

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
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Institute of Political Studies
Department of Geopolitical Studies

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Miloš Dangubić

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**Effects of hydrocarbon discoveries on stability of the
Eastern Mediterranean**

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Miloš Dangubić
Study programme: Geopolitical Studies
Supervisor: doc. Martin Riegl, Ph.D.
Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 28.07.2024.

Miloš Dangubić

References

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Abstract

This research paper deals with the effects of the recently discovered hydrocarbon resources on the stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. The goal of this research is to find out what happens when new energy resources are discovered in the already unstable region. The Regional Security Complex Theory, formed by members of the Copenhagen School, is applied on the Eastern Mediterranean in order to get the framework for analysis of the effects of hydrocarbon findings on bilateral and trilateral relations between the countries in the region. The involvement of the Great Powers in the energy issues in the region is also presented in the paper. The research focuses on countries most relevant for the hydrocarbon exploration and trade, which are Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Israel and Egypt. Their historical relations are presented, and how hydrocarbon findings affected their relations is examined. Using qualitative analysis of actors' behaviour, this research showed that energy resources have amplifying effect on the relations; it will improve already amicable relationships, and it will increase conflicts and disputes among unfriendly countries.

Keywords

Gas, Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, conflict

Klíčová slova

plyn, východní Středomoří, Kypr, Řecko, Turecko, spor

Title

Effects of hydrocarbon discoveries on stability of the Eastern Mediterranean

Název práce

Vliv nových nalezišť ropy a zemního plynu na stabilitu východního Středomoří

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1. Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean region historically has been a region filled with many conflicts due to its strategic location, mixture of cultures, and presence of great powers. In current times, the situation is not much different. All these factors are still present, thus making the Eastern Mediterranean a particularly intriguing case to analyze. The recent discovery of the undersea hydrocarbon resources presented itself as another point of contention among the countries in the region. The main goal of this research is to determine what will happen when new energy resources are introduced to the already volatile region of the Eastern Mediterranean. Among the current conflicts in the region, such as the Cyprus problem, Greece-Turkey rivalry and many maritime delimitation disputes, stand out from the others as the most influential for the hydrocarbon exploration and trade.

Energy resources have always played an important role in region-building and regional development. Over the course of history, numerous wars have been fought over the control of energy resources, although there are also many examples where energy resources brought prosperity to a region. Proponents of the realist view of International Relations claim that conflicts over energy resources are more likely to occur, while according to the liberal view, economic incentives of energy trade will lead towards increased cooperation in the region.

Due to the nature of extracting and transporting undersea hydrocarbon resources, a stable geopolitical situation in the region is needed in order to materialize on their discovery. This aspect of hydrocarbon exploration and trade inherently causes it to be a political issue as well, thus making this topic a viable choice for political science research.

1.1.Thesis outline

As it was mentioned in the introduction, this thesis deals with the question of how newly found energy sources can affect the security dynamics in any given region. Based on this discussion, the research question of the thesis is formed: “How new hydrocarbon findings affect regional stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean?”. From this research question, two main hypotheses are derived:

1. Hydrocarbon findings will lead to more cooperation in the region
2. Hydrocarbon findings will lead to more conflicts in the region

Further details on the hypotheses and their testing methods will be provided in the Methodology part of this chapter.

Since the regions consist of several countries, and region is in itself an international environment, the IR theoretical approach is needed to examine the topic of the thesis. The Regional Security Complex Theory, formed by the Copenhagen School, will be utilized in order to answer the main research question of the thesis. This theory was chosen because it provides a comprehensive framework for examination of regions and relationships between different countries.

In the first chapter of this thesis the theoretical background will be provided. The discussion will expand on the Regional Security Complex Theory, covering its concepts, advantages, and limitations. Reasons behind the decision to use it for this research will be included as well. Also In this chapter, it will be discussed whether the Eastern Mediterranean can be considered a distinctive region. In the next chapter, the general information about the Eastern Mediterranean, and countries inhabiting it, will be provided, as well as the information

regarding the hydrocarbon findings in the region. The following chapter will deal with intraregional relationships between several countries, and it will lay out patterns of amity and enmity in the region. Influence of Great powers in the Eastern Mediterranean and their involvement in energy related affairs will be the topic of the subsequent chapter. Finally, in the last chapter, the effect of hydrocarbon findings on relations between the countries in the region will be investigated and the analysis of the research's findings will be presented.

1.2.Methodology

To answer the main research question of this thesis, I will perform qualitative analysis of relevant actors' behavior, policies, and official statements. To test the hypotheses of this research, the actions of the actors will need to be categorized as either promoting cooperation or leading to conflict.

Cooperation will include all successful bilateral and trilateral agreements regarding the hydrocarbon exploration and trade, creation of international organizations that deals with joint endeavors in relation to the hydrocarbons. Official statements that emphasize the significance of shared benefits from hydrocarbon exploration will also be taken into account.

On the other side, failure to solve maritime and other disputes concerning hydrocarbon exploration will be considered as actions leading towards more conflict in the region. Any possible armed confrontation, increase in number of military drills adjacent to the location of hydrocarbon reserves, heated and divisive rhetoric from government officials, when talking about hydrocarbon exploration and trade, will be considered as part of this category as well.

2. Theoretical background

In this chapter the theoretical background on which this research is based will be presented in order to lay the foundation for the following chapters of the thesis. To answer the question of the effect of new hydrocarbon findings on regional stability and security of the Eastern Mediterranean, the concepts of security and regions must be defined. To define these concepts, as discussed in previous chapters, this thesis will use the Copenhagen School's theories, specifically their Securitization Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory. The main representatives of the Copenhagen School are Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, in whose works the aforementioned theories were developed.

2.1. Regional Security Complex Theory (RCST)

RCST is a theory that analyzes the security dynamics within specific geographic regions. Buzan first developed theory in the book "People, States and Fear", and further expanded it in his following works, written alongside his colleagues Wæver and de Wilde. This theoretical framework differs from traditional global or national security viewpoints by focusing on the regional level and the complicated web of relationships between governments within a limited geographical area. While Buzan initially defined security complexes in terms of security links among the regional countries that comprised the complex¹, the focus switched to securitization relations in later works².

RSCs are defined as groups of states within a specific geographical region that share common security concerns and are closely interconnected through diplomatic, economic,

¹ Buzan, 1983

² Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

political, and military interactions. More precisely, Buzan, Wæver and Wilde describe RSCs as: “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization or both, are so interlinked that their security problems cannot be reasonably analyzed or resolved apart from one another”.³

According to the members of the Copenhagen school, **enmity** and **amity** relations among the states, rather than the balance of power, are the main components of security complexes.⁴ The term amity describes the cooperative relationships and partnerships that develop within a certain security complex between states that have similar security interests. Establishing cooperative ties is crucial for tackling common issues and promoting stability in the region. On the contrary, enmity involves adversarial relationships and any disputes that could emerge between states that are part of the same complex. Enmities can arise due to resource competition, historical disputes, or conflicting strategic goals, adding a complex and dynamic element to the dynamics of regional security. The concepts of amity and enmity are essential for understanding region as a whole, and the relationship between countries inside a region. They play a pivotal role in the RCST and its application.

³ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

⁴ Ibid.

One of the main functions of RCST is establishing the framework for the empirical studying of regional security. RCST specifies four levels of analysis and how to establish connections between them.⁵ The four levels of analysis are:⁶

1. Domestic – deals with domestically generated vulnerabilities in the states of the region. The vulnerability of a state determines the type of security concerns it faces, which can potentially classify another state or group of states as a structural threat, even if they do not have any hostile intents.
2. Interstate relations – these relations create regions itself
3. Interactions between regions – this level is not as important as the others, since RSC is defined by interactions of units inside of the complex. Nevertheless, in cases where there are major changes in the patterns of security interdependence, this level of analysis becomes more important.
4. Global powers in the region - interaction between global and regional security structures.

Buzan defined the essential structure of RSC, that consists of four variables, that are used for monitoring the changes in the composition of the RSCs. These four variables are: boundary, anarchic structure, polarity, and social construction.⁷ Boundary sets apart RSC and its neighbors; Anarchic structure requires that RSC consists of two or more independent units; Polarity deals with how power is distributed among the units; Social construction which is concerned with the patterns of amity and enmity among the units.⁸ These four variables serve

⁵ Buzan & Wæver, 2003

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Buzan & Wæver, 2003

⁸ Ibid.

as a benchmark for examining how different events could affect the structure and inter-state relations inside of a RSC.

It is also important to note that a country can be part of only one RSC, although the exception to this rule is called an “insulator” state. These states, as defined by Buzan, “are standing between regional security complexes and defining a location where larger regional security dynamics stand back-to-back.”⁹

By utilizing RCST and its concepts, a comprehensive view of security dynamics in a region is achieved, highlighting the interactions between neighboring states and the influence of outside powers in the region. Additionally, RCST allows for a nuanced understanding of regional security dynamics by emphasizing geographical proximity and historical context. Since security and securitization are one of the key components of the RCST, the next part of this chapter will further define these concepts.

2.2. Security and securitization

The Copenhagen School of thought represents the constructivist perspective to International Relations, and it has broader approach to the security when compared with traditional views on security. The realist view, prominent during the Cold War era, examined security solely through the prism of power, and it was mostly focused on the military threats.¹⁰ Barry Buzan, in the book “People, States and Fear” shows that the realist concept of security was too narrow and that his objective was to expand on the notion of security and to offer a

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Buzan, 1983

“broader framework of security”¹¹ According to the traditionalist military-political understanding, the security is about survival, and it occurs when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object.¹² Referent object is usually state (including government, territory, and society), but members of Copenhagen School argue that other things can be considered as a referent objects, such as national sovereignty, national economies, or collective identities.¹³

Buzan states that security is “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics”.¹⁴ Through examining this definition of the security, the concept of “securitization” could be understood the best. Securitization, the term originated by Ole Wæver, is the process of framing some issue as an existential threat to the state or any other referent object, moving it above politics. Since the Copenhagen School belongs to the constructivist school of thought, for them security is a social construct, and according to Wæver elites decide (or construct) what is a security problem, meaning that Copenhagen School put emphasis on the presentation of some issue as an existential threat.¹⁵ Furthermore, Buzan frames securitization as an extreme version of politicization; on the spectrum of importance of public issues, Buzan establishes three categories: non-politicized (issue is not part of public debate), politicized (issue is part of the public policy, requiring government’s decision), and securitized (issue is presented as existential threat, justifying emergency measures and actions outside the normal bounds of political

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Wæver, 1995

procedure).¹⁶ From these definitions, we can conclude that, for Copenhagen School, security is based on the idea of the speech act and public discourse.¹⁷

Besides broadening the things that could be considered as a referent object in security, Buzan and his colleagues also established new security sectors. Contrary to the realists' view on security, which examined security exclusively through the military-political sector, the Copenhagen School added economic, societal, and environmental sectors into the equation.¹⁸ It is important to note that those sectors are interlinked, not completely independent, and that single threat can affect multiple security sectors.¹⁹ In order to closely examine the effects that energy could have on security, we must first determine how different threats affect one or more sectors.

Military sector is the easiest one to understand in the context of the security; it stems out of relationships that involve forceful coercion, it is concerned with the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and with any military threat directed at the state. The fact that military threats most usually involve the use of force, puts them at the level of the most concerning threats for any state.²⁰

The political sector, like the military sector, is also concerned with the state as a whole, although the political threats are not as direct as the military ones. The political sector is about relationships of authority, governing status, and recognition, and it is concerned with the

¹⁶ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

¹⁷ Wæver, 1995

¹⁸ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Stone, 2009

organizational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy.²¹

The economic, societal and environmental sectors are not so straightforward in their definition as the military and political sectors, due to the nature of threats that they are examining.

The economic sector is usually concerned with the relationships of trade, production and finance, and the economic security is about the access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power.²² On the other side, due to the nature of economics itself, it is challenging to determine the scope of economic threats. As Buzan states: “the normal condition of actors in a market economy is one of risk, aggressive competition and uncertainty”²³, this insecure nature of market economy makes economic security hard to disentangle, thus the threshold of what is acceptable based on an inherent instability and what is a threat can be difficult to identify²⁴. In general, economic threats could be characterized as anything that threatens the supply of the vital resources and that threatens the normal functioning of economy. The economic sector is also a good example of how the different sectors are interconnected with each other; for example, military security of any state is dependent on economic security due to the effect of economic wellbeing of a state on its military budget.²⁵

²¹ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

²² Ibid

²³ Buzan, 1991

²⁴ Stone, 2009

²⁵ Ibid

The societal sector of security is even more difficult to define than the economical one, mostly because the similarities between societal and political security.²⁶ Nevertheless, the political security is more concerned about the organizational side of the states, systems of government, and the ideologies that give governments their legitimacy, while the societal security is dealing with collective identity, the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community.²⁷ Almost every active conflict nowadays have a societal element in its root, hence it important to acknowledge this sector when examining security on any level.²⁸

The fifth and final sector of security, according to Buzan, is the environmental sector, and there are difficulties in defining this sector as well. The environmental sector is generally about the relationship between human activity and the planetary biosphere, and it is concerned with the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend.²⁹ The environmental threats could be both natural and human-induced; natural ones include any natural catastrophe, such as volcano eruptions, earthquakes and hurricanes, while human-induced are global warming, pollution and many others.³⁰

²⁶ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Stone, 2009

²⁹ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

³⁰ Stone, 2009.

2.3. Securitization of energy

Although the Copenhagen School views energy exclusively as an economic referent object, a case could be made that energy has a much bigger and broader effect on security. Buzan thinks that energy could rarely affect sectors other than the economic due to the availability of resources and the nature of the energy market.³¹

However, in practice there are a lot of examples where energy issues have contributed to the heightened securitization in all security sectors; lack of energy resources can increase possibility of a military conflict and political instability in the country, and inefficient use of energy can be harmful for the environment.³² Gas, more so than any other type of energy, is able to affect multiple sectors due to the fact that its exploration, extraction and transportation requires long term investments and relative geopolitical stability.

Since energy has overarching effect on all sectors of security, C. Adamides and O. Christou argue that energy should be comprehensively examined, while taking into account the interconnected economic, political, and military variables as well as the processes of securitization and desecuritization that occur within these sectors.³³

The energy-related relationships between the actors could lead to the formation of the Regional Energy Security Complex. Mikko Palonkorpi stated that the Regional Energy Security Complexes are created through energy-related interactions between two or more states in a specific geographical area. This involves an energy dependency relationship among the states

³¹ Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997

³² Natorski & Surrallés, 2008

³³ Adamides & Christou, 2013

and the perception of this dependency as a security threat.³⁴ The emerging threats stemming from energy related interactions are typically more intensive between states or regions that are in close geographical proximity. The main contributing factor of this is the geopolitical and geographical nature of energy; its production, transportation, and consumption, as well as its related environmental issues, are geographically determined.

According to Jeffrey D. Wilson, securitization plays a key role in determining how any given state will behave in regard to energy. He states that governments will typically respond to security challenges by implementing economic nationalism policies when securitizing pressures from the economy, regime, and geopolitics are high.³⁵ Economic nationalism refers to governments' interventions in the economy to achieve specific political goals³⁶. Nationalistic policies can lead to energy conflicts between states by encouraging rivalry, preventing cooperation, and politicizing markets. On the other hand, governments with low securitization tendencies are more likely to implement liberal policies. These more liberal policies promote cooperative behavior by enhancing markets and facilitating collaboration for common energy goals.³⁷ From this approach it can be concluded that securitization is the foundational factor in determining whether state energy behavior aligns with the two opposing IR methods - high securitization will lead to conflictual behavior, while low securitization will promote cooperative solutions.³⁸ All these different viewpoints on the securitization of energy will be utilized in order to answer the main research question of this thesis.

³⁴ Palonkorpi, 2006

³⁵ Wilson, 2019

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

2.4. Eastern Mediterranean as a Regional Security Complex

In their works, the members of the Copenhagen school did not include Eastern Mediterranean as a distinctive region or a Regional Security Complex. Countries that form the Eastern Mediterranean RSC are included in Middle Eastern and European RSC, with Turkey being an insulator state, Although Eastern Mediterranean was not included in the original RSCs, argument could be made that Eastern Mediterranean could be looked upon as a distinctive region, at least when looking through the prism of energy related security dynamics. This part of the chapter will be a foundation for the rest of the research, by defining what makes Eastern Mediterranean a distinctive region.

According to Efraim Inbar, the Eastern Mediterranean is located east of the 20° meridian, and it consist of the littoral states Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Turkey.³⁹ In addition to these core states, there are also two unrecognized states of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Palestinian Territories. This definition of the Eastern Mediterranean and countries inhabiting it will be used in this thesis, with most of the research focus being on the states that are important for the hydrocarbons exploration and trade. Those countries are Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Israel and Egypt.

Yannis Stivachtis, in his paper titled "Eastern Mediterranean: A New Region? Theoretical Considerations", used the Regional Security Complex Theory in order to investigate if Eastern Mediterranean could be considered as a distinctive region. He claims that, when looked through more traditional security sectors, such as military and political, it is difficult to discern Eastern Mediterranean as a separate region. However, when looked through prism of

³⁹Inbar, 2015

economical sector of security, due to the security dynamics operating in the energy sector, Eastern Mediterranean have traits of a Regional Security complex.⁴⁰ He backs it up by stating that new hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have attracted new attention on their possible influence on current regional conflicts and power configurations in the region. He further adds that new hydrocarbon findings have added to the complexity of international politics in the region.⁴¹

Other authors, such as Filippos Proedrou⁴², Constantinos Adamides, Odysseas Christou⁴³, and Jean-Loup Samaan⁴⁴, put energy related security dynamics as a defining feature of Eastern Mediterranean Regional Security Complex. Adamides and Christou specifically explored energy as a referent object, in order to examine its role in securitization relations among the states in the region.

Throughout the works of aforementioned authors, it is clear that it is possible to view Eastern Mediterranean as a Regional Security Complex, and as a distinctive region. Because energy is at the core of the security dynamics in the region, this research will mostly focus on security matters that are directly connected with energy exploration and trade while applying RSCT to the Eastern Mediterranean. This means that some other security issues in the region, such as Syrian civil war and conflict in Gaza, will not be covered to such an extent.

⁴⁰ Stivachtis, 2019

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Proedrou, 2012

⁴³ Adamides & Christou, 2015

⁴⁴ Samaan, 2016

2.5.Limitations of Regional Security Complex Theory

Like any other theory, the RCST has its own limitations. Since its creation, it has received mixed reception from the academic community. One of the main points of criticism of RCST is the state-centric approach. Although Buzan and Wæver, in their later version of the theory, included referent objects different than the state, some authors, like Stefan Wolff, still claim that their theory is disregarding the influence of the non-state actors.⁴⁵ Gunhild Hoogensen stated that RCST's state-centric approach restricts the ability to investigate its own insights into regional security beyond the state.⁴⁶ The second argument he raised was that the authors concentrated too much on traditional security aspects and not enough on non-traditional security issues.⁴⁷

According to Amitav Acharya, the RSCT generally ignores the significance that regional institutions play in determining how a given complex's structure changes. Furthermore, he argues that the theory addresses the relationship between regional and global powers, the relationship between regions themselves receives less importance.⁴⁸

Andre Barrinha questioned the accuracy of RSCT in describing the emergence and definition of Great Powers. According to him, the writers left it on to the perception of other great powers to determine if a regional power becomes a great one or not.⁴⁹

Regarding the securitization theory, Matt McDonald pointed out limitation of the narrow definition of the form of the securitizing act, which places too much emphasis on speech relative

⁴⁵ Wolff, 2011

⁴⁶ Hoogensen, 2005

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Acharya, 1992

⁴⁹ Barrinha, 2013

to other forms.⁵⁰ Another point of criticism of securitization theory is the role of audiences, which according to many authors remains an underexplored area.⁵¹ According to Leonard and Kaunert, there is no criterion for determining who exactly forms the audience in practice, which means that there is no clear definition who determines if a securitizing act is effective or not.⁵²

2.6. Other relevant concepts

In order to understand the intricacies of hydrocarbon exploration, it is necessary to explain the meaning of Exclusive Economic Zones and ways of transporting natural gas.

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as defined in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is an “area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea”, extending up to 200 nautical miles “from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured”.⁵³ Among the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey and Israel did not sign the UNCLOS, and it is the source of many maritime delimitation disputes in the region.

Natural gas is usually transported by pipelines, but pipeline projects require significant financial investments, geopolitical stability, and they take many years to be completed. Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is an alternative to transportation of gas by pipelines. For production of LNG, a LNG plant is needed to liquify the gas, and after that it can be transported by vessels. The LNG terminal is also needed at the final destination, in order to return gas to its original state. Although LNG does not require long pipelines to be transported, it still needs LNG plants and terminals to be utilized.

⁵⁰ McDonald, 2008

⁵¹ Ibid

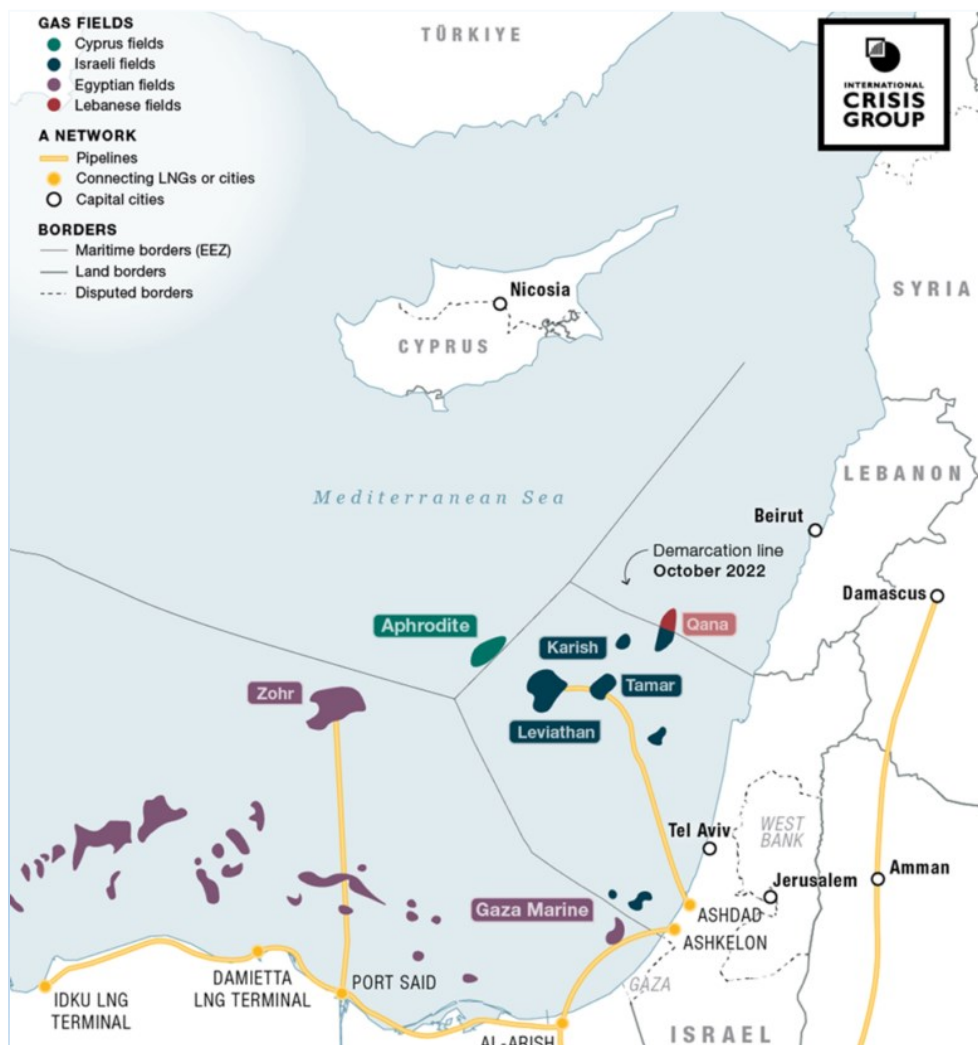
⁵² Leonard & Kaunert, 2011

⁵³ United Nations, 1982, https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

3. Hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean

The location of recent hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean, and their estimated volumes will be presented in this chapter, as well as its significance for the countries in the region.

3.1. History of gas fields discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean



Source: International Crisis Group, 2023

For many years, the Eastern Mediterranean region has been the subject of ongoing gas and oil exploration. There were several gas fields that were discovered in southern Judean desert in Israel, but they were insignificant in the volumes that they can produce. The Eastern Mediterranean saw the start of the first offshore drillings in 1969, but the 17 exploratory wells that were drilled over the following 30 years proved to be dry.⁵⁴

The discoveries that really marked the beginning of the Mediterranean gas boom were the discoveries of the Noa gas field in 1999 and Mari-b in 2000 off the coast of Israel.⁵⁵ These two gas fields were small in volumes of gas, but they provided additional motivation for further gas explorations in the region. The first significant gas fields discoveries were Tamar and Leviathan fields off the coast of Israel. Tamar was discovered in 2009 and it is estimated that it contains 300 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas, while Leviathan was discovered in 2010 and it contains 620 bcm.⁵⁶ The largest discovery to date was in 2015, when the Egypt's enormous Zohr field, which is estimated to hold 850 bcm of gas, was discovered.⁵⁷

In the recent years, most significant discoveries have been Cronos-1 and Zeus-01 in the Cypriot territorial waters, and Narges-1X of the coast of Egypt, with all three of them being discovered in 2023. Both Cronos-1 and Zeus-01 are estimated to contain around 70 bcm each, while Narges-1X is estimated to contain around 100 bcm of gas.⁵⁸

Although the Eastern Mediterranean in general is not as rich in resources as some other regions of the world, it still has a great potential. It is one of the least explored regions, and it is

⁵⁴ Nathanson & Levy, 2012

⁵⁵ Demiryol, 2020

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Connelly, 2023

estimated that Levant basin of the Eastern Mediterranean contains at least 3.5 trillion cubic meters (tcm) of gas, while Nile Delta basin is estimated to hold 6.3 tcm of gas.⁵⁹

Producing gas fields		
Country	Gas field	Estimated volume
Egypt	Zohr	850 bcm
	West Nile Delta	140 bcm
	Nour	55 bcm
	Nooros	56 bcm
	Atoll	40 bcm
	Baltim	20 bcm
Israel	Leviathan	620 bcm
	Tamar	300 bcm
	Tanin	35 bcm
	Karish	30 bcm
	Mari-B	30 bcm
	Noa	5 bcm

Source: John Bowlus, ECFR,2022

The discovery of the gas fields is just one part of the equation; So far, only Egypt and Israel are the countries in the region that managed to materialize on large hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean. Only they have begun to exploit gas fields, shown in the table above, while other countries in the region, such as Cyprus, are yet to begin extracting the gas from the fields, due to the various geopolitical and economical obstacles. Part of the reason that only Egypt and Israel managed to produce gas is that they have the least maritime disputes. Broader explanations of many obstacles that are preventing more successful utilization of hydrocarbon findings will be presented in following chapters.

Although other countries have not yet started to extract gas from the fields, the hydrocarbon findings definitely affected them. In next parts of this chapter, it will be examined

⁵⁹ Demiryol, 2020

how the hydrocarbon findings influenced countries in the region individually, while in the later chapters the effects on the bilateral and trilateral relations in the region will be presented.

3.2. Cyprus

Large-scale natural gas discovery, especially within the Aphrodite field, have helped to make Cyprus an integral player within the Eastern Mediterranean energy sector. Large multinational oil and gas companies like Total, Eni, and ExxonMobil have established mutually beneficial relationships with the Cypriot authorities as a consequence of such developments, and in hopes of extracting the Cypriot gas fields.⁶⁰

With the goal of making Cyprus an important energy center in the region, such partnerships have contributed to strengthening the nation's energy industry. These business engagements highlight the interest that the global community takes in the resource-rich areas. The hydrocarbon findings potentially position Cyprus as an integral part of the European fossil fuel supply chain, with possibility of lowering the reliance of European countries on Russian gas.⁶¹ Because of this, Cyprus has more support from its Western allies in its plans to continue gas exploration, and eventually become a gas producing country.

On the other hand, energy findings can attract negative attention as well. Since the discovery of the gas field in the Cypriot territorial waters, Turkey has ramped up its efforts in legitimizing the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and it supports it in its claim of the part of the Cypriot territorial waters.⁶² This is the main reason behind Cyprus's

⁶⁰ Čavčić, 2024

⁶¹ Nakhle, 2023

⁶² Eissler & Arasil, 2014

delay of gas extraction. Since this is the one of the most consequential disputes in the region, it will be elaborated upon in the following chapters of this research.

The hydrocarbons, without a doubt, have a potential to transform Cyprus's economy and make it less reliant on energy imports. Although Cyprus is still a long way from becoming a significant factor in the energy trade, mainly due to its geopolitical problems, there is a hope that disputes can be solved, and that it will ultimately lead towards the successful gas extraction.

3.3. Israel

Israel's energy environment has undergone drastic changes mainly due to the consequence of the recent discovery of substantial natural gas reserves within the Tamar and Leviathan fields. Israel recently became self-sustaining in gas production, and that enabled it to become an energy exporting country. Providing energy resources to neighboring countries like Egypt and Jordan is one of the main benefits of new hydrocarbon discoveries.⁶³

Israel is also in the center of many projects which, if successful, would lead towards exporting gas to the European Union. One of these projects is the proposed EastMed pipeline which aims to link Eastern Mediterranean gas to European markets.⁶⁴ Israel's energy-related endeavors have resulted in partnerships with countries such as Greece and Cyprus, thus promoting cooperation across the region.⁶⁵ These patterns demonstrate how the nation's energy assets play a critical role in both the geopolitical and economic affairs.

⁶³ Rabinovitch, 2024

⁶⁴ Mizrahi, 2023

⁶⁵ Kambas, 2023

3.4. Turkey

Turkey, due to its ambitions and its commitments to the TRNC, has substantial maritime claims throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Although there is still no discovery of gas fields in their internationally recognized territorial waters, Turkey keeps drilling in disputed waters which are generally recognized as Cypriot and Greek territorial waters.⁶⁶ Thus, Turkish assertive approach towards obtaining hydrocarbon reserves is leading towards more tensions in the region.

Ankara's determination to establish itself as a crucial energy competitor across the region has been shown via the actions of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). The drilling explorations carried out by the TPAO are often followed by the backlash from the other countries in the region⁶⁷. Obviously, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus are two countries that oppose the Turkish expansionistic actions the most.

Besides the hydrocarbon exploration, Turkey has a goal of becoming the regional energy hub, through which all energy routes will need to pass in order to reach European market.⁶⁸ Turkey already has a head start in this domain, since Russian and Azerbaijan's gas pipelines go throughout the Turkish territory. Turkish authorities do not want to miss out on chance to have Eastern Mediterranean gas pipelines going through its territory as well.⁶⁹

The biggest problem for Turkey, in achieving their goals, is that they do not have many allies in the region, and despite being in the NATO, the Western community supports more their

⁶⁶ Zeballos Rivero, 2023

⁶⁷ Skinner. 2020

⁶⁸ Novikau & Muhasilović, 2023

⁶⁹ Ibid

rivals Greece and Cyprus. Besides these problems Although it seems that Turkey is being isolated in the region, it still has some leverage in its attempts to be included in the regional energy endeavors. All these conflicts and energy-related disputes highlight the larger geopolitical struggle in which Ankara is attempting to establish itself as a significant regional power.

3.5. Greece

Since Greece is country that heavily relies on import to satisfy its energy needs, it has been relentlessly seeking new energy resources, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁰ Although gas fields have not yet been discovered in the Greek waters, there is still considerable potential for hydrocarbons to be found. It is estimated that there could be around 600 bcm of gas in the vicinity of the Greek island of Crete.⁷¹ Partnerships involving global oil companies, such as Total and ExxonMobil, are aimed at increase of the exploratory activities.

Similarly to the case of Cyprus, Greece has also enjoyed support from its Western allies, mainly from European Union and the United States. in its maritime territorial disputes and development of energy projects. Greece, similarly to Turkey, also aims to be the transit country for any possible pipelines that will send gas from Eastern Mediterranean towards the Europe.

Greece, like the other countries in the region, is counting on possible new hydrocarbon findings to transform its economy and become more energy independent.

⁷⁰ Wendt & Petropoulos

⁷¹ Koutantou, 2022

3.6.Egypt

Egypt has established its reputation as a key energy player in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the significant gas discovery, especially in the Zohr field. In addition to increasing local energy supply, these findings have accelerated Egyptian ambitions of becoming a regional energy center. In 2018, Egypt became completely self-sufficient in its gas needs, and it could focus on the export of gas.⁷² Egyptian facilities, which include LNG exporting hubs, along with its advantageous position allow it to function as an important role in exporting to marketplaces in the Middle East and Europe. Egyptian energy resources are being developed owing to the mutually beneficial relationships Cairo has formed with international oil giants like BP, Shell, and Eni.⁷³

Egypt has probably profited more from hydrocarbon findings, than any other country in the region, except Israel. Besides obvious financial gains from exporting the gas, Egypt also secured 7.4 billion euros worth aid package from EU in 2024, mainly due to its energy potential.⁷⁴ This shows that EU views Egypt as an important piece for its energy sector. Egypt is the prime example of how hydrocarbons can greatly benefit a country. Hydrocarbons provided great value for Egypt, both for its domestic energy needs, and as a new revenue stream for its economy.

⁷² Soliman, 2022

⁷³ Bowlus, 2020

⁷⁴ Magdy, 2024

4. Patterns of Amity and Enmity in the Eastern Mediterranean

Before examining the effects of new hydrocarbons findings on the bilateral and trilateral relationship between countries in the region, first we need to establish their historical relationship and determine if they are amicable or not. Only relations that are the most relevant for hydrocarbons exploration and trade will be examined.

The geopolitical structure of the Eastern Mediterranean has been permanently shaped by its geographical position on the crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa. Additionally, it has been home to many rivaling states and empires throughout history. Eastern Mediterranean also hosts mix of different cultures and religions that are essential for understanding some of its contemporary conflicts, such as division of Cyprus and Israeli-Arab tensions. Without understanding this historical complexity, it is difficult to analyze the current state of affairs in the region. Since the region has substantial geopolitical and strategic significance for the regional as well as the global powers; there are a lot of distinguishable amity and enmity patterns in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this chapter, historical relationship between countries relevant for the hydrocarbons exploration and trade will be analyzed, in order to see how they fit in the amity and enmity patterns in the region

4.1. Cyprus-Greece-Turkey relations

The most important historical event for the relations between Cyprus, Greece and Turkey is the Turkish invasion of the Cyprus in 1974 and its subsequent control of the northern part of the island. Despite having its origins in longstanding animosities and incidents in history, the Cyprus dispute continues to remain a major geographical problem with immediate ramifications for Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus. Strengthened by common historical and ancestral connections,

the long-lasting partnership between Greece and Cyprus is essential to maintaining the stability and security of the region at large. On the other hand, Turkey's backing of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) highlights persistent geopolitical and demographic challenges that serve as a reflection of greater conflicts throughout the region.⁷⁵

The globally recognized Republic of Cyprus is located in the southern part of the island while the TRNC, which is only recognized by Turkey throughout the world, is located in the opposite direction. The political environment is still defined by this breakdown which has been there since the Turkish invasion in 1974. Turkey sent in the troops after the Greece-supported coup d'état and occupied 37 percent of Cypriot territory. This led to the declaration of the independence by the Turkish Cypriots in 1983. The strip of land between the two distinct settlements, known as the Green Line, is monitored by the United Nations peacekeeping troops.⁷⁶ There have been numerous attempts to reunite the divided country, or to find a political solution for the dispute, but until now none of the attempts were successful. While the region remains conflict oriented, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus continue to have friendly and mutually beneficial relationships. In addition to having similar political as well as financial goals within the European Union, the relationship is reinforced and strengthened by mutual historic and cultural links. Greece has represented a strong voice in favor of Cyprus within the European Union; thereby, endorsing its claims to statehood and geographical stability. Military and strategic collaboration represents another aspect of the bilateral relationship with Greece offering strategic assistance as well as training to Cypriot troops.

⁷⁵ Özsağlam, 2022

⁷⁶ Stergiou, 2016

Subsequently, a patron-client interaction exists between Turkey and Northern Cyprus with Turkey providing the TRNC significant diplomatic, military-related, as well as the financial assistance. The provision of infrastructure, explicit funding, along with the stationing of Turkish troops on the territory are all examples that demonstrate this cooperation.⁷⁷ Northern portion of Cyprus is viewed by Turkish state as an important strategic component that gives them a presence throughout the Eastern Mediterranean as well as an opportunity to have influence over developments throughout the surrounding region.

After examining their mutual relations, it is clear that Cyprus has quite amicable relation with Greece, and that they have probably the closest relationship in the region. On the other hand, Cyprus and Turkey relationship is one of the worst in the Eastern Mediterranean, and that it fits in the enmity category.

4.2. Greece-Turkey relations

Even with Cyprus conflict taken out of the equation, Greece and Turkey relations are still turbulent, with many points of contention. Greece and Turkey's relationship presently is profoundly affected by an intricate mix of historical grudges, disputes over territory along with ever evolving geopolitical situation in the region. Despite being part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; both of these nations regularly find themselves on opposing camps regarding significant geopolitical problems which has resulted in occasional tense incidents and unstable bilateral interactions.

⁷⁷ Dokos et al, 2018

Disagreement over the airspace and marine borders represents one of the main points of contention in the relationship between Greece and Turkey. For example, just in 2022, Turkish fighter jets and UAVs violated Greek airspace more than 10000 times.⁷⁸ Although disputes over the skies, maritime delineations and EEZs have persisted for the last several decades between the two sides, tensions have gotten worse as a consequence of recent discovery of the hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean.

. Besides the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey is fiercely opposing Greece's objectives to expand the boundaries of its territorial waters from six to twelve nautical miles in the Aegean Sea as permitted by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Turkey has not signed or ratified the UNCLOS, and it sees its rules of maritime delimitation as an immediate danger towards its sovereignty, as well as considering it as a *casus belli*.⁷⁹ Turkish authorities have further warned that it can lead to more serious conflicts. This widespread problem continues to act and remains as an issue of contention between Greek and Turkish leadership.

Another aspect that has profoundly harmed Greek-Turkish relations is the establishment of a perception of Turkey as a 'maritime state' through the official adoption of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine.⁸⁰ Envisioning Turkey as a maritime country and naval force was once popular among a small number of naval officers who saw Greece and Cyprus as the most

⁷⁸ Kokkinidis, 2022

⁷⁹ Psaropoulos, 2022

⁸⁰ Denizeau, 2021

significant obstacles to Turkey's maritime expansion, and after a failed coup attempt in 2016, this doctrine started to be endorsed by the Turkish authorities.⁸¹

The "Blue Homeland" doctrine and Turkish Neo-Ottoman aspirations only escalated tension between Greece and Turkey. In combination with their tumultuous history and difference in culture, recent political developments show that relationship between Greece and Turkey obviously shows patterns of enmity.

4.3. Cyprus-Greece-Israel relations

Over the course of last few decades, relationship amongst Cyprus, Greece and Israel has transformed into an alliance of strategic importance, featuring collaboration throughout multiple domains. The new hydrocarbon findings have the most responsibility for bringing these three countries together, but this topic will be further elaborated upon in the following chapters of this thesis.

Their cooperation started on the 8th of August 2013 in Nicosia, when three parties signed Memorandum of Understanding, and since then there were nine trilateral summits organized.⁸² In November 2017, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece had their first trilateral defense meeting, marking a significant milestone in their relationship.⁸³ Armed forces of these three nations have routinely held joint personnel meetings and participated in combined military drills to examine possible coordinated responses to newly developed threats. In this context, leaders of the Hellenic Guard and Israel Defense Forces have exchanged visits, and Greek fighter jets have participated in

⁸¹ Grigoriadis, 2022

⁸² Koukakis, 2023

⁸³ Kogan, 2020

aerial shows carried out by the Israeli Air Force over the years. Israel Defense Forces also carried out military exercises in Cyprus, where they simulated war against the Hezbollah.⁸⁴

Intelligence sharing has also been critical area of coordination for these three sides; They have exchanged cutting-edge procedures and intelligence in order to enhance their respective defenses.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the impending threat of terrorist attacks and hijacking in the Eastern Mediterranean are two challenges that each of these countries has worked to address in terms of maritime defense.⁸⁶ Besides military cooperation, these three countries also collaborating in combating the effects of natural disasters. In 2013, in the aftermath of forest fires in Israel, they decided to form a regional emergency response force.

In terms of their economic cooperation, these three countries primarily benefit from their energy cooperation. Besides having common goals in hydrocarbon exploration, they also collaborate in electrical energy projects. A three-fold energy deal was agreed upon in 2013, in order to create the EuroAsia Interconnector, which is a 2000 megawatts submarine electricity transmission line intended to link their respective power systems.⁸⁷ The construction of the project started in 2022, and it is expected to be completed in 2027.⁸⁸

All these facts show that relations between are amicable. Their quasi-alliance enables them to act in unison in several domains, especially in their rivalry with Turkey. Cyprus, Greece and Israel share common goals in the region, and they are further connected by their mutual allies, such as United States and the EU.

⁸⁴ Ahronheim, 2022

⁸⁵ Zemenides & Harris, 2019

⁸⁶ Tzogopoulos, 2023

⁸⁷ Lefkovitz, 2022

⁸⁸ Ktisti, 2022

4.4. Cyprus-Greece-Egypt relations

The relationship between Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt has also evolved into a strategic and politically important partnership in terms of their geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. This trilateral collaboration is built on shared objectives, a common goal of regional peace and development. Similarly to the Greece's and Cyprus's relations with Israel, their relationship with Egypt is mostly based on shared interests in hydrocarbons exploration.

Cyprus, Greece and Egypt's cooperation in military affairs is based upon trilateral meetings of their respective defense ministers.⁸⁹ Besides ministerial level, there are trilateral summits, that are organized since 2014, where leaders of the countries meet to discuss ways of improving their cooperation in many different domains.⁹⁰ Since 2021, these three countries have signed the trilateral military cooperation program for every year.⁹¹ They also often hold joint military exercises that include naval and air forces conducting coordinated drills.⁹² The goal of these regular trilateral drills between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt is to enhance collaboration and improve coordination on a variety of armed forces responsibilities, such as maritime defense, counter-terrorism, and rescue missions.

These three countries also have favorable economic relations. Besides cooperating on the gas exploration and trade projects, Greece also is one of the biggest European investors in Egypt, with investments totaling 255 million dollars across 215 projects spanning finance, industry, services, construction, tourism, agriculture, communication, and information

⁸⁹ Abu Zaid, 2022

⁹⁰ Asharq Al Awsat, 2023

⁹¹ Hellenic Army General Staff, 2024, <https://geetha.mil.gr/en/signing-of-the-joint-action-plan-between-greece-cyprus-egypt-for-the-year-2024/>

⁹² Prakas, 2022

technology.⁹³ Similarly to the EuroAsia underwater power cable project that Greece and Cyprus are conducting with Israel, there are plans to construct EuroAfrica cable, which would connect Egypt with Greece and Cyprus.⁹⁴ The project has not yet entered building phase, and it is currently in the stage of technical consultations.

Collaboration between these three countries on many levels shows that they enjoy an amicable relationship. Although Greece's and Cyprus's cooperation with Egypt is not as strong as their cooperation with Israel, nevertheless it is grounded in common goals and mutually beneficial projects.

4.5. Israel-Egypt relations

The relationship between Egypt and Israel has changed dramatically over the past few decades, ranging from warring enemies fighting in frequent conflicts to wary friends working together on numerous endeavors. This change reflects the pragmatic priorities of both states as well as the constantly evolving landscape of Middle Eastern geopolitical issues. Four significant wars between Israel and Egypt have been fought over the course of last seven decades. The first conflict was the Arab-Israel War that was fought in 1948, and just eight years later the second conflict started during the Suez Canal Crisis that occurred in 1956. The third war between the two countries was the Six-Day War that was fought in 1967, in which Israel took away the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, while the fourth and last conflict was Yom Kippur war that happened in 1973.⁹⁵

⁹³ Kapoor, 2024

⁹⁴ Kandil, 2021

⁹⁵ Khani, 2013

The breakthrough in the relationship between Israel and Egypt was brokered by the United States, Camp David Accords, mediated by the President of the United States Jimmy Carter, in 1978 formed a framework for ceasing the hostilities and concluding the peace treaty between the two countries. Egypt became the very first Arab nation that officially recognized Israel in 1979 with the ratification of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Under the terms of the treaty that governed this deal; Egypt received security guarantees and one of the main conditions for repairing their bilateral relationship was Israel giving Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt.⁹⁶ Years of animosity were brought to an end by this historic agreement, which also established a pattern for future Arab-Israeli peace efforts.

Although there are still fundamental problems between the two states, the Israel-Egypt relations have become more productive over the last four decades since the peace treaty has been signed. The relationship between these two countries was initially based on security cooperation, particularly in combating terrorist acts and maintaining regional stability. Both countries share a common interest in combatting extremist organizations, such as ISIS, which pose an imminent threat to the peace in the region. Although sometimes collaboration between the two sides is carried out covertly, their shared intelligence has proven vital in addressing these concerns about security and the overall stability of the region.⁹⁷

On the economic side, Israel and Egypt are mostly cooperating in the energy trade. In addition to this, their most successful collaborating project is the Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) initiative, which started in 2004. The QIZ is a protocol between the Egyptian and Israeli governments that permits the Egypt to profit from Israel's free trade deal with the US, by

⁹⁶ Mishali-Ram & Ginat, 2023

⁹⁷ Shkolnik, 2022

exporting jointly manufactured products from QIZs. Israel, in return, obtains greater political benefits than economic ones, which are mostly limited.⁹⁸ Exports under the QIZ protocol reached \$1.2 billion in 2021, with textiles and clothes accounting for 94% of Egypt's total QIZ exports, while chemicals, minerals, fertilizers, glass, and agricultural products account for the remaining 6%.⁹⁹ The main goal of this US-led initiative was to bring Egypt and Israel closer, by means of economic incentives.

Although the relationship between Israel and Egypt seems to be going in the right direction, there are still many obstacles on their way, most notably the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, Egyptian public opinion frequently reflects a deep skepticism and animosity against Israel, arising from historical hostilities as well as from their support of Palestine. The heightened nature of these emotions may limit the degree of cooperation between these two countries.

The real nature of Egypt's and Israel's relationship is still difficult to determine. Their relationship consists of a mix of historical grudges and recent collaboration in many spheres. Although they ceased hostilities four decades ago, their relationship still cannot be classified as amicable, partly due to the cultural differences and Egypt's public opinion towards Israel. Nevertheless, contrary to the opinion of many Egyptian citizens, Israel and Egypt are not enemies, and their relationships does not show patterns of enmity anymore. Their relationship can best be described as neutral, since there are many factors that can swing it towards amity or enmity at any point in time.

⁹⁸ El Rabiéy, 2023

⁹⁹ Sabry, 2022

4.6. Israel-Turkey relations

There have been several significant ups and downs in the bilateral ties between Israel and Turkey, with some periods of collaboration combined with bitter disagreements. They enjoyed relatively good relations since formation of the state of Israel, with Turkey being the first Muslims country that officially recognize Israel in 1949. Both countries maintained a firm alliance for many years, especially within the spheres of economic and security cooperation.¹⁰⁰

Relationship between Israel and Turkey started to change when Turkey's ruling party, the Justice and Development Party, started to pursue more Islamist foreign policy and playing a bigger role in supporting the Palestinian cause.¹⁰¹ The turning point in their relationship came in 2010 after the "Mavi Marmara" incident. Mavi Marmara was a vessel operated by Turkish government-organized NGO called Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief. The vessel tried to reach Gaza during the Israel's naval blockade, which led to violent clash with Israeli commandos, which resulted in deaths of ten Turkish nationals. The relationship between these two countries deteriorated quickly after the incident. Turkey downgraded diplomatic relationship with Israel, by expelling Israeli ambassador, and recalling its own ambassador from Israel.¹⁰²

Attempt to reconcile came in 2013, when Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu contacted its Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan to apologize for the incident, and to try to normalize their relationship.¹⁰³ After the six years of tensions, Turkey and Israel finally reconciled and restored its diplomatic ties. It was agreed that both countries would again appoint

¹⁰⁰ Ghariani, 2023

¹⁰¹ Eligür, 2023

¹⁰² Greenberg, 2011

¹⁰³ Oztig, 2023

ambassadors to Ankara and Tel Aviv. This period of normalization did not last long since Turkey again expelled Israeli ambassadors after the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2018.¹⁰⁴

The last rapprochement between Turkey and Israel occurred in 2022, when they decided that the full diplomatic relations will be restored. Once again, the normalization was short lived. In the aftermath of Hamas's attack on Israel in 2023, Turkey recalled its ambassador once more.¹⁰⁵

Although relationship between Israel and Turkey was unstable in the last decade and half, their economic cooperation did not suffer from political disputes until recently. Turkey and Israel have had a free-trade agreement in action since 1997 and major trade items include steel, oil and plastic.¹⁰⁶ The volume of Turkish exports to Israel exceeded 5.4 billion dollars in 2023, and Israel is Turkey's 13th-largest export destination, while Turkey was Israel's 5th biggest import partner. Turkey's exports mostly included steel, mechanical devices, construction materials, agricultural products, and oil. Overall trade value between these two countries exceeded 6.8 billion dollars in the same year.¹⁰⁷

In 2024, political differences ultimately spilled over to the economic relationship between Israel and Turkey. On 9th of April 2024, the Turkish authorities decided to initiate sanctions on trade with Israel, until there is ceasefire in Gaza. The Turkish Trade Ministry announced a list of fifty-four products, whose exports to Israel will be halted. The list includes

¹⁰⁴ Fullbright, 2018

¹⁰⁵ Crew, 2023

¹⁰⁶ Porter, 2024

¹⁰⁷ Michalski & Matusiak, 2024

steel and jet fuel, among other items.¹⁰⁸ In return, Israeli Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich threatened to suspend the Free Trade agreement and impose 100% tariffs on imports from Turkey.¹⁰⁹

It was matter of time when the many political disputes would affect the Israel's and Turke's economic cooperation. Their relationship was gradually deteriorating since 2010s, with the help of hostile rhetoric towards Israel from Turkish authoritarian leader Erdogan. At this point in time, after the termination of their economic endeavors, their relationship shows more signs of enmity than amity. Still, due to the numerous historic examples where they improved their relations, it would not be surprising if there will be another rapprochement attempt in following years.

4.7. Israel-Lebanon relations

Israel and Lebanon have a longstanding and intricate relation that is marked by hostilities, conflicts, and intermittent diplomatic initiatives. Numerous elements involving domestic political frameworks, external actors and geopolitical situations have a significant impact on the interactions involving each of these states.

Since 1948; there have been several instances of antagonism between Israel and Lebanon. Lebanese endured the fallout from the regional conflicts even though it was not a primary participant in the 1948 war between the Arabs and the Israelis. Although the 1982 and 2006 Lebanon wars may be highlighted as the only two examples of the armed battles between two sides that have been classified as actual wars, there have been many instances where factions

¹⁰⁸ Gostoli, 2024

¹⁰⁹ Scheer, 2024

from both sides have exchanged fire across the border. Besides historical hostilities, Israel is currently engaged in skirmishes with Hezbollah, which were sparked by Hamas's attack on Israel on 7th of October. The current situation is the biggest escalation of hostilities since 2006 war.¹¹⁰

Hezbollah, a Shia militia supported by Israel's adversary Iran, has served as one of the main reasons behind the friction between the two sides. Relationship between the two sides has remained complicated due to the organization's strategic might and political influence in Lebanon. Hezbollah functions simultaneously as an official faction inside the Lebanese government and as an armed force with the potential for extending influence throughout the region as a whole, thus it has enormous impact on the Lebanon's relations with Israel.¹¹¹ The situation and overall atmosphere remain unstable due to the armed group's proclaimed goal of resisting Israeli hegemony and also because of Israeli missile attacks and assassination attempts on Hezbollah's leadership.¹¹² Absence of a recognition and formalized ceasefire deal between each of these countries additionally contributed to making the issue worse. Even though Lebanon and Israel currently are not waging the full-blown war, there are still armed conflicts along their border due to the Hezbollah's support of Hamas. Besides this, the Shebaa Farms region, claimed by Lebanon and controlled by Israel, is one of the reasons why tensions between Israel and Lebanon are still high. Due to the vast number of hostilities exchanged between these two countries, it is safe to say that their relationships show clear patterns of enmity.

¹¹⁰ Guerin, 2024

¹¹¹ Burke, 2023

¹¹² Ott, 2024

5. Role of the Great Powers in the region

In this chapter, the involvement of the great powers in the region will be examined. Since the strategic position of the Eastern Mediterranean on the crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa, activity of outside powers in the region is quite high.

5.1. United States of America

The United States of America continues to have a significant footprint throughout the Eastern Mediterranean by means of its strategic military positioning along with strong relationships with its allies in the region. Its main base of operations is located in the Italian city of Naples, where the US Sixth Fleet is stationed, which is a part of the United States Naval Forces Europe-Africa. From this position, US Navy is able to protect the maritime routes and project power throughout the whole Mediterranean.¹¹³ The activities undertaken by this fleet are significant for assisting the NATO alliance deployments and for fending off potential dangers from its adversaries. Through its naval outposts and military infrastructure in strategic areas, such as Souda Bay in the island of Crete and Incirlik Aviation Field in the Anatolian Peninsula, the United States continues to expand its footprint.¹¹⁴

These locations improve the capacity of United States for responding to emergencies in the area while also allowing for immediate deployment capacities. Additionally, by having joint military exercises, security agreements and cooperation in intelligence sphere, strategic alliances of United States with the Republic of Cyprus, Greece and Israelis has continued to grow stronger. More specifically, the USA has publicly pledged its full backing for the Republic

¹¹³ Coto, 2023

¹¹⁴ Yegin, 2022

of Cyprus, in their disputes with Turkey and the TRNC, and highlighting the necessity of peaceful agreements and energy collaboration in the region. The USA also has endorsed Israeli efforts of exporting energy, considering these efforts as an opportunity to lessen European dependence upon Russian gas while strengthening the stability of the region.

United States intention of promoting stability in the region and prosperity through energy while fending off Chinese and Russian influence is most clearly indicated by the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership legislation that was eventually signed into law in 2019.¹¹⁵

With the goal to preserve an equitable distribution of power that specifically serves the interests of the United States, strategies employed by Washington throughout the region are centered on discouraging provocative behavior by regional states like Turkey, which has its expansionist goals related to maritime disputes and hydrocarbon exploration.

It is clear that USA still has a strong presence in the region, both militarily and diplomatically. Although the USA does not rely on its military capabilities as it used to do, it is still capable of mustering a significant force when it is needed. The best example of this is sending aircraft carriers in support of Israel after the Hamas's 7th of October attack.¹¹⁶

Although the USA's involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East is not as apparent as it used to be, it is still the great power with the most influence in the region.

¹¹⁵ Bakhshandeh & Yeganeh, 2023

¹¹⁶ Goursaud, 2023

5.2.China

China's influence in the region is mostly of the economic nature, although there is limited involvement in security matters as well. Beijing has been heavily investing in essential infrastructure projects via Belt and Road Initiative, that includes Piraeus Port in Greece, which is being transformed into a major logistic center for Chinese shipping routes.¹¹⁷ Throughout history, Piraeus has been a major hub for trade and military infrastructure in the area. It has also been a crucial base for Greece to project its commercial and economic influence throughout the Mediterranean. Nowadays, Piraeus, which is overseen by Chinese Overseas Shipping Company (COSCO), strengthens the Chinese geopolitical presence throughout Europe with its geostrategic location.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, Chinese military presence is not as apparent than its economic activities in the region, nevertheless it is gradually growing. This can be seen best in its participation in several military exercises in the region. First, in 2010, China participated in international military exercise called "Anatolian Eagle", which was organized by Turkey at its Konya air base.¹¹⁹ In 2015, China and Russia held joint military exercises, and it was the first instance where Chinese Navy participated in the naval drills in the Mediterranean.¹²⁰ Besides this, presence of a naval support base in Djibouti, despite not being geographically located in the Eastern Mediterranean, offers Chinese naval forces ability to assert influence and quickly defend its marine routes.

¹¹⁷ Kahveci-Özgür & Duan, 2022

¹¹⁸ Ghafar & Jacobs, 2020

¹¹⁹ Shlykov, 2022

¹²⁰ Ibid

Chinese military presence seems like a component of a larger plan, in which the main goal is to protect its transportation routes, while positioning the country as a major maritime force on the international stage. Although China has some military presence in the region, its priority is still to assert its economic power. Chinese involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean is mostly there because of its trade routes, and there are not many signs that China has any other ambitions beside preserving its trading routes.

5.3. Russia

Russia's robust military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is characterized by its strategic partnerships with Syrian regime. Kremlin was able to rebuild its authority throughout the Syrian Civil War by supporting Assad regime militarily and cementing its position in the region. Due to its naval base in Tartus and air base in Hmeimim, Russia is able to project its power throughout the region.¹²¹ Besides regular military forces, Russia has influence through its private military company Wagner Group, which was involved in conflicts in Syria and Libya.¹²² Since the military intervention in the Syrian War, Russia managed to establish itself as a significant factor in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In addition to its alliance with Syria, Turkey plays a significant role in Russian presence in the region. Although their relationship is rather volatile, Turkey is still the Russian most significant partner in the region. Turkey's importance for Russia lies in the fact that Turkey is the vital transit country for Russian energy resources.¹²³ Russian and Turkish cooperation

¹²¹ Talmazan, 2017

¹²² Gasimov, 2022

¹²³ Stronski, 2021

extends to the military domain, with Turkey buying Russian S-400 air defense systems in 2019.¹²⁴

From the economic side, the new hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean presents a significant challenge for Russian energy policy.¹²⁵ EU is looking to replace Russian energy resources, especially after the start of the War in Ukraine, with the gas from the Eastern Mediterranean. Although the capacities of the Eastern Mediterranean's gas fields are not large enough to substitute the Russian gas, it will nevertheless reduce dependance on the energy imports from Russia and it will enhance EU's bargaining power in the negotiations with Russia.¹²⁶

Despite the fact that hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean have negative effect on the Russian energy policies in general, Russia have some stakes in their exploration. In 2017, Russian state-owned energy company Rosneft bought a 30% stake in Egypt's Zohr gas field.¹²⁷ Additionally, Russian company Novatek has won contracts for exploration and extraction of gas in Syria.¹²⁸

Russia, through its military and diplomatic presence in the region, is attempting to challenge the NATO and USA influence by forming relationships with Turkey, Egypt and other countries, and with its own military bases in Syria it is able to defend its interests in the region. Although new hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean are not favorable for

¹²⁴ Pierini, 2024

¹²⁵ Gasimov, 2022

¹²⁶ Shin & Kim, 2021

¹²⁷ Dyner, 2017

¹²⁸ Legucka, 2020

Moscow's long-term plans, it still has some benefits from it, and it is able to influence their development.

5.4. European Union and United Kingdom

The combination of socioeconomic and political power, as well as limited military engagement characterizes the European Union's authority throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Besides its institutions, EU relies on Greece and Cyprus, its only member states in the region. Despite the absence of an its own armed forces, the EU members have often participated in joint military and naval exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean. France and Italy especially stand out in this regard.¹²⁹

The EU's commitment to the region's future has origins in protection of its borders, diversification of energy supply, and dedication to the peace and stability in the region. The main goal behind EU's involvement in the energy-related affairs is to try to replace the dependance on the Russian gas and oil. Projects such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, where Turkey is excluded, but involving the Republic of Cyprus, Greece and Italy, demonstrate the EU's determination to establish a collaborative structure for hydrocarbons discovery and export towards the EU countries.¹³⁰ Additionally, the EU contributes significantly to the efforts of resolving territorial disputes and other conflicts, by offering financial and administrative backing, in hopes of reaching regional peace and stability.¹³¹ Furthermore, the EU supports strongly its member Greece and Cyprus in their many disputes with Turkey. Threats of sanctions

¹²⁹ Shkurko, 2023

¹³⁰ Tanchum, 2020

¹³¹ Badarin & Schumacher, 2022

towards Turkey, in case if it continues with the exploration activities within disputed waters, demonstrate EU's allegiance towards its member countries.¹³²

It is clear that cooperation in hydrocarbon exploration would greatly benefit the EU in its goals of reducing its dependence on Russian energy resources. Because of this goal, the EU is strongly committed towards reaching a peaceful solution for the region's many conflicts and disputes.

Although United Kingdom is not a member of EU anymore, its foreign policy in the region is almost identical to EU's policies. UK has a permanent military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean through its two military bases Akrotiri and Dhekelia, located on the island of Cyprus. The territories on which bases are established are part of the British Overseas Territories and are completely under British control. These bases provide a strategic advantage for the UK in the region, and they are vital to the British military capabilities in the Middle East and Mediterranean. These territories also function as an outpost for intelligence collecting and monitoring network in the region. These intelligence capabilities are critical for tracking potential threats to the security of Britain and its allies.¹³³

Regarding energy matters, UK also has similar interest as the EU. The UK remains a member of the north-west European gas market, which means that the issues that EU countries are currently facing in terms of energy security and diplomacy have spillover consequences on Britain.¹³⁴ Similarly to the EU, peace and stability in the region are the main goals for UK as well.

¹³² Bayar, 2020

¹³³ Tossini, 2018

¹³⁴ Özçelik, 2022

6. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on bilateral and trilateral relations

This chapter will present how the recent hydrocarbon findings affected the power dynamics in the region. It will be examined if hydrocarbon findings led to signing of cooperative agreements, maritime delimitation and if the discourse around it was securitized or not.



Source: Sovereign Limits, 2020

6.1. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Cyprus-Turkey relations

The discovery of gas fields in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone has drastically influenced the Cyprus conflict, and on the other hand, the Cyprus conflict has disrupted the Republic of Cyprus's ability to materialize on the hydrocarbon findings. Thirteen years have

passed since the discovery of the Aphrodite gas fields, and Cyprus is yet to start extracting gas out of it, mainly to the problems caused by Turkey's support of TRNC.

Initially, it seemed that new hydrocarbon findings will speed up the negotiations between Republic of Cyprus and TRNC. In February of 2014, the President of the Republic of Cyprus Nikos Anastasiades and the Turkish-Cypriot leader Dervis Eroglu signed a Joint Declaration, which set up the framework for talks on the reunification of the island.¹³⁵ But just few months after the signing of the declaration, it was clear that the gas fields will be another point of contention between the two sides. In October of 2014, Turkish authorities announced that it would start conducting seismic surveys in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone, and it sent two warships to accompany the exploration vessel.¹³⁶ This move was widely condemned by Cyprus, Greece and the EU. The negotiation process ceased after this incident, and Cyprus, together with Greece and Egypt in joint statement, called on Turkey to all seismic survey operations underway within the maritime zones of Cyprus.¹³⁷ EU also passed a resolution, condemning the Turkish exploration actions in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹³⁸ These statements show that Republic of Cyprus had unwavering support from Greece and EU in its dispute with Turkey and TRNC. This incident also exhibits how energy affects not only the economic sector of security, but in this case, it affected political and military sectors as well.

Further escalations came in February of 2018, when Turkish authorities denounced the joint hydrocarbon exploration deal between Cyprus and Egypt, claiming that the deal violates

¹³⁵ UN Cyprus Talks, 2014, <https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/11-february-2014-joint-declaration-cyprus>

¹³⁶ Cohen, 2015

¹³⁷ Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/news-announcements/egypt-greece-cyprus-trilateral-summit-cairo-declaration.html>

¹³⁸ European Parliament, 2014, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2014-0225_EN.html

Turkish continental shelf. Just few days after this statement, Turkish warships blocked the ship operated by Italian oil company Eni from getting to the area where it was supposed to explore for natural gas.¹³⁹ This move by Turkey was seen as extremely escalatory by all parties affected by it. Statements from Turkish officials regarding the hydrocarbon showed that gas exploration is highly securitized issue for the Turkish government. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Greece and Cyprus in a parliament session, stated following: “Right now, our warships, air force and other security units are following developments in the region closely with the authority to make any kind of intervention if necessary. We advise the foreign companies who are conducting activities off Cyprus, relying on the Greek side, not to be an instrument to businesses that exceed their limit and power.”¹⁴⁰ Additionally, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu further threatened Cyprus by saying: “Turkey has warned the Greek Cypriots from the onset not to take such irresponsible steps. If they still believe they have nothing to lose they are mistaken.”¹⁴¹

Although Turkish authorities used harsh rhetoric regarding Cyprus’s exploration for hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean, they did not stop further Cypriot attempts, even though they continued their exploration attempts in the Cypriot waters, aided by their warships. After these incidents, Cyprus managed to discover three more gas fields, but none of their gas fields are operational yet, although it is expected that supply of gas from Aphrodite gas field will commence in 2027.

¹³⁹ Kambas, 2018

¹⁴⁰ Andrei, 2019

¹⁴¹ Psyllides, 2018

Cyprus and Turkey clearly have unfavorable relationship, both historically and in current times, and discovery of the gas fields is complicating the matters even further. It will be difficult to materialize on hydrocarbon findings until there is a solution for the division of Cyprus. Additionally, the issue of gas exploration is securitized, and it affects political, economic, and military affairs in the region. All these factors combined are the some of the main reasons why neither Cyprus nor Turkey managed to benefit from new hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean.

6.2. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Greece-Turkey relations

Greece and Turkey have unfriendly relations as well, although they are both part of the NATO. This fact did not stop them from having numerous disputes in several different domains. The recent hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean are one of the points of contention between these two countries, even though none of them have discovered gas fields yet. Both countries hope that they will be transit countries for possible export of gas to Europe by pipelines, and they have maritime delimitation disputes in both the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea.

Turkey and Greece have competing goals for gas reserves and disagree on who has the right of exploitation of the energy resources in the center of the Eastern Mediterranean, claiming that these areas belong to their respective continental shelves. This dispute makes it difficult to award rights to explore and develop the region's hydrocarbon resources. The issue is further complicated by Greece and Turkey's failure to reach an agreement on the delimitation of their respective EEZs in the Aegean Sea.

In 2019, Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), recognized by the UN, signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the maritime delimitation between these two countries.¹⁴² This agreement was negatively received in Greece and Cyprus, which have their own maritime delimitation deal, with many other countries also condemning it. In response to Turkey and Libya's deal, Greece signed a maritime delimitation agreement with Egypt in 2020.¹⁴³ Turkey expectedly objected to this deal, calling it null and void, and that it will not allow any activity at the disputed area in question.¹⁴⁴ Although this maritime delimitation agreement was cancelled by the Al-Bayda Court of Appeals of Libya in 2021, Turkey continued to make deals with the GNA.¹⁴⁵ In 2022, another memorandum of understanding, in regard of cooperation in hydrocarbon exploration and extraction, was signed by these two parties.¹⁴⁶ Similarly to the 2019 agreement, this one was also cancelled by Libyan court in 2024.¹⁴⁷ Although both of these agreements were ultimately cancelled, they still managed to increase tensions in the region, and further securitize the hydrocarbon exploration issue.

The biggest escalation between Greece and Turkey, in regard to the hydrocarbon exploration, occurred in August of 2020. Turkey deployed a survey vessel to the region, accompanied by warships, to map out sea territory for potential hydrocarbons drilling in an area where both Turkey and Greece claim control. The Turkish survey ship, "Oruc Reis" has been sailing between Cyprus and the Greek island of Crete, trailed by several Greek frigates. On August 12th, one of the Greek warships, the "Limnos", approached the survey vessel and

¹⁴² Duz, 2019

¹⁴³ Mahmoud Mourad, 2020

¹⁴⁴ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020 https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-165_-yunanistan-ile-misir-arasinda-sozde-deniz-yetki-alanlari-anlasmasi-imzalanmasi-hk.en.mfa

¹⁴⁵ Ali, 2021

¹⁴⁶ Aydogan & Barakat, 2022

¹⁴⁷ Zaptia, 2024

collided with one of its Turkish naval escorts, the “Kemal Reis”. The Greek frigate maneuvered to avoid a direct hit, and its bow came into contact with the Turkish frigate's rear, resulting in a "mini collision."¹⁴⁸ The Greek authorities claimed that this incident was an accident, but nevertheless Turkey responded strongly with its President Erdogan stating: ” We said that if you attack our Oruc Reis you will pay a high price, and they got their first answer today”.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu said: “No matter what, Turkey will resolutely continue to protect both her and Turkish Cypriots’ rights in the Eastern Mediterranean stemming from international law. No alliance of malice will manage to prevent this. Those who think otherwise have not taken their lessons from history.”¹⁵⁰

Similarly to the Turkey’s situation with Cyprus, its relationship with Greece is also riddled with numerous conflicts and disputes, and the recent hydrocarbon findings are exaggerating these problems. Turkey also uses flammable rhetoric when dealing with the issues of hydrocarbon exploration, which further escalates the conflicts between these two states. The relationship between Greece and Turkey demonstrates that when patterns of enmity exist and energy issues are securitized, reaching a cooperative agreement becomes increasingly difficult. Unfortunately, until Greece and Turkey agree on maritime delimitation, it would not be possible to have significant benefits from any potentially discovered gas fields and from exports towards the European Union.

¹⁴⁸ Kambas & Gumrukcu, 2020

¹⁴⁹ Sharman, 2020

¹⁵⁰ Meredith, 2020

6.3. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Cyprus-Greece-Israel relations

The trilateral relationship between Cyprus, Greece and Israel is characterized by friendly relations and cooperation in many domains. The new hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean only brought these three countries closer together, and it strengthened their relationship.

The energy cooperation was centerpiece of their relationship since the beginning. When these three countries signed the first memorandum of understanding in 2013, the focus was on joint endeavors in the field of hydrocarbon exploration and trade. Even before the trilateral meetings, Cyprus and Israel successfully negotiated and signed a maritime delimitation deal in 2010.¹⁵¹

The main hydrocarbon related project between these three countries is the proposed EastMed gas pipeline that would connect resources from Israel's gas fields with Cyprus and Greece. The pipeline would be 2000 kilometers long, and it is estimated that it would cost more than 6 billion euros.¹⁵² In March of 2019, the leaders of these three countries met in Jerusalem during the sixth Trilateral Greece-Cyprus-Israel Summit, in which US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also attended to show the US's support of the project. At this summit, they confirmed their determination to go on with the EastMed pipeline project, but they did not sign any official agreement regarding it.¹⁵³ The agreement was ultimately signed in Athens in January of 2020, with the goal of becoming operational in 2025.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the future of the EastMed pipeline is doubtful. It is faced with geopolitical problems, mainly due to the Turkey's maritime

¹⁵¹ Loengarov, 2020

¹⁵² Stamouli, 2022

¹⁵³ Kampouris, 2019

¹⁵⁴ John T Psaropoulos, 2020

claims in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its economic feasibility is not certain. In 2020, the US decided to withdraw its financial support for the project, claiming that project is increasing tension in the region, and that they need to focus on more ecological solutions for the gas transportation, such as LNG.¹⁵⁵ Currently, there is no timeline set for the finalization of the project, or if it will be constructed at all. There are alternatives that are being considered, such as pipeline connecting Egypt and Cyprus, and construction of LNG terminals.¹⁵⁶ Although EastMed pipeline's construction is getting less likely, this project still shows willingness of Cyprus, Greece and Israel to cooperate in the field of hydrocarbons exploration and trade.

Even though these three countries have friendly relations with each other, there are also some disputes between them. Cyprus's Aphrodite gas field is partly located in the Israeli EEZ, where is called Yishai field. Israel is concerned that extracting gas from Aphrodite field would deplete gas reserves in the Yishai field. Both countries are committed in resolving this issue, and their respective officials often state that they are working towards the quick resolution of the problem.¹⁵⁷ Although a deal has not been reached yet, there is no doubt that Israel and Cyprus will manage to overcome this dispute. Another mitigating circumstance is that Israel's oil company NewMed Energy (formerly Delek Drilling) is a part of consortium that is supposed to extract gas from Aphrodite field, so it will play a role in resolution of the Aphrodite-Yishai dispute.¹⁵⁸

The relationship between Cyprus, Greece and Israel shows us that it is much easier to cooperate when there are no historical patterns of enmity among the countries, and when the

¹⁵⁵ Gencturk, 2022

¹⁵⁶ Khan, 2024

¹⁵⁷ Hadjicostis, 2022

¹⁵⁸ Zwick, 2019

issue of energy is not securitized. Additionally, in such relationships, energy findings often lead to more cooperation and improvement of the relations.

6.4. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Cyprus-Greece-Egypt relations

The relationship between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt is another example where energy resources are bringing countries closer together. Their trilateral partnership is at the core of the hydrocarbon exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the government of these three countries are cooperating extensively in order to materialize on newly found resources.

These three countries started organizing trilateral summits primarily due to the common goals in hydrocarbon exploration trade. Besides these summits, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt are cooperating through international organization called Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which was founded on Egypt's initiative, and as an attempt to coordinate energy policies and form a regional gas market in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁵⁹ EMGF was founded in 2109, and its members, besides Cyprus, Greece and Egypt, are Israel, Jordan, Palestinian Territories, Italy and France. Notably, Turkey was not included in the forming of the organization, mostly because of many disputes with the forum's members.

These three countries also did not have any problems in agreeing on their maritime borders; Egypt and Cyprus signed a maritime delimitation agreement in 2003, even before there were discoveries of gas fields in their respective EEZs, while Greece signed its delimitation agreement with Egypt in 2020.¹⁶⁰ There are also plans for Cyprus to export gas from Aphrodite

¹⁵⁹ Nael M. Shama, 2019

¹⁶⁰ Yiallourides, 2020

field to Egypt via pipeline, as an alternative to the EastMed project, but there is no official agreement regarding this plan yet.¹⁶¹

Although projects involving Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt have not materialized yet, these three countries intend to continue to collaborate not only in energy projects, but also in other fields. Their relationship is another example where energy projects, that are not securitized, can lead to more stability and cooperation in the region, when there is absence of historical or present-day disputes and conflicts.

6.5. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Israel-Egypt relations

Israel and Egypt have one of the more interesting relationships in the region. After fighting several wars in the second half of the 20th century, and despite still having some political disagreements, their relations progressed towards pragmatical cooperation in several fields. One of these spheres of collaboration is energy, and new hydrocarbon findings strengthened their economic cooperation.

The beginning of Egypt's and Israel's gas trade came in 2005, when the memorandum of understanding regarding the Egypt's export of natural gas to Israel was signed.¹⁶² It was agreed that Egypt would supply Israel with 1.7 billion cubic meters of gas per year, in the following 15 years. The export of gas started in February of 2008, and it was transported through the Arish-Ashkelon pipeline.¹⁶³ This agreement did not last long, since Egypt stop exporting the gas in 2012, after the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt.¹⁶⁴ Although the officials

¹⁶¹ Wrobel, 2023

¹⁶² Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/mou2005.pdf>

¹⁶³ Das, 2020

¹⁶⁴ Gancman, 2015

from both countries claimed that termination of gas trade was purely because of economic reason, this still shows that political matters have vast influence over the energy trade. After the cancelation of the agreement, the energy situation changed drastically in both countries. Egypt was facing gas shortages, while Israel started extracting gas from its Tamar and Leviathan fields. This economic situation, and ousting of Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt, led to reversal of the roles, and Israel started exporting gas to Egypt through the same pipeline in 2020.¹⁶⁵ There was again a small disruption in gas flow from Israel to Egypt in October of 2023, due to the temporary closure of Tamar gas field after the escalation of war in Gaza.¹⁶⁶ The exports resumed one month later, but in smaller quantities.¹⁶⁷ This small setback, and tensions amid the war in Gaza, did not discourage Israel and Egypt from continuing the gas trade, with the two sides agreeing on increase of export volumes in 2024.¹⁶⁸

Another important deal regarding hydrocarbons, that these two countries signed in 2020, was the memorandum of understanding regarding the export of LNG to the European Union.¹⁶⁹ The EU also signed this agreement, and it looks to replace the Russian energy resources with gas from the Eastern Mediterranean. According to this agreement, Israel will export gas to Egypt, where it will be turned into LNG and then re-exported to the European Union. This agreement shows the significance of outside powers in facilitating energy deals.

The case of Israel's and Egypt's relationship demonstrates that benefits from energy trading can sometimes be large enough to overcome political disagreements, especially when

¹⁶⁵ El Wardany, 2020

¹⁶⁶ Rabinovitch & Bouso, 2023

¹⁶⁷ El Safty, Rabinovitch & Bouso, 2023

¹⁶⁸ Wrobel, 2024

¹⁶⁹ El Safty & Rabinovitch, 2022

no side is securitizing the issue of energy. On the other hand, it also showed that extreme political changes, like the Arab Spring and Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in Egypt, can suddenly change the dynamic of the bilateral relations, which strongly affects the economic cooperation between the countries.

6.6. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Israel-Turkey relations

The energy trade is not at the core of the relations between Israel and Turkey, but recent hydrocarbon findings did influence the dynamics of their relationship. Both parties see energy cooperation not only as a economic benefit, but also as a way of improving their volatile relations.

The new hydrocarbon findings were at the center of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement attempt in 2022. Turkey was getting increasingly isolated from other countries in the region, and it was looking to repair relations with some of them. On the other hand, Israel was looking for its own gas exports. These factors led both countries to consider cooperating in the field of energy. When Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Ankara, the cooperation in hydrocarbon exploration and trade was one of the main topics discussed.¹⁷⁰ The idea of pipeline transporting Israeli gas to Turkey, and further exporting it to the Southern Europe, was envisioned as the main project in Israeli-Turkish rapprochement.¹⁷¹

This rapprochement attempt, like previous ones, unfortunately did not last long. In 2023, after Hamas's attack on Israel on 7th of October, followed by war in Gaza, the relationship between Turkey and Israel worsened again. The possible cooperation in hydrocarbon

¹⁷⁰ Bakir, 2022

¹⁷¹ Azriel, 2023

exploration and trade was one of the endeavors that suffered most from renewed antagonism between Israel and Turkey. Turkish authorities, in support of Palestine, decided to suspend negotiations regarding the joint projects in energy trade, until there is ceasefire in Gaza.¹⁷² Although Turkey's authorities often use hostile rhetoric when talking about Israel, the energy issue was never the part of securitization processes.

The dynamics of Israel's and Turkey's relationship proved that energy can be a good starting point in repairing the strained relationship between unfriendly countries. Energy potential managed to improve Israel and Turkey relationship, but ultimately it was not enough for them to overcome the disputes regarding the war in Gaza. This case shows that economic benefits are usually less important for the countries than the larger political and security issues.

6.7. Effects of hydrocarbon findings on Israel-Lebanon relationship

Israel and Lebanon have the most hostile relations in the region, where any escalation can lead towards the armed conflict. Lebanon is one of the least important countries for the energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean, but maritime delimitation dispute with Israel managed to affect the hydrocarbon exploration.

These two countries do not recognize the sovereignty of each other, and they are still formally at war. Since the formation of the state of Israel, there were both land and maritime border disputes. The temporary land border between Israel and Lebanon is called "Blue Line", and it was determined by the United Nations in 2000.¹⁷³ The disputed maritime part in the Eastern Mediterranean consists of 860 square kilometers of water, that both parties claim

¹⁷² Markind, 2023

¹⁷³ Henderson, 2021

belongs to their respective EEZs. After the Israelis discovered Karish and Qana gas fields in that region in 2010, Lebanese authorities were concerned that some of the gas fields could be partly located in their EEZ.¹⁷⁴ These hydrocarbon discoveries increased the importance of the maritime delimitation dispute. In the same year, Lebanon sent lists of coordinates for its EEZ to the United Nations, and Israel did it in 2011.¹⁷⁵

The negotiations on maritime delimitation began in 2020, because Israel was preparing to start extracting gas from the disputed Karish field, which Lebanon claimed for itself in its entirety.¹⁷⁶ The negotiations did not progress quickly enough until the US appointed Amos Hochstein as a mediator in 2022. During the course of the negotiations, there were several escalations done by Hezbollah. In July of 2022, Hezbollah launched three drones towards the Karish field, targeting the gas production vessel operated by Greek oil company Energean, but IDF forces managed to shoot them down them.¹⁷⁷ This drone attack showed the readiness of Hezbollah to prevent the Israeli extraction of gas until the maritime delimitation agreement is reached. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah further securitized the energy issue, claiming that drone attack is just the beginning, and threatening the Israelis by stating following: "Write down this equation — we will reach Karish and everything beyond Karish and everything beyond that... If you want to prevent Lebanon from exercising its right to save itself by extracting oil and gas, no one will be able to extract oil and gas".¹⁷⁸ To everyone's surprise, just few months after the Hezbollah's escalatory actions, the two sides managed to agree on a maritime delimitation deal, with the help of US mediator Amos Hochstein. Israel and

¹⁷⁴ Powell, 2022

¹⁷⁵ Loengarov, 2022

¹⁷⁶ Krasna, 2020

¹⁷⁷ Fabian, 2022

¹⁷⁸ Siegal, 2022

Lebanon agreed that Karish field would belong to Israel in its entirety, while the Lebanon got rights of exploration in the Qana field.¹⁷⁹

The maritime delimitation agreement between Israel and Lebanon is a quite unique case where the securitization of energy and real risk of escalation led towards quicker conclusion of negotiations between hostile countries. Israel and Lebanon did not improve relations after this deal, but it demonstrated that, in rare and specific occasions, the discovery of energy resources can contribute towards the solution of border disputes.

6.8. Comparison of the results

Effects of hydrocarbons on bilateral and trilateral relations			
Relations	Amity/enmity	Securitization of energy	Cooperation
Cyprus-Turkey	Enmity	Yes	No
Greece-Turkey	Enmity	Yes	No
Cyprus-Greece-Israel	Amity	No	Yes
Cyprus-Greece-Egypt	Amity	No	Yes
Israel-Egypt	Neutral	No	Yes
Israel-Turkey	Enmity	No	No
Israel-Lebanon	Enmity	Yes	Yes (limited)

As it can be seen in the table above, there are some general rules of how hydrocarbon findings affect the bilateral and trilateral relations. If the relations are amicable, energy issues are not securitized, and it leads towards increased cooperation in economic and other domains. This situation coincides with more economically liberal policies being implemented by the

¹⁷⁹ Berg, 2022

governments. On the other side, if relations between countries show patterns of enmity, energy issues are generally securitized, and cooperation is less likely to happen. In this case governments lead economically nationalistic policies which can lead towards more tensions and conflicts in the region.

The only outlier is the relationship between Israel and Lebanon, where the energy issue was securitized, and despite these countries having hostile relations, they managed to come to agreement regarding maritime delimitation. This is mostly due to the mediation of the US and fears of this dispute escalating into armed conflict. It is doubtful if the two parties would reach an agreement if there were not intervention from outside powers. As it was presented in previous chapters, the involvement of Great Powers in the energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean is usually stabilizing factor, due to their goal of using region's energy resources for their own markets.

These results show that there is two folded answer to the research question of this thesis, and that both hypothesis are partially true; By analyzing the effects of the new hydrocarbon findings in the Eastern Mediterranean on regional stability, it is demonstrated that energy exaggerates the existing relationships between countries. In cases where relations between countries are amicable, hydrocarbon findings lead towards more cooperation, while in opposite case, when relations between countries are unfriendly, hydrocarbon findings will lead towards more disputes and conflicts.

Conclusion

This research showed that there is not one unifying answer to the question of what happens when new energy resource is introduced to the politically unstable region, such as the Eastern Mediterranean. The outcome depends on several factors such as patterns of amity and enmity, securitization of energy and Great Power's mediation attempts.

In cases where relationship between countries is amicable, like the relationship between Cyprus, Greece and Israel, energy issues will not be securitized and it will lead towards more collaboration. These countries will sign bilateral and trilateral agreements regarding the cooperation in field of hydrocarbon exploration and trade, they will not have problems with maritime delimitation, and usually they will be members of same international organizations. In the opposite cases where relations between countries shows patterns of enmity, such as relations between Cyprus and Turkey, many difficulties arise when dealing with the hydrocarbon exploration and trade. Energy issues are generally securitized, which often leads to escalation and involvement of armed forces in energy related matters. These countries will not resolve disputes easily, and some of countries will be isolated from the regional institutions and organizations. Also there are some specific situations, where benefits of energy trade can be large enough incentive to start rapprochement talks, or to overcome minor political problems, but ultimately energy benefits are not enough to resolve fundamental problems between countries.

To summarize, it is safe to conclude that energy usually has the role of amplifier on relations; it will strengthen already amicable relations, while it will be another point of contention for unfriendly nations.

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