was

corroborated later, on 25 July 2016, under article 10(1)(a) of the regulation (EU) No 347/2013 of the European parliament and the Council. In 2013, Israeli, Greek, and Cypriot Energy ministers signed a MoU on trilateral cooperation in the area of waters and electricity, highlighting a broader trend of regional cooperation on energy issues, given the fact that Israel's interests in the interconnector imbricated with those of Greece and Cyprus (Mitchel, 2021).

On 24 April 2015, the Grant agreement was signed between ΔΕΗ QUANTUM ENERGY and the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA) of the EU for the design, implementation and environmental studies of the Euroasia Interconnector. Not surprisingly, on 28 January 2016, the leaders of Cyprus, Greece and Israel re-affirmed, during a historic Tripartite Meeting, in Nicosia, their full support towards the project, which unleashes significant energy potential and contributes towards enhancing energy security for the energy markets of the countries concerned, by adhering to the relevant timeframes of the European Commission for the years 2017, 2019 and 2022. In addition, on 30 May 2016, during the trilateral meeting, in Jerusalem, the Director Generals of the Ministries of Energy of Israel and Cyprus and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment and Energy of Greece presented Euroasia interconnector ltd as the official project promoter of the electricity interconnection. At the end of the same year, the project received once again the support from the leaders of Cyprus, Greece and Israel, during the Tripartite Meeting, of the 8th of December 2016, held in Jerusalem, whereby all three parties underscored the strategic importance of the electricity interconnection. In specific, Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Nikos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus and Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, agreed to continue strengthening their cooperation in order to promote a trilateral partnership in various fields of common interest in the Eastern Mediterranean and the entire region, while emphasizing the strategic importance and the benefits of the trilateral energy projects, such as East-Med pipeline, as well as, Euroasia interconnector, not only for the three engaged countries but also for Europe. On 17 February 2017, EU member states agreed to the Commission's proposal to invest €444 million in 18 priority European energy infrastructure projects, among which the Euroasia interconnector, as a PCI project (Project of Common Interest), which has been approved to receive €14.5 million for the final detailed studies prior to project implementation. It must be underlined that the Euroasia interconnector is one of the seven selected electricity projects that has received funding and the only North-South electricity interconnection in the Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe Priority Corridor NSI East Electricity). Furthermore, on 17

October 2017, the electricity interconnection between Cyprus and Greece was realized through a historic joint decision for cross border cost allocation of the interconnection, provided by the European Regulation 347/2013 for Projects of Common Interest (PCI), which ended Cyprus' electricity isolation. On 8 April 2018, during the fourth Trilateral Summit held in Nicosia, President Nicos Anastasiades of Cyprus, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece, reiterated their full support to the timely implementation of the Euroasia interconnector, a leading project of common interest (PCI) of the EU, whilst the CEO Nasos Ktorides, characterized the project as a secure 'electricity highway' between Asia and Europe. Similarly, at the fifth Trilateral Summit, held, on 20 December 2018, in Beersheba, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, re-confirmed their interest in the project and re-emphasized their political dedication to the promotion of the electrical interconnection of Israel-Cyprus-Greece, through the specific subsea cable (Vimeo, 2018). On 7 June 2020, Greece's Energy and Environment Minister, Kostis Hatzidakis, Cyprus' Energy Minister, Giorgos Lakkotrypīs and Israel's Energy Minister, Yuval Steinitz underscored the significance of the Euroasia interconnector in ensuring energy security and economic prosperity through the trilateral partnership between the involved countries.

In addition, on 22 December 2020, during the 8th Energy Symposium, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, Natasa Pilides referred to the project's importance and clarified that Euroasia interconnector terminates Cyprus' energy isolation, facilitates the creation of an internal energy market, as well as the gradual transition of Cyprus to green energy and a cyclical economy and enables the utilization of hydrocarbon resources within the Cypriot EEZ. More recently, on 8 March 2021, the Ministers of Energy of Cyprus, Israel and Greece, Natasa Pilides, Yuval Steinitz and Kostas Skrekas, signed the historic memorandum of understanding (MoU) in relation to the Euroasia interconnector project of common interest (PCI3. 10) The signing ceremony, held at the Presidential Palace in Nicosia, was attended by the Ministers and technical advisors of Cyprus and Israel and was joined by the Minister of Energy and Environment of Greece by videoconference. In a joint statement the three partners characterized the Euroasia interconnector as 'a major step' forward for providing the necessary synergies that will facilitate the integration of additional renewable energy sources in their respective electricity and primary energy supply mixes, thereby enhancing the ability of the three stakeholders to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (Ministry of Energy Commerce and Industry, 2022).

Inter alia, such cooperation will involve enabling the timely granting of necessary permits and approvals, the discussions and coordination between electricity regulatory authorities and Electricity Transmission System Operators, the harmonization of their respective technical standards and examining ways and means of ensuring the safety, security, sustainability, resilience and reliability of the electricity interconnector cable. Periodic meetings were assessed as a necessary mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of the MoU. Specifically, in her welcoming speech, the Minister of Energy of Cyprus, Natasa Pilides, described the MoU as an ‘important milestone ‘in the joint efforts of the three parties to deepen regional cooperation in the field of energy, which enhances further the partnership between Cyprus, Israel and Greece in supporting the planning, development and implementation of the Euroasia interconnector, as an additional component of the emerging Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor (Ministry of Energy Commerce and Industry, 2022).

Pilides stressed that the project is a ‘decisive step’ towards ending the island’s dependence on heavy fuels and it is viewed as a ‘cornerstone’ to transition to a green economy and economic growth with environmental protection. Moreover, the Cypriot Minister, referring to this ‘electricity highway’, explained that it will not only connect Cyprus with the energy grids of Asia and Europe, but it will also contribute to the completion of the European internal market. According to Natasa Pilides, the tangible benefits of the project can be encapsulated in the following: fortifying the electricity grids, allowing the further integration of RES, enhancing the security of energy supply and achieving energy exports (Euroasia, 2021).

On 26 July 2021, the Council of the European Union, in a landmark decision, approved for Cyprus the allocation of a €100mln grant to the Euroasia interconnector electricity interconnection, as part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), under the ‘Next Generation EU’ initiative, in order to end its energy isolation, as the last non-interconnected EU member state, as well as, to promote the development of a sustainable and green economy (Euroasia,2021b).

In the same vein, the European Commission announced, on 7 September 2021, a tender that will allow companies to get funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), indicating that Euroasia interconnector Ltd will be able to apply and receive part of the required amount for the construction costs of the project, with the total amount of funding approaching the 50% of the total cost. On 22 October 2021, the Minister of Energy of Cyprus, Natasa Pilides, during her briefing toward the parliamentary committee on economics, confirmed that 25

million euro will be allocated to the implementation of the Euroasia interconnector with the target to end Cyprus' energy isolation.

According to the energy- related discussions that took place during the Eastern Mediterranean Conference and Exhibition, which was held in Nicosia, on 10 November 2021, the project for the introduction of liquefied natural gas for power generation is expected to deliver LNG to Cyprus by the summer of 2023. The Euroasia Interconnector, featuring a FSRU at the Vassilikos area and a 1.3kilometre jetty bearing pipelines to bring the LNG ashore, is over financed as it managed to anchor €374 million with capital expenditure currently estimated up to €290 million. In fact, the project has obtained €101 million from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), €43 million in equity investment from the Cyprus Electricity Authority and funding from European Investment Bank, amounting to 150 million and €80 million from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development. Apparently, such a transformational project, like the Euroasia Interconnector, will be beneficial economically and environmentally since it will bring Cyprus into a new era of new economic development closely interconnected with the Green Deal and its realization will lead to a 20% reduction of CO2 emissions (CCN Network, 2021).

On 26 January 2022, the Commissioner for Energy, kadri Simson, announced that EU, under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), will offer financial support for four projects, among which the Euroasia interconnector, with € 657 million (European Commission, 2022). With respect to this outstanding development, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, clarified that the financing, which bankrolls infrastructure projects, will facilitate crews to start constructing the segment of the cable that will interlink Cyprus with Crete, whose total cost is estimated at 1.6 billion euros (\$1.8 billion). Besides the project's geopolitical importance, N. Pilides, underscored that it will ensure Cyprus' energy security, will boost competitiveness in the power supply sector and will assist energy transition towards green economy, above 50% by 2030 (The Times of Israel, 2022).

Ultimately, while the construction of the East Med pipeline is under question, given broader regional dynamics, the Euroasia Interconnector has enticed less controversy except, in 2019, when UNICEF distanced itself from the project due to its association with Israel's illegal settlements. Whilst ostensibly an electricity cable that is consistent with the objectives of the European Green Deal, the Euroasia Interconnector is viewed by environmentalists as a hidden fossil fuel project, enabling Cyprus and Israel to export to the EU electricity produced from their disputed and highly polluting gas explorations. According to them, natural gas and

associated projects like the Euroasia Interconnector are acting as ‘trojan horses’ undermining Europe's climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the project is enhancing fuel conflict in an already turbulent region and is seen as a prime example of the EU's failure to abide by its own legal obligations and commitments. In specific, a legal study the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC) has revealed that EU and member states' support of the interconnector project violates their international and EU law obligations in connection with Israel's illegal settlements, especially that of non-recognition and non-assistance. EU institutions also infringe the prohibition on EU financing of Israeli entities and activities in the OPT under the 2013 guidelines. Confronted with the study, the EU Commission has responded, on its part, that EU financing of the Euroasia Interconnector is restricted to the Cyprus-Greece leg, claiming the Israel-Cyprus leg is a commercial venture. Lastly, environmentalists and NGOs underscore that the specific project undercuts the European climate commitments and fosters conflicts, as reflected in the Israeli-Palestinian case (Jaradat, 2021).

5. 3 The Euro Africa Interconnector

The Euroafrica Interconnector is ‘an electricity highway’, a project aiming to interconnect Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, through a 1396km DC subsea cable, with HVDC onshore converter stations and a total capacity of 2000MW in order to reach the European market. This ‘energy bridge’ is linking Africa and Europe and it is viewed as an alternative, reliable route for the delivery of electricity energy to and from Europe. The project’s starting point is Damietta, Egypt, then through a sub-sea route, Cyprus (kofinou station) is approached, heading west, via a sub- sea route, to korakia station in Crete, Greece. Its lowest sub-sea point it is approximated to be 3, 000 meters below sea-level. The conception, development and realization of the overall project is a complex process, involving multiple stakeholders. More specifically, the Euroafrica energy project has the same parent company as Euroasia, Quantum Energy and it enjoys the absolute support of the engaged governments (Aristotelous, 2018).

The homonymous ‘Euroafrica Interconnector ltd’ is, in fact, the official promoter and developer of the construction of the project, whose initial financial costs of stage 1, are estimated around 2, 5 billion euros. In specific, the implementation dates for the commencement of Stage 1 of the electricity interconnection between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, with total transmission capacity of 1, 000 MW, are: **a.** Cyprus-Egypt, commissioning

in December 2022 and **b.** Cyprus- Crete, commissioning in December 2023. Undoubtedly, this ‘energy highway’ will provide to this partnership outstanding socio-economic and geopolitical benefits, emanating from the reduced electricity cost by using alternative and more efficient methods in power generation, i. e. natural gas, renewable energy sources etc., as well as, from the downscaled cost by replacement of the old power plants. This important project enjoys a high rating by the European Union, falls within the EU energy policy and fulfills all the required energy targets. For instance, it terminates the energy isolation of Cyprus, as an EU member state, which is now acquiring access to electricity or gas interconnections. Additionally, it empowers the security of energy supply of the three partners and of the EU system altogether, through the integration of the isolated small systems of Cyprus and Crete with the Egyptian and European networks, ensuring a multidirectional energy- flow. The project, also, contributes to the development of the renewable energy sources and to the CO2 emissions’ reduction. Not surprisingly, it offers economic and geopolitical advantages to the states in partnership, as described previously, and it adheres to the EU target for 10% of electricity interconnection among its member states (Euroafrica-interconnector, 2022).

However, the Euroafrica interconnector is expected to test the Greek-Turkish relations, since the aforementioned cable will be laid in the sea area demarcated between Athens and Cairo, back in August 2020, which guarantees the international legitimacy of the project. From the Turkish point of view, the fact that the interconnector will pass through areas demarcated between Ankara and the previous Libyan National Unity government is problematic. Despite the Turkish rhetoric and reactions, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus remain committed to the speedy continuation of the project, as it constitutes ‘an alternative highway’ of energy, desperately needed by Europe (Nedos, 2021).

The Euroafrica interconnector is seen, in general, as a competitive project to the Euroasia interconnector, as well as, a prestigious tripartite partnership, which evolves quickly due to the Egyptian commitment to cover the project’s costs rather than wait for the European Commission to grant it a PCI status (Mitchel, 2021).

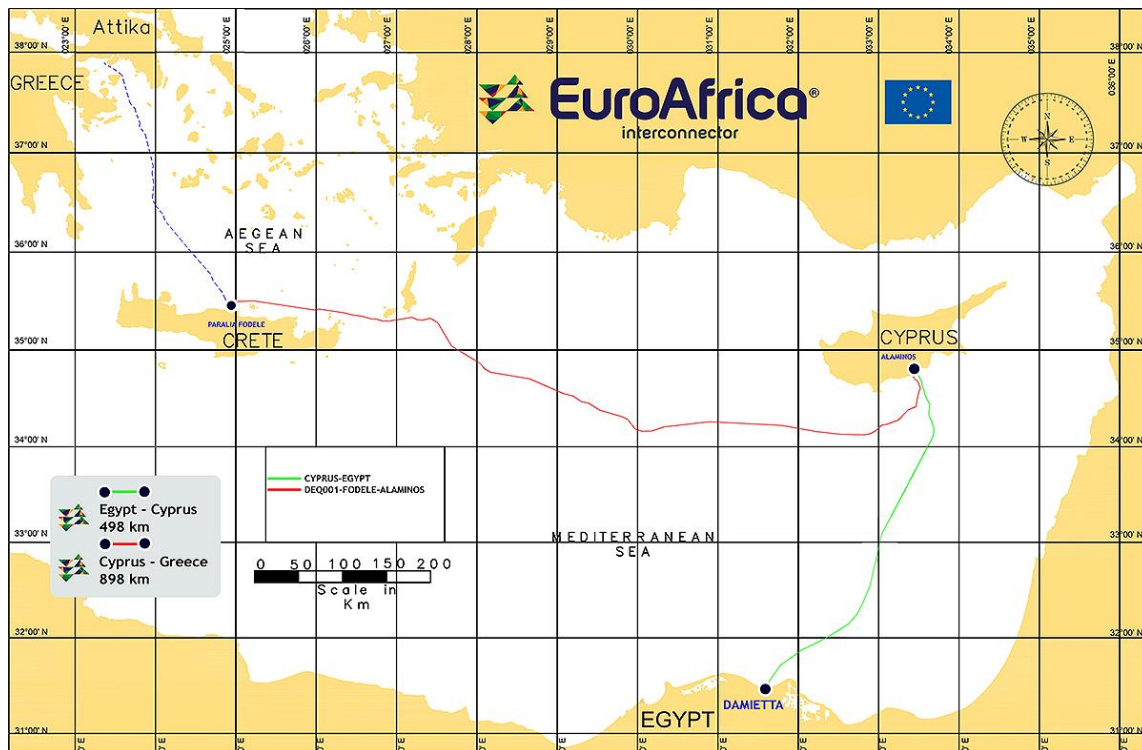


Figure 12. Euroafrica-interconnector.

Source: (Euroafrica-interconnector, 2022).

The origin of the project dates back to 2015, in the form of a scenario, which would exploit the new opportunities that emerged in the region with the discovery, in August 2015, of Egypt’s vast gas field, Zohr, whose deposits are estimated at 30 trillion cubic feet (850 bcm) and have been heralded as the solution to the Egyptian energy problems (Tziarras, 2019).

Yet, the ‘triggering event’ is traceable in 2017, during the 5th Cyprus- Egypt- Greece Trilateral Summit, held in Nicosia, on 21 November 2017, whereby, the three leaders, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades and the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Alexis Tsipras, in their Joint Declaration, expressed their firm commitment to enhance trilateral cooperation in the field of energy and welcomed the 2, 000MW Euroafrica Interconnector for energy security and supply (Euroafrica-interconnector, 2019).

Nonetheless, significant evolutions happened, in 2019, when the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades and the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, issued a joint declaration at the conclusion of the 7th Trilateral Summit, held in Cairo, on 8 October 2019 (Euroafrica-interconnector, 2019), where they confirmed the common desire to continue deepening their cooperation in energy issues. In this regard, they jointly recognized the importance of

establishing an electrical grid between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, such as the framework agreement between the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company and the Euro Africa Interconnector Company, on 22 May 2019 (Euroafrica-interconnector, 2019).

Focusing on Cyprus, after the historic meeting between President, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and the Chairman and CEO of the Euroafrica interconnector, Nasos Ktorides, in Nicosia, on 21 November 2017, which led to the signing ceremony that took place between Eng. Gaber Dessouki Moustafa, Chairman of the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company and CEO, Nasos Ktorides, in Cairo, on 6 February 2017, another important meeting was held, once again, in Cairo, on 7 March 2018, between the Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mohamed Shaker and the Chairman and CEO of the project developer, where the project's route and timeframe were finalized (EuroAfrica, 2018).

More recently, on 4 September 2021, the first ' Intergovernmental Summit' between Cyprus and Egypt took place in Cairo, which prepared the groundwork of the upcoming Cyprus-Egypt memorandum of understanding (MoU) and paved the way not only for even closer ties between Egypt and Cyprus but also for a forthcoming tripartite Egypt-Cyprus- Greece MoU to promote the electricity interconnection of the three stakeholders through the Euroafrica Interconnector project. The Intergovernmental Summit reaffirmed their common will to substantively strengthen the existing, rich framework of cooperation and to further upgrade the political and economic ties between the two countries.

With regard to energy, instructions were given to speed up the work of the joint committee set up for the implementation of the intergovernmental agreement for the construction of an underwater gas pipeline, as well as the Euroafrica interconnector. Energy Minister, Natasa Pilides, explained that electricity interconnection with Egypt will ensure the energy security of Cyprus and it will offer mutual benefits to both states regarding the promotion of renewable energy sources and the efforts made worldwide to mitigate pollution and limit the negative impact of climate change. Moreover, with respect to the field of electricity and renewable energy sources, it was agreed to exchange know-how in these sectors, especially in the use of solar thermal and photovoltaic systems, as well as green hydrogen production (Gavriella, 2021).

As expected, Cyprus and Egypt, determined to proceed with their energy planning- despite Turkey's opposition-decided to sign, on 16 October 2021, in Nicosia a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the electricity interconnection between the two countries. The memorandum was signed, at the Presidential Palace, on behalf of Cyprus by Minister of

Energy, Commerce and Industry, Natasa Pilides and on behalf of Egypt by Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy, Mohamed Shaker El-Markabi (Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, 2022).

In a joint Statement about the electricity cross-border interconnection between Cypriot and Egyptian transmission networks, it was underscored that it exemplifies an important constituent of the ongoing strong relations and strategic cooperation between them. In this context, the Ministers agreed to establish a general framework of cooperation to enable planning, permitting, development and implementation of the electricity interconnection. They also underlined that, in order to review and monitor the implementation of the MoU, regular ministerial meetings would be held. According to the statement, this interconnection is viewed as a major step forward for providing the necessary synergies and facilitating the integration of additional renewable energy sources in their respective electricity and primary energy supply mixes. Inter alia, such a cooperation would involve simplifying the timely granting of permits and approvals for carrying out all the necessary studies on the technical and economic level of the implementation of the project, including the coordination between Regulatory Authorities and Electricity Transmission System Operators, as well as, the execution of appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of the electricity interconnection. In her opening remarks, Minister of Energy, Pilides, characterized the MoU signed as an ‘important milestone’ in the joint efforts of the two countries to boost regional collaboration in the field of energy, corroborating the strong bilateral bonds (Stavrinos, 2022).

Building on the work done by the two governments over the past few years, especially during the trilateral summits of the Heads of States, the Cypriot Minister of Energy stressed that the MoU enhances further the cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt and constitutes an additional component of the emerging Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor. For Cyprus this electricity interconnection with Egypt, a strategic ally in the region, has the potential to become a cornerstone of the Cypriot efforts towards transition to a green economy, strengthening both countries’ ability to meet their respective commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The significance of the interconnection is reflected in tangible benefits, such as the fortification of the electricity grids, the further integration of renewables in the energy mix, as well as, the increase of the security of energy supply, which will all facilitate future energy exports. In his remarks, Dr. Mohamed Shaker El Markabi, Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy of Egypt, underlined the multiple benefits of the electrical interconnections, such as, securing and stabilizing the electrical system,

reducing reserve margin to cope with emergencies and diversifying electrical energy sources (Stavrinos, 2022).

With regard to benefits at an economic, environmental and political level, the Egyptian Minister reiterated that the project will build strong and well-connected networks across the Eastern Mediterranean in order to enhance security and reliability of energy supply and intensify the penetration of electricity, generated from renewable energy sources, on a national, regional and European electricity mixes' level, utilizing the maintained electricity surplus. Egypt's top priority- he added- is to create a powerful and reliable energy system, supporting a long-term, sustainable economic development and securing electricity supply, as well as, to anchor its reliability and a surplus of more than 28 GW. Currently, the Egyptian energy sector is focusing on the improvement and upgrading of the national grid to comply with the international standards and to adjust the new capacities with a high share of renewable energies. In the frame of the boosted global interest in renewable energies, Egypt has allocated more than 7600 km² of lands for renewable energy projects with a total potential of more than 90 GW. The Egyptian Minister expressed his certainty that the electrical interconnection project will open the 'floor gate' of cooperation between the two shareholders, promoting the generation of renewable energy, whilst his Cypriot counterpart clarified that energy- isolated Cyprus is determined to proceed with electricity interconnection with both Israel and Crete and another electricity interconnection with Egypt. Finally, both sides acknowledged the opportunities in the field of technology and green hydrogen and therefore they agreed on setting up technical teams that would work intensively to expedite various energy- related projects (Stavrinos, 2022).

A few days later, a tripartite meeting, at the level of Heads of State and governments between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, took place, on 19 October 2021, in Athens, whereby a relevant tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU), linking the electricity interconnection of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece with a cable of a total length of 1, 396 km, was signed (Hazou, Cyprus, 2021).

In specific, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus and Abdel Fattah El- Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, welcomed the signing of an agreement for the establishment of a trilateral electricity interconnector between the grids of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. The trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Cyprus, Egypt and Greece aims to

promote the electricity interconnection of the three countries through the Euroafrica Interconnector (Gavriella, 2021).

This project, they pointed out, empowers their 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 considerable amounts of electricity to and from the Eastern Mediterranean (Le Figaro, 2021).

Evidently, the electricity interconnector project, which interlinks the electricity grids of all three countries, constitutes a vital component of a joint strategy to accelerate the development of the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor, offering an alternative source of energy supply from the region to the European Continent and vice versa, they concluded (Καθημερινή της Κύπρου, 2022).

Be that as it may, plans for the Euroafrica, Euroasia Interconnector, as well as, the East Med pipeline projects, are causing tension in the Eastern Mediterranean. The geopolitical situation is impeding the advancement of these plans. The Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, has supported strongly, in November 2021, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) that was held in Glasgow, the construction of this cable, connecting the three stakeholder countries, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus, with Central and Western Europe. However, the project presupposes the cooperation of Turkey, which reacted with the issuance of a NAVTEX. In fact, if Turkey tries to prevent the laying of the cable by developing its fleet, this could escalate further the dispute over the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the mineral resources in the region. Apparently, this conflict acquires an additional geopolitical dimension, as the Chinese electricity supplier state grid, is also engaged as a stakeholder with 24% in the Greek network, Admie. The developer of the Euroafrica/Euroasia Interconnector project, based in Nicosia, has underlined, though, that relevant agreements exist between the governments of the engaged states on the cable- routes. Lastly, it is reminded that, recently, the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, reiterated that the project commencing from Egypt would play a key role in Europe's energy security and that all three stakeholders will not have to ask anyone for the permission to do so (Hohler & Demicran, 2021).

Chapter 6. Conclusions

The growing geo-economic importance of the East Mediterranean, as reflected in the intense regional energy competition, is an undeniable reality. The significant discoveries of oil and natural gas, found in the Levantine basin, which are estimated at 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 122 trillion cubic feet of gas respectively, are transforming the area into an energy hub and are further complicating the relations of the engaged states (Konstantinidou, 2019; Ruble, 2017).

Besides transforming the region into an energy hub that could lessen the European energy dependency and contribute to EU's natural gas supply diversification, these sizeable deposits accompanied by relevant investment activities in offshore oil and gas exploration and production will facilitate the involved states to become from net importers to net –exporters (Ruble, 2017). Notwithstanding the region's non- characterization as EU's number one priority, for the time being, but rather as an area with a supplementary role, the emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean as an energy- hub alters the geopolitical dynamics and upgrades the significance of the countries in the region, since the European markets constitute, currently, an optimal option for the entire regional subsystem (Pelagidis & Stratakis, 2019).

Given the fact, that the European need for strengthening its energy security will keep on, at least until 2025, the EU will have to reshape its strategy due to the energy–related evolutions in the region (i. e. new infrastructure networks, interconnectors, terminals etc.) (Pelagidis & Stratakis, 2019). Focusing on Cyprus, it must be highlighted that the discovery of the Aphrodite field, comprised of an estimated 4. 1–6 Tcf, combined with the one of the Egyptian Zohr, in 2015, has mobilized and incentivized Cyprus to undertake its third licensing-round for blocks 6, 8 and 10, in 2016, and to continue its exploration program (Ruble, 2017). The Cypriot engagement into the hydrocarbons research, through concessions to IOCs, relevant seismic surveys etc., corroborated the evidence of the islands' gas potential and energy value. Undoubtedly, the old combined with the recent discoveries (i. e. Glaucus block) have changed profoundly Cyprus' energy and geopolitical profile (Konstantinidou, 2019).

Notwithstanding Cyprus' small size and small consumption (i. e. annual domestic natural gas consumption projected at 0. 04 Tcf in 2042) (Ruble, 2017) it is, still, a key regional player due to its geographical position and the unsettled Cyprus' problem, which perplexes not only Cypriot but also regional hydrocarbon exploitation pathways (Hohler & Demicran, 2021).

In such a context, it comes without saying that the future revenues from the exploitation of its natural resources (i. e. deriving from Aphrodite, Glaucus etc.) and the transportation of natural gas through various options, as analyzed in chapter 3, will ‘invigorate’ its trade and energy market and turn Cyprus into a gateway for the security of energy supplies for Europe, as well as, to an anchor for additional flows of natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Pantelidou, 2017).

6.1. Cyprus’ problem settlement & its two dimensions intertwined with the Eastern Mediterranean energy ecosystem

The first question that must be answered is whether the hydrocarbons discoveries could promote regional stability, as well as, a settlement to the Cyprus’ problem. With respect to that, it must be stressed that the hydrocarbons potential of Cyprus could function as a constructive stimulus for the resolution of the Cyprus’ problem, given that Cyprus could counterbalance the Turkish assertiveness and motivate the Turkish Cypriots to adopt a more cooperative stance. Cyprus, in other words, should find the right framework to come to terms, without putting at risk its sovereignty, without recognizing the TRNC and without ‘pausing’ its hydrocarbon program, if no settlement is achieved to the Cyprus’ problem. This means that the so –called ‘gas-card’ should not be overrated and Cyprus should capitalize it to become, in the medium term, a chief-player, able to achieve a better settlement, through the overall, regional geopolitical transformation, which is underway (Giannakopoulos, 2016).

Moreover, energy has a multiplier impact on states’ political securitization relations and can increase the security concerns and tensions, whilst the opposite happens in de-securitized relations, which incite cooperation (i.e. trilateral, quadrilateral alliances, cooperative schemes etc.), facilitate stability and boost energy development. Given the fact that the hydrocarbons are not utilized only as economic commodities but also as political tools, it becomes evident why energy affects highly the de/securitization relations (Adamides, 2016).

In a volatile region, such as the Eastern Mediterranean, the significance of stability is a sine qua non and regional players, among which Cyprus need energy -generated motives for stability and energy- collaboration. In such a context, the un-settled Cyprus’ problem makes de- securitization even more complex and perplexes further the prospects for hydrocarbon collaboration between Israel and Turkey, since the Cypriot EEZ intervenes. In addition, the securitized Cypriot- Turkish relations do not show signs of hope for any future hydrocarbon cooperation or of a hydrocarbon- generated negotiated settlement (Adamides, 2016).

In light of the above-mentioned, additional securitization and assertiveness is expected on the Turkish part, towards any Cypriot exploitation activities or even escalation of its operations against the drilling program of Cyprus. It is reminded that the characterization of specific areas of the Cypriot EEZ as part of the Turkish EEZ or of TRNC's, corroborate the negative ramifications of the hydrocarbons in the region (Adamides, 2016).

In conclusion, even in the case, where, the hydrocarbons do not provoke additional securitization, it is questionable whether they can promote a settlement to the Cyprus' problem, based on a mutually accepted agreement, since the energy- issues are highly related with the Cyprus' question and, therefore, issues, such as, territorial adjustments, governance, etc. must be overcome. Lastly, the assertion that any future gas revenues could counterbalance the cost of settlement is unsolid and uncertain due to financial and political reasons (Adamides, 2016).

Accordingly, the second question that must be answered is, whether a solution to the Cyprus' problem could enhance regional collaboration and hydrocarbons exploitation- options for Cyprus, while safeguarding revenues, which could cover some of the settlements' costs. With regard to this second issue, it must be underlined that a negotiated solution to the Cyprus' problem could be a window of opportunity for additional geopolitical alteration, which could lead, for example, to energy –exports through or to Turkey, seen even, as an extra channel for diversified export- options (Adamides, 2016).

In such a case, emphasis will be given on energy services than supply, as the confirmed quantities of the deposits within the Cypriot EEZs justify medium –size operations. In addition, through the settlement of the Cyprus' question, the island could be upgraded into an energy- hub and this problem would stop being instrumentalized by other countries, after its solution (i. e. Israel would no longer be able to disassociate the Turkish export –alternative based on the peculiarities and the constraints posed by the Cyprus' question). In reality, a possible settlement of the Cyprus' problem could have an impact on Cyprus' alliances and its network of relationship in the region, acting as a 'stepping stone' for even closer cooperation among the neighboring states in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as, as an accelerator for conflict- resolution. Moreover, in a post- settlement Cyprus, new challenges would emerge, such as further enhancing and deepening the relations with regional players, among which, Israel, Egypt and Turkey. In such a hypothetical context, Turkey would face a predicament with respect to its relations with Cyprus, given its position regarding the EEZ delimitation. As a non –signatory of UNCLOS III it does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, yet in a

post- settlement scenario, Turkey would have to recognize officially the Republic of Cyprus, while remaining still a non- signatory. However, as explained in chapter 2, Turkey does not accept any judicial settlement of its international disputes due to its positions concerning its maritime disputes, the hydrocarbons issue in the wider region and its inter-state relationships (Adamides, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the unresolved Cyprus' problem perplexes the delimitation issues among Turkey and Cyprus and the core-topic is for how long Turkey is going to perceive Cyprus as a special case and whether it will alter its stance in a post- settlement environment, even from a legal point of view. In any case, Turkey after a future resolution to the Cyprus' problem will have to reshape its position, since such an evolution could impact also the overall regional security formation. As mentioned, the current regional cooperative schemes (i. e. trilaterals, quadrilaterals etc.), which are gathering momentum in the energy sector, escalate the securitization processes, incrementally, while, at the same time, the Cypriot- Turkish security relations remain immutable and rigid. A possible resolution to the Cyprus' question could promote energy cooperation, stress the securitized relations among various states in the region and underscore the EEZ- related challenges, yet it is not expected to have a transformative impact on the regional geopolitical securitization relations (Adamides, 2016).

In view of the above, it becomes evident that a settlement of the Cyprus' problem could change the regional geopolitical dynamics through energy. Notwithstanding the de/securitization of some facets of the bilateral or multilateral framework, such a resolution it is not expected to change foundationally the impact of energy, which will not, automatically, come along with additional securitization. However, the hydrocarbons might restrict the de/securitization effect of the resolution to the Cyprus' problem and likely provoke extra securitization and difficulties of the inter-state relations. Lastly, it must be highlighted the hydrocarbons issue constitutes an interplay of complexities and while, having the potential to act as a political game changer, they are closely intertwined with the Cyprus' question (Adamides, 2016).

It is worth mentioning, that some scholars suggest that the hydrocarbons are an enabler of enhanced dialogue and reconciliation within the Cyprus' context. They propose cooperation and positive incentives to overcome the preoccupation with sovereignty, as well as, parallel negotiations. In specific, they underscore that while the Cypriot gas findings potential is still not certain there is sufficient amount, which can turn these natural resources into a game changer. Consequently, it is an imperative for two sides on the island – according to these

scholars- to cooperate and reach a solution, at least in the field of the hydrocarbons. Such a hydrocarbons- focused cooperation could be attempted even before a settlement, despite the complexity attributed to the Greek Cypriot position. Moreover, inventing attractive ways to confront the impediments so as to overcome the preoccupation with sovereignty, for example, through electricity trade, or compensating deprived owners for property loss, or through the future income from the natural resources etc. could be helpful towards that direction. Eventually, though the main goal is undoubtedly a settlement to the Cyprus' problem, if and when needed, parallel negotiations could be utilized, in specific topics, such as the islands' hydrocarbons resources, which should be viewed as a domain of cooperation (Gürel, Tzimitras, & Faustmann, 2014).

Likewise, in a settlement scenario, Cyprus could become a bridge between the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. In this context, the EU could unlock extra investment funds and use various tools, such as, the structural funds and project financing from the European Investment Bank or the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (Zemach, 2016).

Finally, it must be stressed that the Cypriot President, N. Anastasiades, on 13 February 2022, underlined that a solution to the Cyprus' problem will contribute significantly to the reevaluation of the entire Cypriot energy program, so that Turkey's aspirations or plans are not ignored and Turkey has a say in the process of the utilization of natural gas wealth, provided that the international Law of the Sea is respected, as well as, the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of the neighboring states (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

6.2. Cyprus: an emerging energy player moving towards an integrated regional gas infrastructure

Cyprus' monetization pathway: LNG

As discussed previously, the interest in the gas developments of the region was invigorated, in 2015, after the discovery of the Zohr gas field in Egypt, following the Leviathan field of Israel, found in 2010. In the case of Cyprus, politics- as reflected in the Turkish interventions against the drillings in the Cypriot EEZs- and gas exploration are intertwined. Notwithstanding the three licensing rounds and the three sizeable natural gas discoveries, the gas development in Cyprus is facing up delays, while the island is in need of markets, which will buy the Cypriot gas. In any case, due to the Cypriot small domestic market and the size of the regional markets, Cyprus will have inevitably to reach the global markets so as to sell

its gas. Evidently, its natural gas development will have to be realistic and flexible and move on, even in the case, where the Cyprus' problem remains unresolved (Ellinas, 2019).

While the Cypriot hydrocarbons resource potential is still uncertain, yet, there are sufficient amounts of gas, which could act as a game changer. The pursuit of reasonable maximization is defined by measurable objectives, or as Mearsheimer would have put it, 'what money is to economics, is power to international relations'. In view of the aforementioned, emphasis must be placed on the most reasonable monetization option for Cyprus, at least for the time being, which is no other than the LNG pathway, as analyzed in chapter 3. For many, this option encapsulates the overall interests of the country (i. e. economic, social etc.), as well as, its geopolitical leverage and its deterrence. This is attributable to some basic features of the LNG, which can be sold in the global markets in better prices, since its demand is growing recently (i. e. both as a road/ railroad- fuel, as well as, a maritime traffic fuel) and it is projected to be on a rise, until at least, 2050. In addition, its environmental friendly and low-cost 'quality' make it a perfect substitute for diesel. This is, also, compatible with the EU's de-carbonization strategy and its green agenda, which promotes the renewable energy sources and will not affect the Cypriot gas- development. Re-focusing on the LNG pathway, it must be stressed that its construction will mobilize the overall energy sector across this industry's value chain and will contribute to job-creation, as well as, to the increase of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and to the diversification of the Cypriot economy. It goes without saying that this will multiply inter- sectorial synergies and will create economies of scale, while offering an industrial framework, making the Cypriot economy more competitive and more resilient to external shocks. In addition, low –cost electricity will be produced based on a greener fuel with higher energy efficiency and lower intensity, contributing the EU's green agenda. Gas- generated electricity could be, likewise, utilized through the transmission highways, like Euro Asia and Euro Africa interconnectors, and be sold to the European markets. The LNG option is also cost -effective, compared, for example, to the East Med pipeline and presents less investment risk, while in combination with the fuel supply by ships (i. e. bunkering), it is expected to boost the Cypriot economy. Lastly, the LNG pathway will facilitate regional cooperative alliances and enhanced synergies by generating common inter-state objectives. The interest expressed by various international investors towards Cyprus, as reflected in Exxon Mobil's intention to participate in the construction of an LNG plant in Cyprus' or Total's, Eni's, Qatar Petroleum's, Chevron's and Shell's engagement in the Cypriot gas exploration program, is not unanticipated, given the potential of Cyprus to draw and liquefy future gas quantities from neighboring states, like Lebanon, Syria or Israel, on the

condition that the LNG pathway is expedited and pursued without any further delays or hesitations, since time- frame is crucial and opportunities must not be lost. In fact, the Turkish Cypriots, Turkey and other states in the region could be shareholders in the Cypriot LNG monetization pathway since confirmed gas findings and expected new ones entirely support this LNG- oriented energy strategy. It must be reminded, also, that the US Geological Survey evaluated that the Levant Basin has recoverable resources of 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 122 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas, whilst the US Energy information administration highlighted that Cyprus due to its considerable EEZ has the capacity to upgrade outstandingly its energy- sector via a redesigned energy policy. In light of the above, it becomes clear that the LNG option, based on the sufficiently large quantities of Cyprus, which justify the infrastructure expenditures, is a reasonable strategy of long- term viability and it is viewed as a ‘survival’, national and economic strategy for Cyprus and not just as a mere project. If this pathway is governed with vision and purposefully it could transform Cyprus into an energy center or possibly even a hub. Despite a nine month delay, attributed to the pandemic with the works for the construction of the Floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and the jetty, at Vassilikos, the Cypriot Minister of Energy, N.Pilides, underlined, on 9 February 2022, that the LNG project will be completed within the timeframe, namely by July 2023. The specific €289-million LNG project, promoted by the Natural Gas Public Company (DEFA), will be concluded with swift steps and the contractor’s demand for a 10% increase citing rising costs due to the pandemic will be renegotiated with the construction consortium (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

As analyzed in chapter 5, in June 2019, Cyprus made an agreement with Noble Energy (prior to its October 2020 acquisition by Chevron) on production sharing of the Aphrodite block, abetted by the field’s development plan, facilitating the negotiations for the sale of Aphrodite gas to Shell’s Idku LNG plant in Egypt. Notwithstanding the continuing discussions between the consortium and the engaged parties, the consultations have not been completed, until now. Cyprus, however, acknowledging that the development of the Aphrodite requires time, carries on the project to import LNG (Ellinas, 2019). With respect to the LNG pathway, it must be highlighted, also, that a floating LNG (i. e. FLNG) constitutes an option in the case of a possible collaboration between Cyprus and Israel, as discussed in chapter 3. Both countries, according to their resources, have the potential to produce and export around 25 bcm annually, for twenty years and they aspire to export their natural gas via Egypt’s liquefaction plants. Yet, due to the international gas prices and multiple commercial reasons, they both confront impediments. The floating LNG consideration is, therefore, a possible

solution, for Cyprus and Israel, as already confirmed by the Delek Group and Noble Energy (prior to its October 2020 acquisition by Chevron), in 2019 (Ellinas, 2019).

6.3. Cyprus' EU identity as an asset

As already seen, in chapter 1, Cyprus, as an EU member country, possesses a valuable asset, which must be capitalized appropriately in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean, not only in the energy sector but also through the enhanced cooperative frameworks among the states in the region so as to safeguard its vital interests and better tackle with the Turkish assertiveness and aggression. In other words, Cyprus should utilize its EU membership as a shield towards Turkey, take advantage of the European solidarity and the available institutional tools (i. e. EU's sanctions, warnings, intervention etc.) and ask for a more dynamic presence, namely the so- called actorness of the EU, in the Eastern Mediterranean, besides investing in and financing energy projects and energy- related operations, such as, the LNG facilities in Cyprus. In addition, it should utilize its energy resources not only as economic commodities but also as political tools, implementing the appropriate strategy, depending on the situation so as to protect its national, economic, social etc. interests in the best possible way. The EU bond for Cyprus should be a type of 'bridge' linking the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world with Europe, not only through the network of interconnectivity but also via the expressed solidarity, the enhanced cooperation, and multiple regional synergies. Cyprus with its European identity, should, undoubtedly, act as an interlocutor and facilitator in the construction of an Eastern Mediterranean corridor, which will offer considerable energy safety to the EU. Finally, besides the aforementioned, Cyprus should empower its political importance for the EU in order to attract its interest in supporting a comprehensive resolution to the Cyprus' problem, against the Turkish claims (Pantelidou, 2017).

Post -pandemic expectations & realities

6.4. Cyprus within increased infrastructure interconnectivity, paving the way for an integrated regional infrastructure building capacity

After the outbreak of the pandemic, the Eastern Mediterranean felt its severe economic, social and political ramifications (i. e. unemployment, social protection etc.) and the economies of the region, which are discerned by different paces of development and

asymmetries, showed signs of resilience and of economic recovery and they are expected to continue their efforts towards reforms and growth (nationalinterest.org, 2022). The challenges posed for the Eastern Mediterranean states are not unconquerable and once political uncertainty is removed and is replaced by trust -building, natural resources' development could be facilitated, while stability is, also, being enabled (tr.boell.org, 2022). In such a context, infrastructure interconnectivity in the energy sector is gathering momentum and its precondition is, as already mentioned, the enhanced regional cooperation, fueled by common interests (i. e. Cypriot- Israeli cooperation). Notwithstanding the delays attributed to commercial and investment -related reasons, Cyprus signed, in 2016, the first of its three agreements for exporting its gas (i. e. as LNG) via pipeline to Egypt's Idku or Damietta plants (Ruble, 2017). In this regard, given the fact that the projected annual natural gas consumption needs of Cyprus (i. e. at 0. 04 Tcf, in 2042) are small, compared to the confirmed findings, its export dynamics are viewed as quite promising. It comes without saying that integrated infrastructure building- capacity in the Eastern Mediterranean emerges as a major challenge, capable of balancing the regional supply and demand, through upgraded infrastructure, enabling more gas quantities to be delivered to become marketable (Zemach, 2016).

Such an integrated regional infrastructure via this interconnectivity could act as multiplier of investments and a stimulus of economic growth (i. e. reduced transport costs of the natural gas etc.). Given the fact that the Cypriot economy is small to validate the high investment cost of constructing transmission systems and energy- related facilities concerning the utilization of gas (i. e. in power generation, transport etc.) but also small to 'devour' its gas -capacities, infrastructure development, deriving from private and public synergies, able to tackle the economic and geopolitical obstacles, is a prerequisite for the establishment of a natural gas- territory within this regional subsystem. This future integrated infrastructure developed in the Eastern Mediterranean, through the right planning, could maintain the existing network and based on the so- called interoperability -mindset, could allow the existing facility in a territory of a specific country to be co-utilized, partly, so as to satisfy the needs of other adjacent countries. Especially, such a collaborative framework could be beneficial for the marine environment since it entails a low environmental footprint. An inter-state coordinated partnership via common rules and joint- actions could reduce pollution and even restore the regional ecosystems. The above- described plan, viewed as the 'Eastern Mediterranean integrated gas- infrastructure', which is emerging as a challenge, is a viable project, expected to become a reality in the region, if it is accompanied by political will,

efficient implementation and the right economic feasibility assurances. Such a network would embody the supply and demand profiles of the stakeholder- countries, as well as, the available infrastructure and the export routes, while being flexible to implement various alternative scenarios and paths, when needed, regarding the flow of gas, through the offshore or onshore interconnections. The development of each pathway or scenarios (i. e. short or long term export options, demand- supply problems, resources' allocation etc.) would require, as expected, close inter-state collaboration so as to mitigate the financial and political risks. In addition, such a network promoting a common vision of the region's development, would be attractive to international investors, as it happened in the cases of other energy projects in the region, which outstripped the existing geographical and political barriers, through common economic interests (Zemach, 2016). Cyprus, which collaborates closely with Egypt and Israel in order to be interlinked with their grids and be able to export its gas, by capitalizing its geostrategic position and its energy- potential, could become an important player of these future -planned corridors/ highways for the natural gas, within the region and beyond. Undoubtedly, the above- initiative would require the EU's support, in granting its financial assistance to the Eastern Mediterranean, either through structural funds, as in the case of Cyprus, or via project finance, deriving from the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, etc. (Zemach, 2016). Evidently, Cyprus, through its EU membership, could play a leading role, acting as a bridge between the EU and the regional states, in promoting the cooperation, based on common interests, as well as, in mitigating the disputes correlated with the gas- related operations. EU on its part would enjoy considerable benefits, such as, access to energy supply and less energy dependency on gas- imports. The EU's role in such a cooperative integrated regional interconnected network, which would deliver natural gas from multiple sources to regional markets and beyond, is, therefore, essential, and it is not only of financial but also of geopolitical importance (Zemach, 2016).

In conclusion, this integrated cross- border infrastructure, through the well- structured implementation of the existing facilities and enhanced cooperation, could reinforce and upgrade the energy sector in the Eastern Mediterranean, notwithstanding the political disputes. Lastly, it could provide substantial benefits and new investments in domains, like energy, whereby economic profits can generate incentives for cooperation and not friction (Zemach, 2016).

6.5. Cyprus within the enhanced regional cooperation

As discussed extensively in chapter 4, regional cooperation, through the mechanisms of multilateral partnership (i. e. trilaterals, quadrilaterals etc.), acting as ‘communication channels’ for an enhanced dialogue and as a basis to develop synergies in areas, such as energy, economy, security, commerce, culture, education and others, is a priority of the Cypriot foreign policy. Today more than ever, due to the global challenges, including the pandemic, climate change, cybercrime, extremism etc. opportunities for enhanced cooperation, at both regional and international level, are endless. Especially, some pandemic-related challenges, such as supply chain disruptions, inflation pressures and shortage of workers etc., need to be addressed. At this critical juncture Cyprus in collaboration with its allies in the region, must invent new formulas and frameworks of cooperation so as to confront effectively all emerging challenges and shield the general welfare. In this regard, Cyprus has prepared a national recovery and resilience plan, encompassing approximately 133 reforms and investments, the majority of which is devoted to green (and digital) transition (Parikiaki, 2021).

This national plan is consistent with ‘Vision 2035’ strategy, namely the long-term Cypriot strategy for a sustainable growth model, aiming at empowering the economic competitiveness and upgrading the potential for sustainability (Parikiaki, 2021).

In the post- pandemic world, Cyprus in partnership with like –minded states is enabling this cooperation to flourish in sectors, like trade, health-care, technology, climate change etc., acting as a facilitator, to this regional networking. To this end, Cyprus, in line with its political priorities, is instrumentalizing, lately, a cohesive economic -diplomacy strategy, as a means of enhancing this regional cooperation in business and economic terms, maximizing prosperity through value- added trade, innovation, foreign direct investments, as well as, national branding. At this point, it must be highlighted that the EU, has adopted the ‘Next Generation EU’ package, estimated to distribute 750 billion euro in loans and grants to Member States, among which Cyprus, to assist them address the economic and social impact of the pandemic and to make European economies and societies more sustainable and resilient towards any challenges and opportunities ahead (Parikiaki, 2021).

In view of the above, it becomes evident that Cyprus is committed to deepening this regional cooperation in an attempt to strengthen its ties with the states in the regional subsystem of the Eastern Mediterranean and safeguard better its national interests, especially in the energy

sector, reflective of a substantial natural wealth, capable of becoming a ‘game changer’ for the divided island (Parikiaki, 2021).

Eventually, it must be underlined that increased regional cooperation presupposes, also, resolution of EEZ- disputes, establishment of platforms- capable of settling- conflicts via negotiations, prioritization of energy integration through regional initiatives and relevant projects, implementation of geopolitical, political, regulatory frameworks and considerations as ‘foundations’ (besides commercial and economic) in the development of the energy-related planning in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean, mobilization of the energy diplomacy, as well as, resumption of the UN- led talks for a possible settlement of the Cyprus’ problem (Ellinas, 2019).

6.6. Cyprus & Energy transition

The Eastern Mediterranean gas basin has been profoundly affected, from an economic and political perspective, by the gas- discoveries, which incite frictions but also diffuse conflicts and promote enhanced regional alliances. Nonetheless, due to the regional geopolitical disputes, the full development and exportation of the natural gas has not been entirely accomplished, whilst the tremendous fluctuations in the gas and oil industry, alongside with the consequences of the pandemic on the energy sector and the economies, have ‘upturned’ the future of natural gas exploitation in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ellinas, 2019).

However, given the fact, that the natural gas is a bridge -fuel to renewables, during the energy- transition, the Eastern Mediterranean should encourage the adoption of the renewable energy, which can alleviate dependency on fossil fuels and related -imports (Ellinas, 2019).

In this context, the states of the region should make serious efforts to develop their renewable energy sources, take advantage of the available opportunities for increased energy cooperation and contribute to the EU’s energy security empowerment. The recent discoveries within the Cypriot EEZs have invigorated the island’s aspirations to draw gas and strengthened its energy profile. As expected, it comes without saying that the energy future of the Eastern Mediterranean countries rely on maximizing the development of renewables, while exploiting gas resources regionally, alongside with a future settlement of the Cyprus’ problem (Ellinas, 2019).

More specifically, Cyprus, on 16 July 2021, adopted a cohesive national strategy towards a rapid transition to green economy, in order to attain the goal of low to zero emissions by 2050. The Cypriot national strategy on energy transition, abides by the new legal framework

of the European Commission (i. e. 14/7/2021), which aspires to create the first ever climate neutral continent globally. According to the new guidelines of the revised Green Deal, Cyprus re- arranges its targets by setting a goal of 36% reduction in final energy consumption, a binding goal of 1. 1% increase in the renewable share annually (i. e. in heating and cooling), a 8% rise for the renewables, (i. e. reaching 40% from 32%), as well as, an obligatory target of 3% on the annual renovation of all public buildings and 1. 7% annual energy saving for the public buildings (Stockwatch, 2021).

In light of the above- strategy, it becomes evident that green energy transformation is a basic pillar of the Plan for Recovery and Resilience ‘Cyprus tomorrow’, which is pivotal for the implementation of the strategy. Cyprus, in other words, is interested in acquiring a green energy- profile, providing sustainability opportunities to its people, which presuppose a new productive economic model, encompassing green and environmentally neutral growth by all stakeholders so as to end the energy- isolation of the island. According to the Minister of Energy, N. Pilides, Cyprus has set a series of objectives in order to enhance its energy security and minimize its energy isolation, such as, production of cheaper and environmentally friendly electricity, green investments, new green jobs- creation, economic growth, as well as, prosperity for its citizens. In addition, the climate targets of Cyprus regarding its energy security empowerment, revolve around six axes, such as: facilitation of investments in green and circular economy, focus on research and innovation, implementation of legislative reforms, decrease of energy costs for businesses and households, encouragement of the consumers’ participation, as well as, functioning of a competitive internal, electricity and natural gas, market. To this end, various projects are expected to be constructed, including the infrastructure for LNG imports by 2022 and the Euro Asia and Euro Africa Interconnectors, signifying lifting Cyprus’ energy isolation (Stockwatch, 2021).

In addition, Cyprus places major importance on the energy storage infrastructure, as a core element of its energy transition, while determining its challenging national goals in alignment with the ‘Fit for 55’ European regulation (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

In specific, following the above- mentioned national plan, a special attention is given on storage infrastructure as an enabler of network stability in the entire region and as a facilitator of the European Green Deal. In fact, the usage of storage systems alongside with the electricity interconnectivity with Greece and with Israel could correspond to, at least, a 50% penetration of renewables in the Cypriot energy-mix by 2030 (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

While developing subsidization plans for the energy storage systems, Cyprus has requisitioned €40 million from EU funds, at a time when, Kardi Simson, the European Commissioner for Energy highlighted that Cyprus, due the peculiarity of its electricity system, needs a drastic transition to renewable energy sources in order to fulfill its goals within the framework of the Green Deal (Cyprus News Agency, 2022).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that within the framework of the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan (RSP) and with the financial support of ‘Next Generation EU’ pertaining to the European Union Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, the Cypriot Energy Minister, N. Pilides, promulgated, on 17 February 2022, post –pandemic grant -schemes worth 158 million for 2022, among which, €100 million will be allocated for businesses, €49 million for household energy upgrades and €9 million for energy upgrades for local authorities (Cyprus News Agency, 2022b).

In particular, these projects, which will receive the above- mentioned energy upgrade, include replacement of energy- intensive appliances, installation of photovoltaic panels, roof – insulation, substitution of solar water heaters, insertion of photovoltaic systems for charging electric vehicles etc. (Cyprus News Agency, 2022b).

As expected, a special reference must be made, also, to Cyprus’ efforts to fulfill the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, through an ambitious initiative of the Cypriot government, aspiring to mitigate the consequences of climate change, collectively. More specifically, this Regional Action Plan focusing on addressing the effects of climate emergency in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the Middle East, through cooperation in multiple fields (i. e. environmental, tourism, etc.) was conceived, in 2019, and during its three- years existence, thirteen groups have worked with 240 scientists and international organizations in the wider region, urging governments of additional states to participate in it, so as to confront the climate change impacts jointly (CNN Network, 2021b).

The Action Plan will formulate the ‘modus operandi’ for more competitive regional economies via the renewable energy sources, offering incentives for sustainable and green technologies to businesses and industries, including new job- opportunities through the green policies. In this regard, the President of Cyprus, N. Anastasiades, underscored, on 12 October 2021, that Cyprus is determined to take action, at a national level, to fulfill the objectives of this Action Plan and hoped that the EU, as well as, International Organizations will support this initiative, substantially. Besides Cyprus’ efforts to secure the targets of the Paris Agreement, the President of Cyprus reminded, also, that more than 500 million euros (i. e.

namely 41% of the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus) between 2021 and 2026 will be allocated to green transition- related investments and reforms (CNN Network, 2021b).

Based on the aforementioned, it is understandable that the region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (i. e. EMME) needs to cooperate closely in three domains in order to tackle climate change and achieve swift energy- transition: firstly, in a new zero-carbon energy sources- based system (i. e. namely solar and wind power), secondly, in climate adaptation (i. e. water –stress in urban areas or in the agricultural sector) and thirdly, in terms of economic competitiveness in a green, digital, innovation- driven economy (Christodoulou, 2021).

According to Professor, Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, ‘the regional diversity emerges as a comparative advantage’ and ‘given the different forms of zero-carbon energy, it is reasonable to interconnect the region in an integrated power grid and energy system and link the entire Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (i. e. EMME), including the EU and North Africa with an elongated green energy system (Christodoulou, 2021).

Clearly, sustainable development, instead of separating, facilitates states to overcome their divisions and peculiarities and enhances regional cooperative schemes in this sensitive regional subsystem. In view of all the above, it is obvious that a need for realism throughout the Eastern Mediterranean is a precondition for any energy- related, positive development (Roberts, 2016).

Starting with the regional natural gas, whether deriving from Cyprus or from other states, like Israel or Egypt, it will have to secure that it will be price- competitive in the European markets. Cyprus should implement a cohesive energy strategy and balance short with long term energy- priorities. Undoubtedly, Cyprus must tackle the commercial challenges related with its gas- reserves and assess the available monetization pathways, within a strict timeline so as not to miss the export opportunities. As seen, a settlement of the Cyprus’ problem could facilitate Cyprus to manage its natural wealth through best practices. In such a geopolitically volatile region, it must be highlighted that gas- investments will be attracted only if commercial viability is guaranteed, alongside with the political determination of the regional states. Energy- cooperation, through enhanced alliances, as analyzed previously, is a sine qua non for enjoying political, economic and other benefits, as well as, for overcoming tensions and frictions.

In conclusion, given the peculiarities of the Eastern Mediterranean, combined with the constantly changing gas- dynamics, it becomes apparent that pragmatism and realism should be implemented in the gas- planning of the entire region, if it is to succeed (Roberts, 2016).

However, it must be underscored, also, that the current, post- pandemic energy crisis is reviving the interest in the unexplored gas fields of the Eastern Mediterranean and alongside the increase of the gas prices, since the beginning of the year, the economic and geopolitical value of these deposits has been invigorated, while Europe still learns- by paying dearly- what it means to be highly dependent on Russia.

Last but not least, the US restraint strategy, the Turkish revisionism, as well as, enhanced regional cooperative frameworks in the Eastern Mediterranean are factors, which have co- shaped a new regional landscape. In the post- pandemic era, the Eastern Mediterranean, likely, will be met with greater instability and major challenges, since, so far, the hydrocarbons have not acted as catalysts for regional peace but rather as friction- points (Τζιάρρας, 2020).

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