


“The Grand Chessboard” in The Eastern Mediterranean and The European Union

Doğu Akdeniz’deki “Büyük Satranç Tahtası” ve Avrupa Birliği

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Abstract

The Eastern Mediterranean topic/issue is one of the main agenda items of international policy in the first quarter of the 21st century. The Eastern Mediterranean is an area where a power struggle is being faced in both regional and global context especially with the discovery of new energy sources. There is no doubt that the European Union (EU) has been developing various moves for the region due to being heavily dependent on outside energy sources. The EU has the purposes and policies for a direct intervention in the latest developments taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially with the EU membership of the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus. However, in addition to the debates regarding whether the newly found energy sources supply a sufficient amount, the EU’s intention to bypass Turkey causes economic, legal and political issues to deepen. The aim of the study is to present a broad outline within the framework of the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean and to evaluate the EU’s policies in this struggle axis.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, Energy, The European Union.

Öz

Doğu Akdeniz konusu/sorunu 21. yüzyılın ilk çeyreğinde, uluslararası politikanın ana gündem maddelerinden birisidir. Doğu Akdeniz, özellikle yeni enerji kaynaklarının keşfi ile birlikte gerek bölgesel gerekse küresel bağlamda güç mücadelesinin yaşandığı bir alandır. Şüphesiz, enerji konusunda büyük oranda dışa bağımlı bir konumda bulunan Avrupa Birliği (AB) de bölgeye yönelik çeşitli hamleler geliştirmektedir. Özellikle Güney Kıbrıs Rum Yönetimi’nin (GKRY) Avrupa Birliği’ne üyeliği ile birlikte, AB’nin Doğu Akdeniz’de yaşanan gelişmelere doğrudan müdahil olma amacı ve politikaları mevcuttur. Ancak keşfedilen enerji kaynaklarının yeterli bir miktar arz edip etmediği tartışmaları ile birlikte, AB’nin bu süreçte Türkiye’yi bypass etme amacı ekonomik, hukuki ve politik sorunların derinleşmesine sebep olmaktadır. İşte bu çalışma, Doğu Akdeniz’de yaşanan güç mücadelesi çerçevesinde genel tabloyu ortaya koyup, AB’nin bu mücadele eksenindeki politikalarını değerlendirme amacını taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğu Akdeniz, Enerji, Avrupa Birliği.

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1. Introduction

The Mediterranean has been a geography where strategic power struggles have taken place within commercial, economic, and political context throughout the history. The geopolitical and geostrategic importance of this area has also taken place in various theories. Within the perspective of Mackinder's heartland theory and Mahan's theory of sea power, the eastern Mediterranean is an important geography (Kesgin, 2018, p. 86-92; Acar & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 599). This importance has taken on a new dimension, especially with the energy resources discovered as of the beginning of the 21st century (Oğurlu, 2017, p. 36). Moreover, regional and global actors have also rushed to take part in this equation. Therefore, it will not be wrong to assume that the new and multi-dimensional area of "the Grand Chessboard" described by Brzezinski (2005) in regard to Eurasian geography is the eastern Mediterranean.

Disputes among the riparian countries in the legal context, debates on status in the Cyprus axis, unsteady picture (Cropsey & Brown, 2014, p. 11) observed even more prominently with the period defined as "the Arab Spring" in the countries of the region can be considered as a few processes of this multi-dimensional area. Apart from the riparian countries, the conflicts of interest of the United States, Russia, and the EU over the region lead to a chronic problem. Therefore, each party's new moves in the region add a new dimension to the balance. The aim of the study is to make an EU-specific analysis in terms of the balance in question. The eastern Mediterranean is considered as a strategic alternative for the EU, which is externally dependent on energy. On the other hand, the presence and interests of the EU member GASC (the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus) in the region is another factor drawing attention.

Within the scope of the stated purpose, the study consists of three parts. In the first part of the study, the eastern Mediterranean will be evaluated as a strategic equation area and the region will be addressed primarily in the scope of geography. Subsequently, energy discovery processes that started in the region at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century will be introduced, and various data will be presented. Following this process, the purposes of regional and global players will be described. In addition, the presence of energy companies in the region will be discussed. The EU's energy problem will be addressed in the second part. Given the main objectives of the EU's energy policy, it is possible to bring up topics such as reducing external dependency on energy, bringing stability to the supply process, making this stability continuous and sustainable, and diversifying supply routes and means. The second part aims at interpreting and explaining the reasons of the EU's interest in the eastern Mediterranean in the context of these headings. In fact, in the third part, the EU's perspective and moves regarding this goal will be evaluated.

There is no doubt that it is necessary to open a separate parenthesis for Turkey when the eastern Mediterranean and EU topics are addressed. Factors such as the status of Cyprus, Turkey's EU accession process, and Turkey-EU relations discourse-oriented course depending on periodic developments are likely to be incorporated into the eastern Mediterranean issue and the EU may reduce Turkey's steps in the eastern Mediterranean to Turkey-EU relations. Moreover, the EU's discourse and policies to eliminate Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean constitute another context. Therefore, this issue will be highlighted, and a comprehensive evaluation will be presented in conclusion part.

2. Strategic Equation Area: The Eastern Mediterranean

The Mediterranean geography affects regional and global relations in terms of both energy and transportation aspects. In terms of energy, this geography arouses the interest of both the states in this region and the other states as it involves the Middle East holding more than half of the world's oil reserves, and its neighboring regions (Yaycı, 2012, p. 4). In the middle of Russia, the Middle East and the North Africa triangle that feeds the EU, the United States and China which are dependent on energy for the sake of maintaining economic growth and development, this strategic area is encountered (Kedikli & Deniz, 2015, p. 401). As for the transportation aspect, the Mediterranean is known as an important transit route. As a matter of fact, the Mediterranean is a sea area that covers only one percent of the world's seas. However, one-third of the world's sea traffic takes place along this route (Yaycı, 2012, p. 7).

Geographically speaking, when a straight line of longitude is drawn from the intersection of Tunisia and the island of Malta, the right side of the longitude is defined as the eastern Mediterranean, the left side as the western Mediterranean. Today there are twenty riparian countries in the Mediterranean basin. Of these, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Slovenia, Italy, France, and Spain have shores in the western Mediterranean while Turkey, Greece, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Egypt, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) have coasts to the eastern Mediterranean (as cited in Kedikli & Çalağan, 2017, p. 122; Duman, 2019, p. 214; Acar & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 600).

The eastern Mediterranean is in a critical location between three continents and in this respect it is at the center of transportation, trade, and energy transfer. On the other hand, the issue regarding the ownership of the recently discovered energy resources is also considered one of the primary reasons for the activity in the region (Acar & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 598). Therefore, the energy issue should be acknowledged as one of the most strategic factors in the eastern Mediterranean equation. The intensive evaluation of this factor on the international agenda came up at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The discovery of the first natural gas field in the eastern Mediterranean happened in Israeli waters in 1999. Proceeding with the exploration activities in the region, in 2009, Israel discovered the Tamar field, with estimated reserves of 280 billion m³, and the Leviathan field, with estimated reserves of 600 billion m³, in 2010. Subsequently, aside from Israel, in 2011 GASC discovered the Aphrodite field with reserves of 129 billion m³ on the southern coast of Cyprus and the natural gas field with estimated reserves of 220 billion m³ in the Calypso field in 2018. In 2015, this time Egypt discovered gas reserves of 850 million m³ in the Zohr field, offshore Egypt and claimed that this amount was in fact surpassed by the reserves discovered in the Noor field (SDE, 2019, p. 4; Duman, 2019, p. 214; Prontera & Ruszel, 2017, p. 145 et al.). Thus, as of the 2000s, the discovery of new energy fields in offshore Cyprus caused the power equation in the region to shift into a new dimension.

It is possible to share the relevant data when evaluated the energy resources in the region in terms of their potential. Accordingly, in its report published on April 8, 2010, the United States Geological Survey (*USG-US Geological Survey*) reported that one of the world's largest natural gas reservoirs is located in the Levant basin, which is a region between Lebanon, Israel, Syria, and the Island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. The report states that the basin in question is estimated to hold 3.5 trillion m³ of natural gas and 1.7 billion barrels of oil (Şafak, 2019, p. 5). In addition, according to international reports, the eastern Mediterranean contains 47% of the world's natural gas reserves, approximately half of the world's reserves (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 1). However, this figure is considered to be open to discussion and this discussion will be evaluated within the third heading/chapter. With the discussions on the amount of the reserves, the fact that the "New Cold War" started as a result of the increasing number of players in the eastern Mediterranean and the analysis of discourse and actions of these players besides the hydrocarbon reserves has gradually shifted from the economic area to the geopolitical area should not be neglected (Kısacık & Erenel, 2019, p. 64). This economic and geopolitical reality also causes legal moves in various contexts within the scope of strategic moves in the eastern Mediterranean. With the discussions regarding the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), these moves have started to take on a more intricate structure and appearance (see Çolak et al., 2019, p. 54).

Within this framework, the attitudes of regional and global actors on the eastern Mediterranean also offer various reflections (see Şafak, 2019; Duman, 2019, p. 216 et al.; Cingoli, 2016; Demir & Tekir, 2017). It is thought that the detailed evaluation of these reflections may be the focus issue of a different study. On the other hand, to put it in general axis, the main objectives of regional and global actors in the eastern Mediterranean can be stated as follows; (a) For Turkey and TRNC (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), firstly to protect their rights in the context of international law and their interests within the scope of these rights, (b) For the EU, to build an alternative energy route to reduce its energy dependency, (c) For Russia, to fulfill its desire to have a presence in the Mediterranean for the sake of retaining energy dominance, (d) For the US, to prevent the actors in question from assuming a more active and effective role in the region, (e) For Israel, not to be isolated in case it becomes an energy-exporting country, (f) For Greece and GASC, to strengthen their weakened economies by acting together by means of the possible alternative energy route that will emerge and (g) For Egypt, to do away with energy imports from Israel through new natural gas resources to be discovered (Güneş & Arslan, 2018, p. 55). Besides the states, the presence of energy companies also constitutes a different aspect of the relations in the region. Using its advantage of international recognition, GASC has conducted hydrocarbon explorations allocating parcels to international energy companies by tender and continues doing so (Kısacık & Erenel, 2019, p. 57). Exploration and drilling operations of Italy's ENI and France's Total companies are the first examples that stand out. In addition, when looking at the region, apart from these companies; it is observed that countries such as the US (Noble, Exxon Mobil), Holland (Shell) and South Korea (Kogas) are present in the region (Acar & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 601; Winrow, 2018; Kahveci Özgür, 2017).

3. European Union and Energy Problem

Energy-oriented relations taken place on a global scale on the East-West axis and the production-consumption line are among the important issues of the last century. Indeed, it was aimed at safely and steadily delivering the energy resources on the East axis to the West axis, which greatly needs these energy resources. Given this difference between

the two axes, according to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2015 report; Nearly half of the world's natural gas reserves (46.9%) are located in the Middle East. Europe and Eurasia (31%), which includes Russia, Asia Pacific (8.2%) and North America (6.5%) follows the Middle East respectively. In terms of consumption, Europe and Eurasia consume the most natural gas (29.6%), followed by North America (28.3%) and Asia Pacific (19.9%) (Şahin, 2019, p. 215). As is seen, the EU region is at the forefront of natural gas consumption, on the other hand, the energy reserve held by the region is low. Therefore, the EU is heavily dependent on foreign energy (Güneş and Arslan, 2018, p. 39). Indeed, the EU imports 53% of the energy that it uses and spends more than one billion Euros daily for this import (Kısacık and Erenel, 2019, p. 53). It is predicted that the energy dependency in question will rise to 70% in the next twenty years (Özdemir, 2009, p. 88).

Therefore, in the context of energy for the EU; concepts such as supply security, continuity, stability, and supplier diversity has gained importance. At this point, especially the concept of energy security has taken on a more dimensional and comprehensive content with the 21st century. The variety of risks encountered has been an effective factor for this content being multi-dimensional and comprehensive. It is possible to evaluate the issues of reducing risks and the need for energy and increasing efficiency on this axis. Alternative energy resources being brought to the agenda in the EU context and the development of technologies in this direction seem to be associated with this (Çelikpala, 2014, p. 86; for the EU's renewable energy policies see also Bayraç & Çildir, 2017, p. 202; Sporer, 2018). In fact, Tagliapietra (2016, p. 97) shows the renewable energy resources factor as one of the reasons for the decline in the natural gas demand of the EU after 2010.

Since the 1990s, the traditional geopolitical and geostrategic aspect of natural gas has been at the forefront in energy security analyses (Çelikpala, 2014). This geopolitical and geostrategic aspect has directly affected the EU. Indeed, The EU's natural gas import dependency on Russia is a known fact (Kısacık & Erenel, 2019, p. 52). Therefore, reducing dependency on Russia in terms of energy security (Ediger et al., 2012, p. 85) is one of the main agenda items of the EU in terms of energy policies. Since the supply dependency brings along various risks, it is essential for the EU to take various measures against potential problems. For example, the EU, which experienced concerns about energy supply security because of the tensions between Russia and Ukraine in the 2000s, has started to seek ways to overcome the crises that are likely to happen in the future (Güneş & Arslan, 2018, p. 52; Kısacık & Erenel, 2019, p. 54; Kakişım, 2019, p. 461).

In fact, the concern that the EU may come face to face with great risks regarding energy supply security and may be subjected to economic problems was clearly demonstrated for the first time in the Green Paper published by the EU Commission in 2000. According to the relevant study, the external dependency and the expectations of an increase in the demand of both energy resources arising from failure to meet the EU's oil and natural gas based energy demand by domestic production will cause the external dependency rates to increase even more. In addition, the import of the relevant energy resources from a few certain countries (which is Russia, as stated in the context of the study undertaken here) may have consequences that may put energy supply security in jeopardy (Uçkan Dağdemir, 2007). Thus, The EU focuses on alternative resources and routes in order to reduce its energy dependency on Russia (Güneş & Arslan, 2018, p. 34).

As one of the main reasons that the EU heavily concentrates on the eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics, it is possible to show the EU's desire to put an end to its energy dependence on Russia. Moreover, with the energy fields discovered in the eastern Mediterranean, GASC, which has become to be seen as a potential new energy supplier for the EU, is considered as an important actor (Kedikli & Çalağan, 2017, p. 134). In the light of these reasons, the importance of the eastern Mediterranean for the EU energy supply security is increasingly growing (Tsakiris, 2018). Especially in terms of medium and long-term goals, the EU's policies on the eastern Mediterranean are thought to determine the Union's energy policy and thus economic and political policies. As this view suggests, it is also necessary to describe in outline the EU's approaches towards the eastern Mediterranean.

4. The Eastern Mediterranean and The European Union

In historical perspective, the EU's eastern Mediterranean policy dates back to the time before the energy-centered developments taken place in the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, it is possible to suggest that the Mediterranean has always been an attractive region for the EU. In fact, some examples such as the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy can be shared in this regard (Özer et al., 2017, p. 173; Akder, 1998; see Dündar Kaya, 2017). Within the framework of energy-focused developments and moves, the eastern Mediterranean has been regarded as an energy source and the discovery of the natural gas reserves off the southern coast of Cyprus have been

seen as the ultimate must-have resources within the framework of the diversification of energy resources strategy for the EU (Kesgin, 2018, p. 371).

The security of the eastern Mediterranean is both an economic and national security issue for the EU countries. It is an economic issue because the most important trading partners of the EU in the historical process have been other Mediterranean countries. On the other hand, it is an issue of national security because the eastern Mediterranean is also the route of potential threats to the EU from the southwest (Kesgin, 2018, p. 367). Within the framework of these factors, it can be said that the EU has two expectations on the energy resources in the region. The first is the idea that the European states' energy dependence on Russia can be relieved by alternative energy resources –the background of this situation was stated within the second part. As for the latter, it is thought that the economy of the GASC may improve thanks to energy import (Kedikli & Deniz, 2015, p. 409).

The GASC issue is maybe one of the most noteworthy examples in the EU's eastern Mediterranean policies. Indeed, the EU's eastern Mediterranean policies have taken on a new dimension with the EU membership of GASC. With the membership of both Greece and the GASC, the EU has internalized the issues related to the maritime jurisdiction, to which these countries are parties. Therefore, it regarded the region that contains both Cyprus and the Aegean Sea as its Union borders (Şafak, 2019, p. 29). Besides the EU, the GASC also, without doubt, aims to obtain various advantages from this process. Admitted to the EU as a member state, the GASC, indeed, has gained an important advantage. At the same time, the GASC also aims to use the economic income to be obtained by offering its energy reserves to the world market as an argument at the negotiating table against the TRNC (Yılmaz, 2018, p.3). This picture shows one of the obstacles that stands in the way of the solution to regional problems because, following its accession to the EU, the GASC's use of the Union's name when taking steps and its attempt to legitimize its activities contrary to international law put the opportunity for trust and cooperation at risk in the current situation (Kedikli & Çalağan, 2017, p. 134).

It can be suggested that the EU pursues the goal of transporting the natural gas resources discovered in the eastern Mediterranean to Europe (Ellinas et al., 2016, p. 25). However, how this will be achieved is a matter of debate in economic, political and legal terms. More than that, how these resources will be transported to consumer countries remains uncertain. Although there are many riparian countries in the eastern Mediterranean, there is no EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) agreement between these countries that has been signed by all parties. Therefore, it doesn't seem possible for any country to act independently of the others about the issues such as the supply and use of the energy resources in the region and roads for the export routes. (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 2). On the hand, the EU seem to be determined to bypass Turkey and the TRNC. The gas is being planned to transport to Europe through a pipeline to be built under the sea and Turkey seems to have been excluded from this pipeline route (Acar & Yılmaz, 2018: 606). However, it should be noted that this is costly in an economic sense, objectionable in a legal sense and unrealistic in a political sense. Indeed, a pipeline route that passes through Turkey and the TRNC would greatly benefit Turkey and the TRNC both in economic and political terms (Çolak et al., 2019, p. 60). On the other hand, apart from the EU, the front of Israel, Greece and the GASC appear to have the similar attitude towards Turkey (Bornstein, 2018, p. 5). It should be added that this unilateral attitude is unlikely to be built on a certain ground in legal terms.

On the other hand, the recently discovered natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean are not expected to meet most of the energy needed by the EU for the time being (Güneş & Arslan, 2018, p. 54). So far, a total of nearly 2 trillion m³ of natural gas reserves have been discovered and this reserve is deemed to be basically far from having the game-changing effect. According to the OPEC data for 2017, the world's natural gas reserve is 199.44 trillion m³ while the crude oil reserve is 1.5 trillion barrels. In the Levant sea, there are 3.4 trillion m³ of natural gas, 1.7 million barrels of crude oil. These reserves correspond to 1.5% and 0.1% of the world reserves respectively (Çolak et al., 2019, p. 58). Therefore, considering the energy amount of the eastern Mediterranean energy resources, it is too early yet to talk about their extraordinary effect that may change the balance of power. This situation, however, does not change the strategic importance of the region and the fact that balances will have a greatly fragile structure in terms of the actors and the objectives and policies of the companies.

Conclusion

The issue of energy has continued to retain its importance since the Industrial Revolution. Discussions focusing on the distribution, supply and productivity of resources have prominently had a direct impact on regional and global balances since the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, it is possible to observe this distribution problem in the background of the First and Second World Wars. When looking at the study from the European Union aspect, it should

not be ignored that the energy problem concerning coal and steel lay at the root of the integration movement that started with the reconstruction process in Europe after the Second World War. The EU's increasing energy demand and especially its natural gas import dependency on Russia have led the EU to alternative resources and routes.

Within this context, the eastern Mediterranean region has been one of the potential resources and routes for the EU in terms of geo-economics, geopolitics, and geostrategy. With the EU membership of the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus in 2004, the EU has pursued a goal of establishing the basis of legitimacy for this process and delivering natural gas in the region to the European continent. However, the instrumentalization of legal discourse for political purposes and besides the EU's moves, the moves of the US and Russia in the region in global equation have dragged the region into an even more complex position. Moreover, the period of instability, which began in late 2010 and has directly affected countries such as Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, has deepened the chaotic structure in the region while the eastern Mediterranean and energy issues have changed the course of the moves on chessboard.

In terms of the moves stated, it would not be wrong to state that the strategic moves in the region have aimed at leaving Turkey and the TRNC alone. Indirect cooperation in the line of Greece, the GASC, Egypt, Israel and the EU and attitudes and discourses towards Turkey offer arguments confirming this view. In fact, the attitude and statements of the EU against Turkey's drilling activities in the east Mediterranean seem to support this argument. In a statement made by the EU, it was said that there is a need in the region for concrete and well-intentioned steps towards creating an environment favorable to dialogue and Turkey's intention to conduct further exploration and drilling activities in the wider region is a regrettable development that conflicts with this need (www.aa.com.tr, 2020). The EU therefore regards Turkey's exploration for natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean as illegal. At this point, the EU sanctions against Turkey were also brought to the fore. However, Turkey stated that it won't step back from its rights in the eastern Mediterranean (bbc.com, 2019). Also, in the light of the recent developments, Turkey's policies on Libya continues to directly concern the developments in the eastern Mediterranean. At this point, GASC, Egypt, Israel and Greece seem to be united in their opposition to Turkey (www.dw.com, 2019).

Notwithstanding these developments, it should be added that the EU's idea of bypassing Turkey, thus delivering natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean to the European continent is not rational in economic terms and does not seem within the bounds of possibility in legal terms either. Therefore, considering the fact that Turkey won't take a step back with regard to the rights in the eastern Mediterranean, it is thought that the relevant problem can be solved on a ground where the countries in the region reach a mutual understanding insofar as possible, otherwise it may turn into a chronic problem in regional and global terms.

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