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State Competition in the Eastern Mediterranean: Energy and Security Issues

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Introduction

The discovery, and consequently the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean create new geopolitical facts, which in the long run could alter the balance of power in the region, both between the states of the region and between the great powers. In the light of the new data and the theoretical framework of interstate competition for benefits and power, as well as the state's necessity to ensure security and stability, this article aims to achieve the following: First, to demonstrate that energy issues will intensify interstate competition, against the position that cooperation on energy issues could bring stability. Secondly, to highlight the broader strategic and security issues faced by the states in the region focused on energy issues; thirdly, to examine the strategic choices of the states which are involved in the recent energy developments in the Eastern Mediterranean; fourth, to speculate the tendency of interstate competition in the near future. Finally, proposals are made on the possibilities of exploiting the energy factor from states of Greece and Cyprus.

Theoretical and empirical background and research questions

The theoretical framework, which is used in order to analyze the case study mentioned above, is that of interstate competition and balance of power balance in a regional sub-system. The nature and intensity of interstate competition in a regional sub-system affect the strategic choices of states, and ultimately shapes the balance of power between them. This also includes the need for states to ensure their security, as well as strategic and economic profits. At the same time, the correlation of power between the states of the particular region is greatly influenced by the interventions of great powers. Moreover, based on the aforesaid theoretical framework, it is mentioned that states compete when they have conflicting strategic goals and ally or cooperate when their national interests are identified.

The empirical background is focused on strategic developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, with references to energy issues and strategic choices of the states involved in these developments. The strategic environment of the

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Eastern Mediterranean is characterized by the intense strategic interaction between the states of the region and their conflicting national interests as well. The main geostrategic issues of the region are the Syrian crisis, Turkey-Israel relations, the Greece-Cyprus-Turkey conflict triangle, Israel's relations with the Islamic world, terrorism and the presence of the US and Russia in region. Moreover, widely in the Eastern Mediterranean, there are conflicts, as well as interstate competitions, which affect strategic developments in the region. Some examples of the most crucial characteristics of conflicts and interstate antagonisms include: instability in the Balkans and North Africa, action of terrorism, the existence of fragile states, interventions by great powers, local states hegemonism, and immigration.

Furthermore, an important factor influencing the strategic developments in the region is energy issues, as the exploitation efforts of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean lead to a spreading redistribution of power among the states of the region. Energy issues create tensions between states, as the unequal distribution of natural resources and the needs of large economies for hydrocarbon cause frictions. At the same time, the states of the region associate their strategic security with the exploitation, use and transportation of hydrocarbons. Thus, energy becomes a strategic tool by states, assisting military, economic and political power.

The concentration of large deposits in geographic areas of Eastern Mediterranean, Russia and Middle East, gives a relative strategic advantage to states that control sources in these areas and are, therefore, state providers. On the other hand, states which, due to industrial expansion and resource scarcity, are forced to import energy from other regions as consumer states, such as European states, are shaping strategies in order not to be vulnerable to this strategic disadvantage.

Based on the theoretical framework mentioned above, as well as the need for analyzing the case study, this article raises some research questions. The answers to the following research questions will help to achieve the article's objectives:

- (a) How do alliances develop between states in the light of the exploitation of energy sources and the need to transfer them? How does this affect the overall correlation of power in the Eastern Mediterranean region?
- b) What is the role of great powers in the region of the Eastern Mediterranean on their attempt to preserve their hegemonic claims? What are the US attitudes towards their allies? What is the role of great powers in the region of the Eastern Mediterranean?
- c) Which is the geostrategic position of Greece and Cyprus? What are the prospects and difficulties for these two countries? What are the prospects for their cooperation with Israel? How and to what degree of success are they facing Turkish aggression?

Positions and strategy of Greece

Considering the signs of energy reserves in Greece's subsoil, the country consists a future producer of hydrocarbons. Additionally, Greece could be an energy hub of the Eastern Mediterranean and the European Union (EU). Based on these facts, Greece seeks to upgrade its energy profile, both in the short term as a transit state, as well as in the long run, as a potential producer state.

On account of this target, the Greek side is striving to develop a new strategic cooperative framework with its neighboring states, which would be built on the basis of energy issues. The cooperative structures, developed by Greece, are with the states of Republic of Cyprus (RoC), Israel and Egypt. Already in 2013, Greece signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cyprus and Israel, stating that they will work together to protect important infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean region. On the Greek side, these collaborative practices, beyond the objective of exploiting and transiting hydrocarbons, seek to create a barrier to the Turkish revision strategy.

One crucial factor for the Greek interests, but also for the Greek-Cypriot interests, is the EastMed Program (Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline), which involves a collaborative energy transit pipeline between Greece, RoC, Italy (from EU) and Israel. Recently, Greece, RoC, Italy, Israel and reached an agreement for the construction of the EastMed pipeline, which will start in a few months. This fact shows the political and strategic determination of these states to implement the project. EastMed will transfer natural gas from the deposits of the Cypriot and Israeli EEZs to Greece, Italy and, by extension, to the EU. Despite the high economic cost of this program, its implementation would favor both the Greek and Greek-Cypriot interests. Especially for Greece, the project will offer a political and strategic advantage over Turkey, through which Greece could effectively tackle Turkish aggression.

Despite the strategic opportunities that the energy issues offer to Greece, there are problems with Greek state decisions to exploit the benefits from the energy. The main problem for Greece and its strategic decisions to exploit energy remains the Turkish revisionism, which continues to question its sovereign rights in the Aegean. In addition, the economic problems that Greece still faces are important constraints for the implementation of Greek strategic planning.

Positions and strategy of the Republic of Cyprus

Because of the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Cypriot EEZ, the RoC has been upgraded geopolitically. Due to this fact, the RoC has the ability to establish alliances on energy issues with Greece, Israel, Egypt, even with Russia. Based on its geopolitical advantages arising from energy, the RoC seeks to become an important state for the other state actors in the region, while aiming to address Turkey's provocation to its detriment (mainly to the newly exploited resources of the Cypriot EEZ). The fact that the "Aphrodite" field deposit is now considered to be marketable will also directly attract other investors, further enhancing the geo-economic value of the RoC. Moreover, its strategic choice to grant licenses for hydrocarbon exploitations to foreign companies, seeks to gain

the support of the countries from which these companies come from. At the same time, the RoC seeks to export gas reserves, as the US contractor, Noble Energy, has confirmed the finding of 5 trillion cubic feet in the "Aphrodite" field. In regards to creating alliances' structures with other states, the RoC has already signed a bilateral agreement with Israel on the demarcation of their EEZs in 2010, and a second one, in 2014, for the exchange and protection of confidential information in relation to hydrocarbons.

The RoC promotes energy issues in order to confront Turkey's offensiveness, while Turkish state is the main threat to the security of the RoC. Through diplomacy RoC tries to take advantage of the strategic benefits offered from energy, by linking energy issues with the strategic and economic interests of other states. At the same time, the RoC maintains that the exploitation of natural resources in its EEZ, is the exclusive right of the legitimate government of the state, and Turkey has no right to intervene with it. Furthermore, the RoC urges that Turkey has to cease the challenges, particularly those who flagrantly violate its sovereign rights, such as those of maritime research by the Turkish barbarian vessel.

With regards to the Cyprus problem and the efforts made for a solution to be found, the RoC supports that negotiations could be successful if Turkey ceases to violate Cypriot sovereignty and reject a debate that would lead to the co-exploitation of its natural wealth. It also supports that the interventionist role of the UN should be constructive for a mutually acceptable solution, and not to put any extortion on the Greek-Cypriot side. Moreover, RoC calls for the practical solidarity of the European Union state members, while the lasts are its allies.

The RoC believes that a strategy open to alliances, as is the case of Israel and the United States (as well as of Russia), can effectively help Cyprus. A possible involvement of Russia in energy planning is of crucial importance, since Russian presence in the region would restrict Turkey's expansive aspirations. On the other hand, the RoC strategic alliance with Russia ignores the reactions of Western allies, especially those of the United States, which could have a negative impact on the Cypriot state and the process of resolving the Cyprus problem. Furthermore, the RoC seeks to exploit its capacity of being a member state of the EU, by promoting its interests, as well as aiming that the European states consider that Cyprus could play an important role in diversifying the EU's energy sources of supply.

Positions and strategy of Turkey

Turkey consists a military power state and an emerging economy in the region of the Mediterranean, despite the economic problems it faces occasionally. Turkey is also an important strategic pillar for the Western alliance, while the Turkish state serve many of the Western states' interests, although the frozen relations Turkey has with certain Western states, particularly with the United States. With regards to energy issues, Turkey's strategic advantage is the importance of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, which is the sixth largest geographic point of oil transit in the world. On the other hand, Turkey has many

problems in its foreign and internal politics which confront its efforts to achieve a leadership role in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Turkey firmly supports that the country will not give up its position and claims on energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean, while mentioning that Turkish state is ready to protect its rights and interests in the region by whatever way and with any mean. Turkey considers that the cooperation among Israel-RoC-Greece is hampering its ambitions for a leading role in managing the marine gas deposits, while limiting its potential to become an energy hub between the West and the East. Under this threat, the Turkish state is becoming increasingly aggressive, especially against the weakest of these states. Thus, Ankara, in an effort to further strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean, continues to violate the sovereignty of both the RoC and Greece, and at the same time attempts to stop the construction of EastMed, which would put Turkey out of the energy affairs. In particular, the recent agreement between Greece, Israel and Cyprus on the construction of EastMed will intensify the Turkish aggression, and possibly the Turkish positions will be supported by Russia, which is also negatively affected by this development. Finally, with regard to the Turkish claims in Cyprus, Turkey argues that Turkish-Cypriots have the right to co-exploit hydrocarbons in the Cypriot EEZ and asserts to have a role on the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the sea around Cyprus.

In addition, Turkey is planning, with operational terms, to improve its strategic value on energy issues. It seeks to become a transit state by promoting a diversification of energy corridors that end or pass through its territory, while claiming to get its own mining platform, by either building it or buying it. In addition, Ankara seeks to pass the natural gas by using pipelines which are passing through its territory. In particular, it seeks to construct an Israeli-Turkish pipeline to channel the gas of Israel and Cyprus through to Turkey and then to the north and another Turkish-Israeli-Egyptian pipeline to the South to channel gas to the Asian markets through the Canal Suez.

Turkey is a state that imports energy, with the largest quantities of gas procuring from Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan. With regards to Russia and Iran, Turkey cannot exert significant political influence, as these countries are competing against Turkey states, with strong political and economic displacement. It is, therefore, energy dependent on them. On the other hand, Turkey's choice for a strategic alliance on energy affairs with Israel is currently not feasible due to their frozen relations, the choice of Israel for finding other allies (e.g. Cyprus and Egypt), but also the unresolved Cypriot problem that provokes instability in the region.

Positions and strategy of Israel

The Israeli state has become a key player in Eastern Mediterranean energy issues as hydrocarbon deposits in its EEZ have made the country energy-independent. At the same time, Israel has upgraded its geopolitical position through energy exports which can be carried out. Thus, Israel is now seeking for strategic solutions for managing the gas discovered within its EEZ, whilst

aiming to maximize its national interest. The comparative advantage of Israel is that it now has, like the RoC, the largest potential energy reserves in the wider Middle East. These reserves are not controlled by Russia, Iran or some of the Gulf states, and therefore Israel consists an important state for the western alliance pillar.

Israel, by cooperating with the RoC, expects to create a bridgehead in Europe that will enable it to transfer its energy reserves to European states. The EEZ demarcation agreement with RoC, in 2011, laid the foundations for achieving this goal. For Israel, Cyprus consists a safe geopolitical bastion, which is necessary to provide the appropriate strategic depth for an Israeli exit in Europe. Thus, Israel desires stability in Cyprus which will allow the passage of a pipeline from Israel to Turkey through the Cypriot EEZ. Israel's strategic goal is also to create an energy grid, including Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Greece, Cyprus, but also Turkey in the background.

With regards to the relations between Israel and Turkey, it is noted that both are powerful states which, unlike their tense diplomatic relations, continue to maintain excellent economic and commercial transactions; which in recent years have more than doubled, reaching 5,7 billion US dollars.

Positions and strategy of US

The US main target in the Eastern Mediterranean is to keep its hegemonic interests in the region on a long-term basis. At present, these interests concern: firstly, the protection of their allies and the maintenance of NATO allied structures; secondly, limiting the Russians' penetration in the region and this of the Chinese, possibly in the future; and thirdly the safeguarding of the economic benefits for the American energy companies coming from their operations in oil extraction.

The maintenance of US primary role in the Eastern Mediterranean pass through the protection of their allies and those serving the US interests in the region. This is confirmed by the elaboration of NATO's strategic doctrine regarding security in the region. That is how US continues to support Israel and at the same time maintains alliances serving the US interests, such as these among Israel, Cyprus, Greece and among Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. In addition, in recent years, the US has been working hard to restore Turkey-Israel relations. The aim of this effort is to establish a regional energy alliance among these two states, which will help the construction of a submarine gas pipeline that will necessarily need to pass through the Cypriot EEZ. While the US seemingly wants Turkey to be isolated both in geostrategic developments and in the energy issues, Turkey remains a key ally for Americans interests in the region. Moreover, facts, such as the use of Incirlik's air base by Americans, the control of the Bosphorus straits that Turkey offers under it surveillance, and the deployment of American radars in the Turkish territory for warning of the Russians missile defense in Crimea, verify the importance of Turkey for the American interests.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the US role in resolving the Cyprus problem is very crucial, due to its global power and involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean affairs. Thus, a solution to the Cyprus problem will be on the basis of the American hegemonic interest, which is mainly expressed by the preservation of Cyprus in the Western sphere of influence.

Positions and strategy of Russia

Russia is increasingly seeking its return to Eastern Mediterranean affairs by strengthening its presence on strategic, political, military and economic level. Russia tries to create a basis for safeguarding its presence in the Mediterranean Sea, which is translated into the use of the naval base on Syrian territory and the political control of the Assad regime by supporting it in the Syrian crisis. Thus, through its military presence, Russia also seeks to play a role in energy affairs. The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean creates competitors for the Russian supply of energy to third parties and mainly for Russian exports to European countries. Moreover, the limitation of Russian influence on oil producing states in the Eastern Mediterranean, makes its efforts to preserve Russian interests in the region difficult.

With regards to Cyprus, Russia wants to be involved in energy issues in the Cypriot EEZ. Particularly, the Russian interest is translated into a possible involvement of Russian companies in mining of hydrocarbons. As a consequence, it is observed that Russian actions in Cyprus have a strategic goal for creating relations with the RoC on energy and military issues, while the economic axis, somehow, is already established. Russia's actions in Cyprus will, however, encounter the strong resistance of Western states, and particularly this of the United States, as they regard that Cyprus is in their sphere of influence.

Concluding remarks

In view of what has been presented and discussed above, the debate on energy and security issues in the Eastern Mediterranean can lead to the following concluding remarks:

First, energy issues have a huge influence on interstate competition in the Eastern Mediterranean, and that is because they tend to intensify it. As the amount of hydrocarbon extraction from the states of the Eastern Mediterranean increases, interstate competition for control, exploitation and transit of energy will increase. It is already mentioned that each state seeks to secure its own interests in energy affairs, fact that brings the states' national interests in conflict.

Second, alliances that are concurring between the states for exploiting hydrocarbons are fragile, and this is because they are guided by the states' different national interests. As it is observed above, this is verified by the fact that new cooperative and allied structures between states have emerged as a result of finding energy deposits in the region.

Third, energy is a factor of power for Greece and Cyprus, which could be a strategic counterweight to Turkey's offensive strategy. Both states solely have to utilize it efficiently. The efforts for achieving cooperation between the RoC, Greece and Egypt for the definition of EEZs and between Greece, RoC and Israel for the transfer of energy through EastMed, will drastically reduce Turkish control over the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In this case, Turkey will have a significant cost for its national interest, and consequently it will tend to stay out of the region's energy planning.

Fourth, as long as Turkey is against the US and European states' national interests, the Western states' willingness to support Turkey, in energy and security issues, diminishes. A particular problem for the Western alliance is the strategy of Turkey to approach Russia. However, Turkey, due to its size, continues to be an important player for the interests of Western states.

Fifth, Israel is perhaps the most important power factor in the region, because of both its upgrade to energy issues and its existing military power and allied support from the United States. On the other hand, there are still many risks for Israeli security, primarily from Iran, due to its historical conflicts with other states in the region.

Sixth, the great powers, primarily the US and secondary Russia, seek to secure their hegemonic interests in the region. Based on this, they support states that best serve them. European states favor alliances that can provide them with energy, as this would reduce their energy dependence from Russia.

Policy proposals for Greece and Cyprus

Taking into account the above findings, following are presented considerations with regards to strategic choices that Greece and the RoC could adapt on security and energy issues, in order to serve their national interests.

The discovery of energy deposits in the East Mediterranean implies the necessity of strategic planning by Greece and the RoC for the best possible exploitation of their energy deposits at economic, diplomatic and strategic levels. The strategy planning starts with the intensification of procedures for the extraction and exploitation of hydrocarbons, as well as the Greece's actions to declare the Greek EEZ. The acceleration of the above procedures requires the overthrow of the Greek reluctance to implement strategies relating to its security and defense. Under the same strategic point of view, Greece and the RoC could also exploit their geographical position as an energy transit hub, mainly to Europe.

Furthermore, Greece and the RoC have to continue invoking and defending the International Law, as the defense of International Law favors their national interests. Also, based on this thesis, they could implement the policy of strategic alliance with the states that respect International Law, which is

constantly violating by Turkey, especially the Law of the Sea. However, Greece and the RoC have to simultaneously product national power in order to effectively assert their interests.

Moreover, based on the fact that the EU is also interested in creating the EastMed gas pipeline, as this would offer a strong alternative energy supply, Greece and Cyprus could exploit this strategic juncture. As part of the pipeline construction agreement, Israel and Cyprus will have an advantage in relation to other countries for gas exports to the European market, while the European Union has agreed to invest \$ 100 million to carry out a study for the sustainability of the EastMed pipeline project. The EU factor is important for Greece and Cyprus, as long as there is a strategic will by the two countries to exploit the factor in hand.

Additionally, strategic planning and determination are required by both states in order to implement alliances with other states, as alliances add extra power to states. The alliances of Greece and the RoC with other states should act as a counterweight to Turkish aggression. Within the alliances, there are also the relations that the two states have with the USA as a major force, as well as their participation in the EU. Furthermore, within the framework of allied structures, energy transfer programmes can be implemented with other states. As it was mentioned above, the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean has created new data that favors the energy alliance of Greece, Cyprus with Israel. A critical issue for Greek and Greek-Cypriot interests is the EastMed program, which has strategic, political, energy, economic and technological extensions. Based on the facts that the Eastern Mediterranean has large hydrocarbon reserves and European states are looking for new alternative energy choices, either in EU Member States or in neighboring countries which are out of Russian dependence, the prospect of implementation of the EastMed program would increase the benefits for Greece and the RoC, despite its high cost.

Finally, the RoC has the possibility to link energy issues with a solution of the Cyprus problem, which would be at the benefit of all Cypriots. Due to the advantage coming from the discovery of hydrocarbons in its EEZ the RoC has the potential to avoid an unfavorable solution that would abolish its sovereignty and would lose all the benefits of exploitation of hydrocarbons. At the same time, the Greek attitude of not pursuing a more active strategic influence on the energy issues affecting Cyprus, despite the very strong alliance between the two states, may exclude Greece from future strategic developments affecting the Cyprus issue.