CYPRUS CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

UNIVERSITY of NICOSIA

ISSN (online): 2547-8702

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY NOTE

February 2021, No. 59

CYPRUS IN THE TENTACLES OF THE GREAT ENERGY GAME OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND THE TURKISH "BLUE HOMELAND"

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The geopolitical and geoeconomic aspects of energy developments in the Levantine basin are of enormous importance, given the power vacuum that has emerged in the subsystem of international relations comprising the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. This is where Erdogan plays a tough poker game with the "blue homeland" doctrine. The superpowers (USA, Russia), as well as China with the Belt and Road Initiative (New silk road), are now openly involved in the energy game of the area. Erdogan is playing a zero-sum game on the geopolitical chessboard, taking advantage of Greek Turkophobia. What Greece has sown she is now reaping. If she had helped Cyprus in 1974, she would not have been confronting what she is now suffering. Nor would the defeat of the Imia episode have occurred in 1996, which accelerated the "graying" or disputing of the Aegean by Turkey. The Turks no longer take Greece seriously and unleash offensive insults, which could also be an occasion for war.

Since 2018 when Turkish drilling ships violated the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Republic of Cyprus, as defined and recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Greece has disappeared completely as a guarantor of Cyprus, a legal obligation under the Treaty of Guarantee that she also forgot in 1974, along with Great Britain. It is regrettable primarily for Greece herself that the Greek "elites" or the Greek political "power system" have never realized that Cyprus has always been the best security and defensive bastion for Greece. Inevitably, then came Greece's turn with the illegal Turkish-Libyan Memorandum on the demarcation of maritime jurisdiction areas and the invasion of Kastelorizo's EEZ, as a retribution to hubris by nemesis, since history does not forgive mistakes, especially of this magnitude. The red lines of Greece are staggering on wheels that that roll back in awe. There are doubts that they

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will stop at half the Aegean dividing line that Turkey covets. Turkey can only be dealt with within the framework of the realistic school of thought of international relations wherein the protection of national security by any means is paramount.

Cyprus must tread firmly and wisely on the tightrope of international tensions. If she plays the win-win game right with the right alliances in the context of the East Med energy competition, Cyprus will not only gain substantial geopolitical leverage beyond material capabilities, thus rendering possible a fairer solution of the Cyprus problem, but she will also derive huge economic benefits. This requires implementing an LNG strategy based on an onshore gas liquefaction station in Vassilikos, which is undoubtedly the best monetization and export option for Cyprus.

The East Med pipeline is an unrealistic fantasy in every respect compared to the LNG Plant. The East Med pipeline proposal can be kept as a communications exercise at a diplomatic level but the true interests of Cyprus (geopolitical, economic, financial and social) in all sectors of the economy and strata of society lie in the construction of a land-based LNG factory, especially given the projections of rising world demand for LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas). First, LNG has the characteristics of oil and therefore, it can be sold in markets all over the world where there is demand and better prices. Second, the development of the energy sector around the LNG Plant with the necessary infrastructure and ancillary industries will create thousands of high value-added jobs across the entire industry value chain that will increase the Gross Domestic product (GDP), while diversifying the economy. The diversification of the Cyprus economy is an issue frequently raised by the credit rating agencies, the necessity of which became all too clear with the hit received by the tourist sector by the covid-19 pandemic. A dynamic energy sector will create inter-sectoral synergies, multiplier effects and economies of scale, rendering the economy more competitive and much safer against external shocks. In addition, the power generation sector will produce cheaper electricity with a greener fuel of lower energy intensity (consumption) and higher energy efficiency and productivity, contributing to a carbon neutral, net zero economy and EU environmental and climate change targets. Third, the cost of the LNG Terminal is lower than that of the proposed East Med pipeline and of a comparatively much lower investment risk. Moreover, the LNG Plant will enable regional cooperation by creating common economic, commercial and strategic interests.

Finally, the LNG Terminal combined with LNG bunkering for fuel supply to ships will help the Cypriot economy literally take off. The Mediterranean Sea is one of the busiest waterways in the world, despite covering less than 1% of the world's oceans. The Mediterranean Sea accounts for about 20% of international maritime trade, 10% of world container transport, 15% of global shipping industry activity and more than 200 million passengers. Furthermore, the Suez Canal in the Mediterranean is one of the seven most important oil and gas transit lanes (energy choke points) in the world.

It is believed that the multinational energy giants, already involved in the Cyprus gas exploration program, that is, Total, ENI, Chevron and Exxon-Mobil (which has already expressed a pertinent interest) and other international investors will be flocking en masse to invest in an onshore LNG Plant. If Turkey wants to invest in the Cypriot LNG Terminal through the Turkish-Cypriots she is welcome to do so, but Cyprus must avoid at all costs the construction of a gas pipeline to Turkey. The Cyprus reserves are literally the only bargaining chip at its disposal for a tolerable solution to the Cyprus problem in the post-Erdogan era.

While Turkey is attempting to devour the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus, reducing it to 6% of what she is entitled to under UNCLOS, our country's position regarding a gas pipeline to Turkey, under whatever disguise or "creative" ambiguity it is presented, must be non-negotiable at the forthcoming five-plus-one conference or any other round of talks on the Cyprus problem. As is well-known, the pipelines render the exporter hostage to the importer and give the intermediary states excessive power at the expense of both.

With an untrustworthy "partner", suffering from an anti-hellenic syndrome and anti-Greek sentiment, a pipeline to Turkey will be a destructive outcome. Instead of channeling the existing and anticipated reserves of neighbouring countries to the LNG Plant in Cyprus, Turkey will sweep them all up. In this respect, another grave risk is the possibility of a Turkish-Israeli rapprochement, signs of which are already emerging. In advancing its strategic goals, Turkey is trying to lure Israel into the mutual plundering of the Cypriot EEZ by offering it a large part of EEZ that does not belong to Turkey in order to further her false claims on continental shelf.

Turkey is already exerting downward pressure on the prices of gas she is importing from Russia, hence it is more than evident what will come out for Cyprus in the case of a pipeline to Turkey. In return for rejecting a gas pipeline to Turkey, Turkey's demand to discard the East Med pipeline project can be accepted. Turkey can, of course, import LNG from Cyprus. She already has four LNG import terminals, two land-based and two Floating Storage and Regasification Units (FSRUs), one of which is located very close to Cyprus in a port in the Dörtyol area (near Ceyhan), in the annexed Syrian province of Hatay. LNG exports can also be made to Greece via the import terminal in Alexandroupolis. Greece will derive enormous benefits from the supply of natural gas to the Balkans and Eastern Europe through the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline, thus relieving Russian dependence, in line with the European Union's energy diversification policy.

Turkey is not interested in immediate disbursement from the Cyprus National Investment (Hydrocarbon) Fund for the benefit of Turkish Cypriots. Turkey is seeking to become an energy hub and to hold Europe hostage by controlling energy flows. Controlling energy flows through Turkish territory, as well as seeking to become a nuclear power, will help Turkey attain her goal of being accepted into the superpower club. Evidently, it is not in Europe's interest to exchange Russian energy dependence for Turkish. Cyprus has convincing arguments for the EU in this regard. The East Med reserves of oil and gas constitute a fifth energy corridor to Europe, with a distinct and separate identity from the fourth corridor from the Caspian via Turkey (TANAP-TAP), for the security of which Turkey waged its latest war with Azerbaijan against Armenia, besides its military interventions in Syria and Libya.

The Turkish “blue homeland” doctrine affects the legitimate interests of all regional states and of course antagonizes wider international vested interests. Allowing Turkey such a vast naval and energy resource control in and around the Mediterranean presents a great threat not only to regional actors and the West but also to existing geostrategic subsystems, while endangering the security and political order of several countries, especially in the Arab world.

Above all, the Turkish “blue homeland” expansionist policy represents an existential threat to both Greece and Cyprus. In this regard, both states must devise an effective deterrence strategy in order to counteract the Turkish coercive tactics. In particular, Greece does have the capability, the support of international law and its own deep historical roots to muster the will and acquire the means to resist. A certain way to end Turkish threats against Hellenism is to acquire nuclear weapons and thus establish a balance of terror, given the comparatively adverse indicator trends. Nuclear capability remains the ultimate deterrence against possible aggression. It is well known how much Turkey respects Israel, a country of less than nine million, precisely because of its nuclear and military capabilities. Without vision and targeting, with opponents who possess them both and instrumentalize them, the adverse outcome is a given certainty.

An effective and immediate exit from the Thucydidean trap (as illustrated by Thucydides in the famous Melian dialogue during the Peloponnesian War) of a revisionist and aggressive Turkey is the only realistic option for Greece, whatever it takes, in order to reestablish fast the eroded balance of power, if war with Turkey is to be avoided.