

# The Eastern Mediterranean Triangle: Cooperation Among Regional States<sup>1,2</sup>

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## 1. Abstract

Energy security is a very comprehensive and broad issue. The definition of energy security varies according to each state and organization's goals, interests, and objectives. This study aims to show that reconciliation on a fair basis between the parties can be more profitable for energy security. In this context, it focuses on the question "what are the advantages of a fair settlement of the parties in terms of energy security?" Accordingly, it examines potential pipeline routes and the risk of jurisdiction disputes to energy security. Later, it examines the connection of the Cyprus problem with energy security and geopolitical dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean. Related to this, it also analyzes the importance of cooperation both from the point of view of the Cyprus conflict and its connections with energy security. Finally, the study emphasizes that only the agreement of the parties will not be enough to ensure energy security, but it can be achieved if this compromise is reached on a fair basis agreement.

*Keywords: Energy Security, Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus Problem, Turkey, Greece*

## 2. Introduction

Natural resources have always been an important element for civilizations. The industrial revolution that began in the 18th century triggered energy needs and global commitment to fossil fuels increased rapidly. The emerging global dependence on fossil fuels during the 20th century again created conflicts globally, while the 1973 oil crisis clearly proved the political value of energy, in particular, giving rise to today's perception of energy security. Energy security is one of the main objectives of public policy and has been constantly shaped by policy makers. The concept of energy security based on the industrialization of societies, has a traditional expression, which varies according to energy fuels and services' safety perspective (Giannakopoulos, A. 2016).

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Energy is one of the most important parameters of our era. The basic parameters of energy security are access to economical, sustainable, and clean energy sources in a short time. While there is a security dimension through these parameters, this is also valid over resource sharing. The extent of the sharing of energy resources is the area where fundamental disputes arise. However, it is very difficult to draw a clear portrait of energy security in resource sharing. Even more it is difficult to predict whether energy reserves in disputed regions with uncertain legal sovereignty rights will inherently lead to resource wars or energy-based cooperation.

Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus<sup>4</sup> import almost all of their energy needs. In this respect, Eastern Mediterranean energy resources, which were discovered at a time when actors needed alternative hydrocarbon resources in serious proportions, are of great importance. These resources have become more of an element of conflict than an opportunity for cooperation in the regions where they are located in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition to its own value as a resource, the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean also serve to achieve energy independence and sovereignty. Beyond the regional actors, the EU is also involved in the region through the member states of Greece and Cyprus. Besides, Eastern Mediterranean gas might be highly important in diversifying the EU's energy needs (Aridemir, H. – Allı, Ç. 2019).

As a result of these complex dynamics, disputes are developing in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and the Greece-Cyprus and hence the EU. In this study, the benefits of co-operation rather than a dispute of parties will be mentioned and the contributions of both the region and the EU to energy security will be revealed.

### 3. Eastern Mediterranean and Energy Security

Energy security is clarified across three components by the World Energy Council. These three components are classified as accession to energy (accessibility), a plenitude of energy and perpetual supply (availability), and reasonable energy prices (acceptability) (Özdemir, V. 2017).

Furthermore, the International Energy Agency (IEA) defines energy security as a capacity of being able to access energy at affordable prices without interruption. Based on this definition, it does not seem correct to infer that the concept of energy security directly means abundance in energy. In fact, in addition to the abundance of energy, its sustainability, cost and uninterrupted supplies are also crucial factors. The Eastern Mediterranean region is polarized with a focus on pro-Turkey and pro-Greece arguments. The main point of the parties' polarization appears to be their uncompromising policy (Ünal, M. C. 2015).

Considering that the Eastern Mediterranean region attracts attention due to its rich natural gas resources, it is necessary to mention the importance of natural gas as an energy source. Natural gas is currently the third most important energy source after oil and coal and is rapidly gaining importance in global energy markets. According to the estimates of the IEA natural gas will surpass coal over the upcoming years and become the second most important energy source in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> In the remaining part of the study, since the Greek Cypriots are recognized as Cyprus in the UN, the Greek Cypriots will be mentioned as Cyprus.

By 2050, gas is expected to reach number one and surpass oil (Giannakopoulos, A. 2016). However, it must be exclusively noted that there is a need for green energy to battle climate change, water, and food shortages in the long term. This situation may bring new geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean in the future and increase the importance of regional and national energy security (Kacziba, P. 2020). Although the need for green energy in the long term will exceed the natural gas requirements, sustainable gas supply security will become important in the medium-term. Therefore, the parties are in a serious struggle to diversify their natural gas needs in the medium-term.

As for Turkey, the country's energy sources are not sufficient, and it is facing increasing demand for energy to support its economic growth and development with its growing population. The continuous increase of energy demand is supported by diplomatic ways to achieve import diversification. The natural gas issue is also important for diversification, due to an import dependency rate of over 99% (Peker, H. S. – Oktay, K. Ö. – Şensoy, Y. 2019). On the other hand, Greece's situation is not very different from Turkey. Greece supplies all its gas needs as imported (Liaggou, C. 2015). The dependence of both countries on natural gas is high and, in this respect, they would like to diversify their imports. Therefore, gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean are very important for expanding their energy needs (Kacziba, P. 2021).

Moreover, gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean are also essential to the EU's energy policies. Natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean represents a factor in the diversification of the energy needs of Europe. Although it is not the only solution, it is very useful in terms of diversifying it with other alternatives. It is a known fact that EU countries are largely dependent on Russia and Norway, except for few energy security projects developed with Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan (Kanter, J. 2016). Nonetheless, the amount of natural gas that Norway has is decreasing dramatically. In addition, the EU countries are trying to diversify their natural gas import sources due to the natural gas crisis between Ukraine and Russia. Therefore, Eastern Mediterranean gas resources attract attention due to their potentials to become a complementary resource (Şeker, B. Ş. 2018).

In terms of strengthening the energy supply security of the EU, the Eastern Mediterranean stands out as one of the most important regions in terms of both supplier and search for new resources. To achieve these goals, however, the right choices based on economic-technical criteria and geopolitical principles are required (Şeker, B. Ş. 2018). Thus, in the principle of energy security, it is very important how the gas will be transferred to Europe. In this context, the possibilities in the transportation of natural gas considered the first option, Israel, Lebanon, and gas deposits in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone would be directed to Turkey, through the construction of a submarine pipeline (Baker, P. 2017). The second option, in case of the Cyprus issue is resolved, is to transport the gas through Cyprus and establish a combination between onshore and offshore pipelines. The third option is to direct Israeli and Cypriot gas to Egypt and to liquefy it in two natural gas liquefaction terminals currently operating under capacity and transport to the markets by ships. Although this option provides great flexibility in reaching the final destinations, it increases the cost even in the long term (Şeker, B. Ş. 2018). The fourth option is the construction of the Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas Pipeline. This pipeline would connect the Eastern

Mediterranean natural gas fields to Greece and from there to Italy and Europe. This project is considered to be the option with the highest cost due to the long distance, high depth and harsh sea conditions (MFA of Italy, 2016). The fifth option which was suggested by Egypt, to completely avoid Cyprus and import Egyptian and Israeli gas through offshore and onshore territories to Greece, leaving out the problematic and disputed areas of Cyprus. The sixth option is to create a regional gas market. According to experts, this the most viable option, as the Eastern Mediterranean resources are expensive to drill and exploit, and Europe is way too far. Therefore, according to the sixth version, the most viable use of regional gas is national and regional consumption which would provide relatively cheap energy resources to regional countries. Notwithstanding in Europe, Eastern Mediterranean gas would be too expensive due to exploitation and transportation costs, economically it cannot compete with Russian gas (Kacziba, P. 2013a).

#### **4. The EastMed Pipeline Project**

The EastMed project has been signed by the EU and is the closest project to implement among other alternatives. Therefore, emphasis on this project seems important to better comprehend the concept of energy security.

The EastMed Project fulfills the necessary criteria and is deemed as a Common Interest Project by the EU, and it is supported on terms such as “low cost, fast planning, guaranteed permission, open to investors” (European Commission, 2017). In this context, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Israel, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus in December 2017 for the realization of the project (Geropoulos, K. 2017). However, the cost of the project is considered to be one of the negative aspects of the plan (Şeker, B. Ş. 2018).

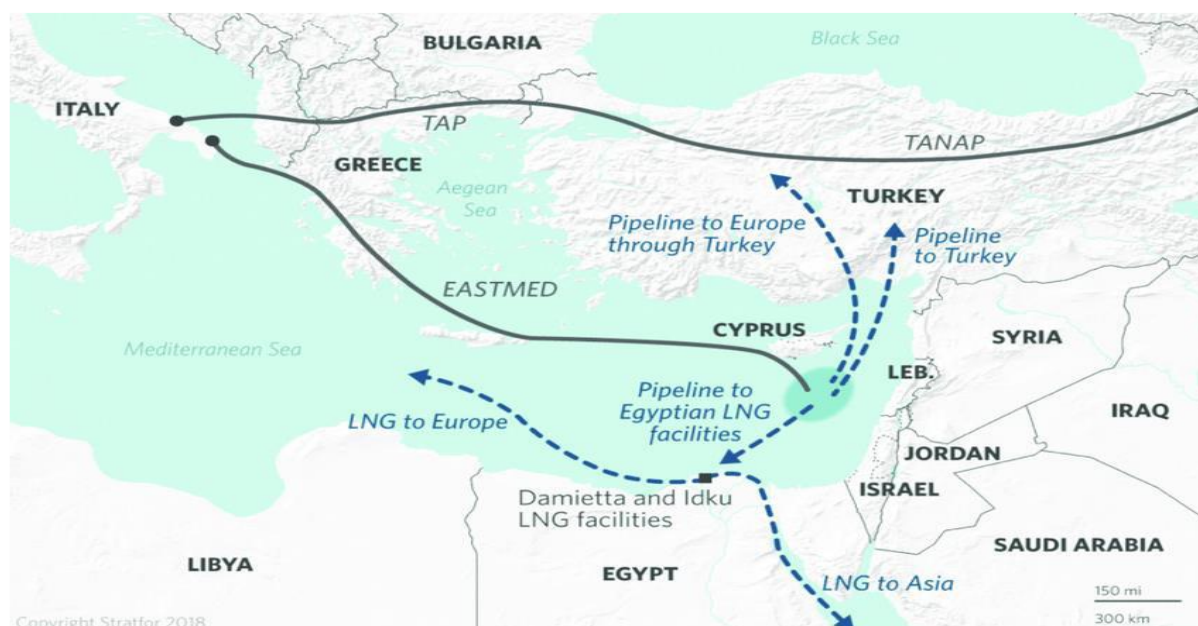
The EastMed Project would provide the transportation of 8-16 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year from the Mediterranean to Europe via Greece through a 2000 km long pipeline that passes 2000 meters below the sea at some points. It is claimed that its construction costs would reach around 6 billion euros. In addition, it is quite difficult to ensure the sustainability of such a long and deep pipeline, a small mistake would cost millions of euros. Nevertheless, Greece and Cyprus reiterate their support for the EastMed project on several occasions. However, the fact that the final price is about two times of the Russian gas reduces the support for this project (Zahr, A. 2017). Setting up liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals is another option and although still very expensive, it is seen as a cheaper alternative to the EastMed project (Kacziba, P. 2013b). In this sense, Egyptian administration provides support for the LNG project as an alternative. However, both the concerns about the cost and the concerns of Israel's dependence on Egypt for exports and the prominence of Egypt as a center of attraction for natural gas in the region caused the applicability of the plan to be questioned politically (Şeker, B. Ş. 2018).

In addition to the cost of the EastMed project, other issues also jeopardise energy security principles, as the proposed pipeline route would also cross areas that Turkey considers its own continental shelf. Therefore, it is stated by the Turkish authorities that the EastMed Pipeline Project violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Günay, D. 2020).

Although Article 79 (1) of the UNCLOS on the freedom of use in the continental shelf declares that all states are authorized to lay submarine cables and pipelines on the continental shelf, Article 79 (3) indicates that the development of such pipelines is necessarily subject to the permission of the coastal states (UN, 1994). Furthermore, the passage of the pipeline and the provision of independent oil exploration activities under Turkey's proclaimed continental shelf in the region could cause a security issue. This situation poses a direct threat to energy security and undermines the EU's original objective of rapid and uninterrupted supplies, as it could lead to conflict between the parties. In addition, when the project's cost is added, a pipeline through Turkey may seem more economical. In this context, reconciliation of the parties should be a vital goal to achieve, as both Turkey and Greece will be a factor increasing the EU's energy security.

The crucial issue is that the pipeline plan is incompatible with Turkey's declared continental shelf. This situation goes against the energy protection principle, and it could lead to a misunderstanding between the parties. Furthermore, when the project's costs are factored in, a pipeline through Turkey seems more cost-effective. In this sense, the parties' reconciliation will be a factor that increases energy security.

As Turkey is an energy transit country and has pipelines, it has the potential to transport both oils and gas from the Middle East to Europe, which is received by coastal states. In the equation that Turkey is not a party to the energy logistics, the construction cost of the LNG plant and Israel's concerns about Egypt appears to an obstacle (Peker, H. S. – Oktay, K. Ö. – Şensoy, Y. 2019 – Şeker, B. Ş. 2018). Figure 1 illustrates the alternative routes of Eastern Mediterranean gas.



**Figure 1. Possible Eastern Mediterranean Gas Routes**

**Source: Peker, H. S. – Oktay, K. Ö. – Şensoy, Y. 2019**

Consequently, the lack of international coordination and negotiations, rather than hydrocarbon supplies, is the aspect that causes instability and, as a result, energy security problems for countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the absence of such options, all countries in the region will face a dispute over hydrocarbon deposits (Peker, H. S. – Oktay, K. Ö. – Şensoy, Y. 2019).

When the main point of the polarization in the region considered to be pro-Greece-Cyprus and pro-Turkey, reconciliation would provide cheaper and safer gas supplies. In this regard, the parties should not try to pair off the concept of “plenty of gas” in their foreign policy strategies but rather recognize that collaboration would be more efficient if sensible measures are taken.

## 5. The Cyprus Question

The parties’ continuing uncompromising policies harm the solution of the Cyprus Question. In this regard, the unresolved Cyprus problem harm the energy security of the island and therefore the energy security principle of the region and the EU. Accordingly, the agreement of the parties on the Cyprus issue will make significant contributions to energy security.

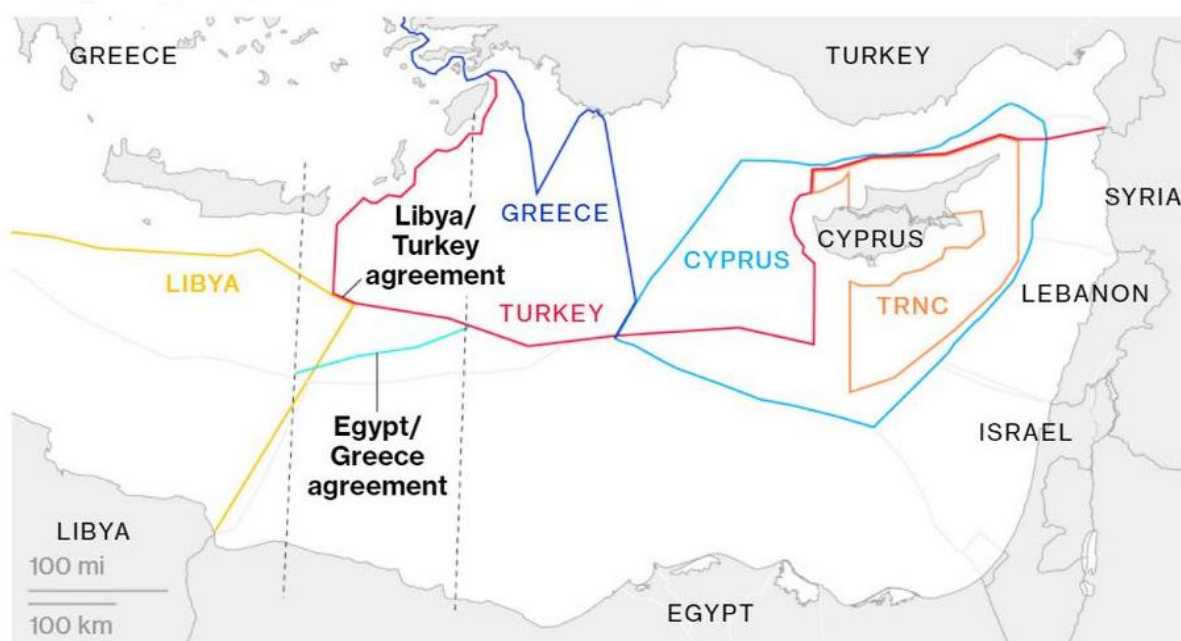
The decisions and the agreements that are taken by Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)<sup>5</sup> on the island are not recognized by the Republic of Cyprus. Likewise, Turkey has consistently stated that the search efforts carried out by the Republic of Cyprus around the island have no legal basis. For this reason, TRNC and Turkey reacted to the natural gas and oil exploration activities carried out by Greek Cypriots. In 2011, the Nicosia continued its gas exploration efforts unabated and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was Prime Minister at the time, and TRNC President Derviş Eroğlu signed the limitation agreements in reaction to oil exploration

<sup>5</sup> Turkish Cypriots are referred to as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a de-facto republic.



efforts of Cyprus. Derviş Eroğlu declared that this agreement between Turkey and the TRNC is to prevent the oil and gas explorations that the Republic of Cyprus has made and likely to do in future. Although the Greek and the Greek Cypriot side claim that there is no provision in this agreement, the TRNC, which controls the northern part of the island, claims that the agreement has a legal basis (Doğan, N. 2014). Similarly, Turkey stated that it is a violation of Turkish Cypriots' rights to conduct unilateral research in the exclusive economic zones of Cyprus (Örnek, S. – Mızrak, B. 2016). Turkey and the TRNC went to an agreement between themselves to license some areas that the Republic of Cyprus had previously unilaterally declared, and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation began to investigate for the first time with research vessel named as Piri Reis. Yet, due to Piri Reis' lack of capacity to conduct these surveys, a Norwegian ship was leased. However, seismic surveys in the Eastern Mediterranean region were initiated in partnership with Turkey and the TRNC. Turkish ships also assisted the chartered research vessels during their seismic surveys (Örnek, S. – Mızrak, B. 2016).

As the TRNC and Turkey expanded their field of action in the region, Cyprus declared that it withdraws from ongoing negotiations with the TRNC. In 2014, the EU declared that Turkey's seismic surveys in the Eastern Mediterranean Region violated the rights of Cyprus and were considered an intervention in its exclusive economic zones. In addition, it has expressed that Turkey must immediately withdraw from gas exploration, otherwise, Turkey-EU relations have a breakdown (Örnek, S. – Mızrak, B. 2016).



**Figure 2. Competing claims over the Eastern Mediterranean**

Source: Hacaoglu, S. – Tugwell, P. 2020

As can be observed on the map, the exclusive economic zone areas of the states are intertwined with each other. In this respect, uncompromising policies they apply to each other are an element that further increases the commotion. However, cooperation of the states in the field of energy will lead the parties to a great consensus and bring about a political solution. In this context,

cooperation in the field of energy may be an instrument for the reconciliation (Kaymak, E. 2012). The parties reject the possibility of energy cooperation before amalgamation due to doubts about how to share hydrocarbon resources (Hazou, E. 2012). And the parties' suspicions cannot be removed without a solution to cover the entire island.

The international unrecognized status of Northern Cyprus, on the other hand, makes unclear how the north of the island will benefit from hydrocarbon resources, and without a solution, it seems difficult to prove this situation (Lakes, G. 2012). Failure to eliminate the possibility of cooperation would be a success for the parties, as working together is a situation that benefits everyone, while a possible failure shows that no party can fully benefit from the riches that will arise (Collinsworth, D. A. 2012).

In this context, the uncompromising policies of the parties complicate the consensus in the field of energy and also jeopardize the future of the Cyprus negotiations, which began in May 2015 and ended in failure in July 2017. The reason for the failure of the Cyprus negotiations is the single-sided steps taken by both sides on the island and other actors involved in the process because they have the basis to defend their own legal positions, and this indicates that the parties are not planning a common future together and have trust issues with each other (Collinsworth, D. A. 2012).

All states in the Eastern Mediterranean share a common interest to become an energy hub for the region and Europe. For this, regional actors should seek stability and cooperation among themselves (Collinsworth, D. A. 2012). However, both the uncertainty on the island of Cyprus and the polarization between Turkey and Greece are damaging this. Therefore, it is directly and indirectly affected by this conflict in the EU (Lakes, G. 2012).

Consequently, minor crises between Greece-Cyprus and the TRNC-Turkey; also, negatively affect Turkey-EU relations. Therefore, these problems on the island of Cyprus are also a problem for the states of the region. When the island of Cyprus is generally considered; in particular, the issue of energy security is very important for the region. The situation, which can be resolved in cooperation with the parties, complicates the situation because of the uncompromising policies of the parties. The energy security of the Eastern Mediterranean Region will be ensured primarily by resolving the hostile situation on the island of Cyprus and as a result of the meeting of a common denominator on the island. In other words, instead of pursuing uncompromising attitudes, the parties adopting the principle of equal sharing on the island of Cyprus will contribute to the energy security of both the region and Europe. Moreover, the agreement of the parties will also promote to the resolution of the Cyprus issue and resolving the issue will ensure that energy is removed more safely and then transferred to Europe.

## **6. Equitable Solutions Based on the Law of the Sea Principles**

The goal of reaching an equitable solution when creating the delimitation of a marine area first appeared in the Truman Declaration in 1945 and was confirmed in both International Court of Justice (ICJ) decisions and international arbitration tribunals (UN, 2000). Today, it has also taken its place as an important institution in ensuring distributor justice, as it requires the consideration



of all data aimed at achieving a fair outcome in every concrete case related to the delimitation of maritime jurisdictions such as topography, geographical, economic data, life interests of states, historical rights (Topsoy, F. 2013).

Based on the equitable principles, it performs mediate duties throughout the delimitation process rather than providing precise concrete criteria in the limitation process. It is necessary to see fairness in limiting not as a method, but as a goal that must be achieved. The equitable principles in the way of achieving the goal are a flexible element that can adapt to every event, and guide in a consistent and predictable manner (Gökalp, İ. 2008).

In order for the parties to work in mutual cooperation, they must first reach an agreement on disputed areas. Tensions between the EU and Turkey have decreased as Turkey has withdrawn its ships from disputed areas. Accordingly, the EU has shelved sanctions resolutions against Turkey, and negotiations have entered between Turkey and Greece. As Josep Borrell Fontelles stated who is the High Representative of the EU, Turkey is an important EU neighbor and also the solution of the disputed areas should be fair to all and in accordance with the international law (TRT World, 2021).

In this regard, it can be mentioned that equitable solution is required for everyone. Because equal sharing will bring cooperation. On the other hand, in a situation where one side gains more, the situation will become more complicated. Just-right solutions should be produced to please each of the states that have made agreements for permanent solutions in international relations, and these solutions should be adopted by mutual consent. Agreements containing disproportionate means or shares will not be adopted by the parties; when the balance of power changes, it will come up again. The Treaty of Sevres, which was never implemented, is one of the best examples of this situation (Montgomery, A. 1972).

This issue requires a very deep study. First of all, the status of the islands, islets, and island countries should be evaluated within themselves. In addition, each case is unique and has its own characteristics. In general, it is not possible for either the mainland or the islands to take full effect when looking at the past decisions taken by international arbitration courts and the ICJ. In this regard, both sides must make concessions and abandon their uncompromising attitudes.

## 7. Conclusion

In the Eastern Mediterranean, it is seen that states are polarized. These poles can be stated as Turkey-based and Greece-Cyprus-based. Moreover, the EU entered the picture because Greece and the Cyprus are members of the EU and because Eastern Mediterranean gas can diversify the EU energy needs. In this context, the Eastern Mediterranean problem also negatively affects Turkey and the EU relations.

As can be understood from the study, the principle of energy security is not to dominate all energy resources at all costs. Nevertheless, in the Eastern Mediterranean, the parties are in conflict with each other to have more space, hence more natural gas. But having more space will

not bring more natural gas, but it also brings conflict. Furthermore, even if having more space brings relatively more gains, this will result in other opportunities being missed.

Greece and the Republic of Cyprus plan to transport Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe with the EastMed project. However, this project is very costly. On the other hand, the transportation of Eastern Mediterranean gas through Turkey can be met at a much more affordable cost, at the same time, the transportation of natural gas through Turkey rather than the disputed waters seems to be a more reliable option. At this point, mutual cooperation comes to the forefront. Because mutual cooperation is more beneficial for both coastal states and the EU.

In addition, the Cyprus problem has a close relationship with energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The possible energy union in the Eastern Mediterranean will support the solution of the Cyprus Problem and the possible solution of the Cyprus Problem will support energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Since, due to the inability to solve the Cyprus Question, the possibility of transferring from the Island of Cyprus to Turkey, which is expressed as the most profitable route for the rapprochement of the parties and the commercialization of gas, is also becoming more difficult (Gürel, A. – Mullen, F. – Tzimitras, H. 2013). It is also stated that such a situation would mean the missing of the opportunity that arises with hydrocarbon resources in the region (Bryza, M. J. 2013). The failure to solve the Cyprus Problem is closely related to the uncompromising attitudes of the states. As mentioned before, the cooperation of states in the field of energy will both increase energy security and contribute to the solution of the Cyprus Problem.

Finally, gas or other hydrocarbon resources that will remain on a local scale cannot be expected to have any benefit for the development of the region. For this, coastal countries must act together (Gürel, A. – Le Cornu, L. 2013).

In conclusion, the principle of “abundance in energy” defined at the beginning of the study should not be reconciled with the principle of “uncompromising attitude” of the parties and should focus on the affordable and sustainable part of energy. As stated in this study, fair, safe sharing and mutual cooperation of energy will be an element that increases the energy security of both the region and Europe.

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