

**T.C.**  
**ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**GEOPOLITICAL SHIFT IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: A  
THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS BEHIND TURKEY'S  
ISOLATION IN THE REGION (2002-2021)**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Imen KTARI**

**Department of Political Science and International Relations**  
**Political Science and International Relations Program**

**FEBRUARY, 2022**



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**Thesis Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Filiz KATMAN**

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**Danışman**

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Filiz KATMAN

İşbu tutanak, tez danışmanı tarafından jüri üyelerinin tez değerlendirme sonuçları dikkate alınarak jüri üyeleri adına onaylanmıştır.

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(\*\*) **Kabul / Ret veya Düzeltme kararı hâli yazı ile yazılacaktır.**



## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results, which are not original of this thesis. (02/02/2022)

Imen KTARI





## **FOREWORD**

Since my early stages, I was taught to work hard for what I sought to achieve, to be patient and strong-willed to accomplish the goals I set in my mind, the priceless attributes were taught from my loving-caring parents to whom I bestow an ever-burning flame of gratitude and a deep sense of obligation, their unceasing source of encouragement and benignly made the completion of this work an honorable achievement to my academic journey.

Special thanks and grateful senses to my honorable advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Filiz Katman for her constant help, guidance and suggestions, without whom the present work would not have been accomplished.

I would like to express my gratitude to the experimented trainers and colleagues at the ORIENT TV workplace for their help and constant support in facilitating the process of the fulfillment of the present study.

February, 2022

Imen KTARI



**GEOPOLITICAL SHIFT IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:  
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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study is to highlight the core factors behind the geopolitical shift in the Eastern Mediterranean explained by the outcome of Turkey's exclusion. Recent studies have showcased absolute profits regional cooperative institutions would have engendered in the arena, consequently the formation of the East Med Gas Forum in 2020 is an attempt to conjointly secure the rewards estimated in the region. Soon, the result led to a sudden rival sequence in the region reflected in the alignment of major Eastern Mediterranean actors being Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, France and Italy to be cognitively entitled to the regional exploration and extraction of gas resources under the East Med Forum all against Turkey. Study aims at demystifying the nature of the geopolitical shift through the use of the Stephen Waltz's theory of the Balance of Threat and the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSC) developed by Burry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver. The dissertation findings defend the idea that Turkey projects a permanent threat to the above-mentioned states starting from 2002, subsequent developments in its foreign policy compiled with its rising economic and military power, left a tremendous impact on the current ideological targets Turkey defends in the arena. Consequently, Turkey seems to be targeted by its neighbors and is now exempt from gas exploration and extraction entitlements other states currently enjoy, which contradicts its geopolitical interests. In terms of method, the study is qualitative using historical analysis and case study research, the historical analysis technique is significant to showcase the relevance of deep-rooted historical ties on the current sudden outcome of Turkey's isolation. Case study aims to testify the applicability of the Balance of Threat Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory on the exemption outcome using specifically the embedded case study to include various analysis of foreign policy relations with

Turkey, being mainly in the present study, Greece, Israel and Egypt. Within this framework, data is collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Data from primary sources will be generated from the semi-structured interviews with political reporters and analytical experts in a face-to face setting, where all interviews are recorded and transcribed to seek new insights about the topic of relevance and reach clarity about the findings. Data from secondary sources is collected through the literature review, which requires document review from articles, press releases, books, and reports. Quantitative data is collected from secondary sources from books and articles, numeric characteristics are classified. In data analysis, the study uses both the content analysis technique to examine the qualitative data collected and discourse analysis technique to scrutinize the relevant data derived from the interviews.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Regional Security Complex, Balance of Threat, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt.

# **DOĞU AKDENİZ'DE JEOPOLİTİK KAYMA: TÜRKİYE'NİN BÖLGEDE İZOLASYONU ÜZERİNE TEORİK BİR ANALİZ (2002-2021)**

## **ÖZET**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdeniz'deki bölgeselleşme sürecinden dışlanması sonucunda açıklanan jeopolitik değişimin arkasındaki temel faktörleri vurgulamaktır. Son araştırmalar, işbirliği kurumlarının bölgede yaratacağı mutlak kârları vurgulamaktadır, sonuç olarak 2020'de Doğu Akdeniz Gaz Forumu'nun oluşumu, 90'ların sonlarında ilan edilen Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) jeolojik araştırmasının tahmin ettiği ödülleri birlikte güvence altına alma girişiminden başka bir şey değildir. Kısa süre sonra, bu sonuç bir rakip dizi gelişmeye yol açtı; bunlardan biri, bölgede yakın dönemde meydana gelen jeopolitik değişim yani başlıca Doğu Akdeniz aktörlerinin, yani Yunanistan, Kıbrıs, Mısır, İsrail, Fransa, İtalya, Filistin ve Ürdün'ün bilişsel olarak hizalanmasından oluşan ve Türkiye'ye karşı bölgesel gaz arama ve çıkarma faaliyetlerine yetki veren Doğu Akdeniz Forumu. Mevcut konunun ışığında, bu çalışma, Stephen Walt'ın "İttifakların Kökenleri" kitabından yer alan Tehdit Dengesi Teorisi'ni ve Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde ve Ole Wæver tarafından geliştirilen Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi (BGK) kullanılarak jeopolitik kaymanın doğasını aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, 2002 yılından itibaren Türkiye'nin artan ekonomik ve askeri gücünün dış politikasına yansımalarıyla yukarıda adı geçen devletlere kalıcı bir tehdit oluşturduğu fikrini savunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Türkiye komşuları tarafından hedef alınmış gibi görünüyor ve şu anda diğer devletlerin sahip olduğu gaz arama ve çıkarma haklarından muaf, bu da kendi jeopolitik çıkarlarıyla çelişiyor. Yöntem açısından çalışma, tarihsel analiz ve vaka çalışması araştırması kullanılarak niteldir; tarihsel analiz tekniği, köklü tarihsel bağların Türkiye'nin tecrit edilmesinin mevcut ani sonucu üzerindeki uygunluğunu sergilemek açısından önemlidir. Vaka çalışmasının amacı, ağırlıklı olarak mevcut durumda olmak üzere, Türkiye ile Yunanistan, İsrail ve Mısır'ın ilişkilerinin çeşitli analizlerini içerecek şekilde özel

olarak gömülü vaka çalışmasını kullanarak Tehdit Dengesi Teorisi ve Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi muafiyet sonucuna uygulanabilirliğini kanıtlamaktır. Bu çerçevede veriler, birincil ve ikincil kaynaklardan toplanmıştır. Birincil kaynaklardan elde edilen veriler, konu hakkında yeni iç görüler aramak ve bulgular hakkında netliğe ulaşmak için tüm görüşmelerin kaydedileceği ve yazıya döküleceği yüz yüze bir ortamda, siyasi muhabirler ve analitik uzmanlarla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilecektir. İkincil kaynaklar olan makaleler, basın bültenleri, kitaplar ve raporlar gibi farklı türevlerden belge incelemesi gerektiren literatür taraması yoluyla toplanmıştır. İkincil veri kaynağından toplanan sayısal özelliklerde nicel veriler sınıflandırılmıştır. Veri analizinde çalışma, nitel verileri incelemek için içerik analizini, görüşmelerden elde edilen verileri incelemek için söylem analizi tekniğini kullanılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Jeopolitik, Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi, Tehdit Dengesi, Türkiye, Kıbrıs, İsrail, Mısır.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>EEZ</b>	: Exclusive Economic Zone
<b>EMGF</b>	: Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum
<b>ENI</b>	: Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (State Hydrocarbons Authority)
<b>EU</b>	: European Union
<b>GCASC</b>	: Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus
<b>GCC</b>	: Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>GNA</b>	: Government of National Accord
<b>ISIS</b>	: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
<b>LNA</b>	: Libya National Army
<b>MENA</b>	: Middle East and North Africa
<b>RSC</b>	: Regional Security Complex
<b>SCAF</b>	: Supreme Council of Armed Forces
<b>TRNC</b>	: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
<b>UN</b>	: United Nations
<b>USA</b>	: United States of America



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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. Topic**

The present dissertation seeks to investigate the reasons behind the dynamics of the isolation of Turkey from the interests of the emerging regionalization processes in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly after the foundation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF or EGF/East Med Gas Forum) in 2020. Specifically, the study sheds the light on the regional cooperative plans implemented by major Eastern Mediterranean littoral states (particularly Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt) for the extraction of gas reserves together with the role of the European Union dimension in fostering the exclusion of Turkey despite promising economic and financial incentives cooperative regional-institution building projects demonstrates. It has been argued that the exclusion of Turkey from the regionalization plans was given due to the threatening environment it projects for the rest of the states as a rising economic and political power in the region. For the sake of expanding this argument, Stephen Walt's book of "The Origins of Alliances" together with the Regional Security Complex Theory of Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde, and Ole Wæver (2003) will be implemented to analyze the reasons behind the alliance of major littoral states against a particular actor being Turkey.

The past few decades have witnessed exceptional geopolitical shifts at both the international and regional levels in the world, consequently the Eastern Mediterranean region is none of an exception especially after the discovery of dormant volatile amounts of hydrocarbon resources in its seabed. Therefore, starting from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a wealth of literature has been growing treating the Eastern Mediterranean as an area of interest. In this framework, many scholars in their scientific researches defended the idea of how resource discovery under a neoliberal regime will drive to institutionalized and regionalized cooperation processes to include all the concerned littoral actors in the region despite existing protracted conflicts (Dizdaroglu, 2017; Tanriverdi, 2013; Poteau, 2018) whereas other realist specialists looked at the idea from a more pessimistic angle

demystifying the fact that resource-discovery rests as a mean to discord and escalations of protracted political and ideological tensions (Opcin, 2015; Yazgan, 2016). Correspondingly, today, Turkey comes across as the only Eastern Mediterranean country to be prevented from multinational gas exploration efforts in the region with a growing anti-Turkey geopolitical realignment in the region proved by the recent formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020, which involved major concerned littoral Eastern Mediterranean actors being (Greece, Israel, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, France, and Italy) without the inclusion of Turkey despite sharing common geostrategic, security and economic concerns with the above-stated actors. In order to demystify the reasons behind the unprecedented outcome, a number of scientific researches including the academic work of Pinar Ipek and Volkan Tibet Gur (2020) demystify the role of ideational mechanisms, particularly the precedent shift in Turkish foreign policy preferences such as cognitive priors, redefined exogenous ideas and incongruent political culture as opposed to the power-driven accounts for cooperation, that shaped the result of Turkey's isolation from the regionalization processes. Furthermore, other scientific researches emphasize the importance of the recent subsequent developments of Turkey's foreign policy in its relations with regional neighbors that resulted in its isolation. In other words, Turkey's distrustful relations with Egypt since 2013, its support for the Muslim Brotherhood party in Egypt along with its military presence in Libya against Egyptian interests, compiled with Israel downgrading relations due to the Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) incident in 2010 and its consistent support to the Palestinian cause and Arab revolts along with the Turks-Greek protracted conflict resulted in its regional isolation and exclusion from regionalization despite newly on-going efforts from Turkey's side to reconcile and repair its regional ties (Gormus, 2021). Starting from this point, the present research aims at untangling the nature of the shift in geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean and the anti-Turkey alliance formation, which emerged after the creation of the East Med Forum in 2020 as a balance of threat against the rising inter-regional power of Turkey. Both Israel and Egypt perceive Turkey as a permanent threat in the region for a number of reasons. The first reason goes back to late 2010 after Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) incident against Israel, Turkey's constant distorts of Israel's public image and support for the Palestinian cause and Arab revolts in the Middle East. Similarly, for Egypt, Turkey is regarded as a permanent threat and a rising assertive military power, particularly



after its intervention in the Libyan affair since 2019 and its support for the Libyan military officer Khalifa Haftar against the Egyptian army, its back-up for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood Party in Egypt along with its host for anti-governmental media channels within its lands. Likewise, the Turkish-Cypriot dispute comes across as a protracted conflict in which countries rival against land and sea sovereignty, s (full name please) Exclusive Economic Zones bilateral agreements, and pivoting political and social culture since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The main research question is formulated as follows: What is the nature of the alliance of the East Med Gas Forum littoral states formed against Turkey? Whereas other sub-research questions are divided as follows: On which levels (economic or political) Turkey is perceived as a threat in the Eastern Mediterranean? What are the implications of Turkey's foreign policy toward the regional geopolitical shift and its exclusion from the regionalization process? How future predictions could be concluded for the consequences of the regionalization process in the Eastern Mediterranean and its impact on the region based on the current events?

The present research argues that the alignment of East Med Gas Forum states against Turkey is a balance of threat alliance explained by the balance of threat theory developed by Stephen Walt and the Regional Security Complex Theory of Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde, and Ole Wæver (2003). The dissertation argues that the opposition exists due to Turkey's manifestation as a rising middle power in the region with growing economic capabilities and a divergent ideological stances in the region , which projects a permanent threat against its neighboring states , especially to those with a less military power, or different political ideologies in the region. The alignment against Turkey is argued to be an intentional opposition in order to limit Turkey's regional growing economic power and political influence.

## **B. Purpose/Importance**

The present dissertation investigates the reasons behind Turkey's isolation after the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in late 2020 using the balance of threat (Walt, 1987) and regional security complex theory of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003) in "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security". The research will mainly address Turkish-Israeli relations starting from 2010 to 2020, Turkish-Egyptian relations along with Turks-Cypriot

relations and the role of Turkish-EU relations in fostering its regional exemption. Demonstrating the background of regional actors' relations as well as Turkey's reaction vis a vis the act of exclusion will give us great insight into the events that led to the act of isolating Turkey. Setting up such a framework, it concludes the type of threat Turkey projects in the region as its rising aggregate capabilities and influential political ideologies grow, neighboring states especially those with less economic power and different political ideologies will feel threatened and weak in the presence of Turkey's current regional vision, and in order to balance the existing threat, a combined opposition existed. The opposition could be exemplified in the strategic alignment of major littoral states in the eastern Mediterranean including Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Italy, France, and Palestine under the East Med Gas Forum in 2020 without the inclusion of Turkey. The thesis will conclude by the future predictions such cooperation will result in and future geopolitics the eastern Mediterranean area will confront. The significance of the present research lies in the fact that it treats a recent developed area in terms of gas reserves and tries to explain in a deep level the nature of the geopolitical shift and the great alliance that happened against "Turkey". Another significance is that the present paper explains the geopolitical shift in terms of the balance of threat theory, which is derived from structural realism and regional securitization theories which claims that geographical regional power states project more threats than dominant powers as long as they are neighbors. Furthermore, the significance of the present paper is demonstrated in its contribution to the literature in the field of geopolitics and foreign policy which matters in the world politics of international relations.

### **C. Fields, Resources, Place-Duration and Support**

The researcher will embark on the study of international relations and foreign policy discipline to scrutiny the indicated topic. The study will mainly use both secondary data and primary data collection techniques in order to answer the main research question. Secondary data has been obtained from press releases, reputable newspaper websites, academic journals, books, and annual reports. Primary data sources are stemmed from official documents from organizations, in-person interviews with political reporters, and analytical experts through the semi-structured interview technique in order to reach clarity about the topic and extend the

information collected from the secondary data base. The dissertation is conducted in the Republic of Turkey and as a former co-trainer in Orient TV of Istanbul, the researcher assumes the ability to conduct high profile interviews with potential political reporters in the field of study.??? the research is estimated to be completed within 8 months, from July 2021 to February 2022. The present research has received no financial support for its completion, authorship, and/or publication.

#### **D. Methods and Techniques**

It is a qualitative study using historical analysis and case study in research, it mainly showcases the importance of deep-rooted historical ties on the present sudden outcome of the isolation. The research methodology will use the case study technique to testify the applicability of the balance of threat theory and regional security complex theory on the current outcome of the isolation of Turkey. 5 or this sake, embedded case study technique or multiple case studies will be used, including the study of Greece, Israel, and Egypt's foreign policy relations with Turkey along with the impact of the European Union issue on Turkey's isolation. The dissertation discrepancies lie in its exemption of Palestine, Jordan, France, Italy and other great powers interest-driven policies from the systematic analysis despite their importance on the outcome the research might come up with. Within the framework of the time constraint the thesis completion predetermine, the study will not visit the international law perspective on the justices of the Libyan-Turkish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or scrutinize the solutions offered to the Greek-Turkish conflict case surrounding EEZs rights and sovereignty issues, hence it will limit itself to demonstrate their impact on the current event of Turkey's isolation. Too long for a sentence.

Within this framework, data will be collected from both primary and secondary sources. Data from primary sources are generated from reputable organization reports and the semi-structured interview with political reporters and analytical experts in a face-to face setting, where all interviews will be recorded and transcribed to seek new insights about the topic of relevance and reach clarity about the findings. Data from secondary sources are collected through literature review, which requires document review from articles, press releases, books, and reports. In data analysis,

the study uses both the content analysis are you sure about the content analysis.  
technique to examine the qualitative data collected.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GEOPOLITICS, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA), EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ), BALANCE OF THREAT THEORY, REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY**

### **A. Definitions**

#### **1. Geopolitics**

Geopolity is a term composed of two words being mainly “geography” and “policy” the latter measures the extent to which the political activity of a state or an area is being conducted in considerations with the influence of its physical characteristics, demographic and economic growth along with its geostrategic position in the world map (Dictionary Cambridge Organization, 2021). In social sciences, the term geopolitics refers to the interdependence of two key factors being, the geographic position and other political elements of a region or a state in predetermining its condition in the international relations arena. In other words, a geopolitical study mainly showcases the relevance of geography in affecting the current flow of politics within a particular region (Zbigniew, 1986). In the meanwhile, Nicolas Spykman states that “ministers come and go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed” to his citation, a destined physical reality a state enjoys is something persistent and not randomly present, it alternatively showcases a set of opportunities and constraints in the international relations field (Spykman, 1969), conceptualizing that ‘it is the geographical location of a country and its relations to centers of military power that define its problem[s] of security’ (Scholvin, 2016). To dive deeper, Nicolas Spykman (1944) in his book the “The Geography of the Peace” attributed the term sovereign state to a state whose geography remains the same and its territorial base is being the only factor that influences its foreign policy. To his opinion, a country’s location along with its topography meaning (land, oceans, equator..) determine its nearness to the centers of power, areas of conflicts or the possible established routes of communication, each of which necessitate a different national defense strategy and a foreign policy that

goes in congruency with the state's position to basic issues and territorial security being potential enemies or union and amity (Spykman, 1944). According to Nicolas Spykman (1944), there exist a number of geopolitics factors that inspire a state's adoption to a particular foreign policy being mainly, its geographical position in the world, size, typology, along with its natural resources, the study of the fore mentioned factors certificate a state's pursue of a successful foreign policy. As mentioned, specialists in this field introduced the term geopolitics based on the examination of both the location and the physical geography of a region and correspondingly counseling advice to politicians (Scholvin, 2016). From another perspective, Helford Mackinder (1904) proclaims "geographical features govern, or at least, guide history" as such he acknowledges the pivotal factor of nature in predetermining politics in the international relations, he finishes the idea with, "man and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls". In his book titled "The Geographical Pivot of History" Mackinder (1904), advanced the Heartland Theory in clarifying "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, who rules the World-Island commands the world", he stressed on the strategic importance of the "Heartland" being Eastern-Europe or the "Pivot Area" as mentioned, where he attributed an immense significance to the region given its vastness and centrality in the world map. Though ruled before by the Soviet Union, the area allows a dominant power to be eligible to control the World-Island, stressing on the value of its natural protection from sea powers by ice in the north and mountains and deserts from the south, which weakened its invasion at that time, he noted that due to the today's supremacy of land power, the introduction of railroads is a double-edged reality, has eased Heartland's vulnerability to land invasion (Mackinder, 1904). The Rimland Theory, subsequently gained momentum after being currently adopted by the United States as an effort to hinder the Chinese influence in controlling parts in the East and Southeast Asia the theory proposes. Being conceptualized by Nicolas Spykman (1944), the author stressed on the importance of the Rimland, which includes Asia minor, Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, China, Korea and East Asia for the control of the Eurasian continent due to its demographic weight, natural resources and industrial development. Spykman stated "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia, who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world". The area is in fact suffering from great geopolitical security concerns due to its vulnerability from both the land and sea sides (Spykman,

1944). The European Union's and the North Atlantic Treaty expansionist intentions to the East is a reflection of the convenience of the Spyksman's theory, the example of the Central Europe as part belonging to the West, yet Russia's active expansionist intentions toward the European Rimland has been always assured by its recent occupation of Crimea (Scholvin, 2016).

## **2. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)**

The abbreviation of MENA is a short term symbolizing the vast region of Middle East and North Africa. There exists no specific definition in introducing the concept of MENA region as member states varies according to the recognition of international organizations. Therefore, the most comprehensive definition includes 24 member states, 21 of which are members of the Arab League (Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen), with the inclusion of Iran, Israel and Turkey (El-Erian & Fischer, 2000). The MENA region benefits from a smart geostrategic location with a facilitated access to large markets, a young and increasingly educated population along with several potential developments in a number of sectors, varying from manufacturing to renewable energy and tourism (OECD, 2021).

Furthermore, the MENA region is privileged for its possession of vast reserves of natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas. According to the organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, the OPEC member-states are primarily derived from the MENA region and enjoy 79.4% of the world's oil reserves, which make it a pivotal organ for the stabilization of the global economy (OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin, 2019). Unfortunately, the region is currently proclaimed to be largely affected by economic and political transformations despite predictions for better growth in future. According to the Global Peace Index 2020, the Institute for Economics and Peace declared that "the Middle East and North Africa remains the world's least peaceful region, despite improvements for 11 countries" (APO, 2020). The main factors to its instability are classified into three categories all of which go back to economic, demographic and political upheavals. Some of these nations are being currently eroded by persistent wars, political revolutions and tribal and sectarian conflicts, noting that after the decolonization processes of the region extra pivotal conflicts emerged, for instance persistent Iraqi-Kurdish conflict; the Arab-

Israeli conflict, the PKK terrorism (1978–present); Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy wars, the situation is a direct outcome to the absence of quality of governance, lack of security and justice systems that vastly caused social discontentment in the region (Cordesman & Toukan, 2016). The region is currently suffering the onus of the Arab Spring revolutions (2010–2011) started with the Tunisian Revolution followed by the Egyptian revolution of 2011 whilst sparking war throughout the rest of the region notably, the Syrian Civil War, the Libyan Civil War, the Yemeni Civil War and the Iraqi war against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) (Cordesman & Toukan, 2016). Though the rest majority of the MENA nations have currently remained stable and continuing their economic, political and legislative progress (Cordesman & Toukan, 2016).

### **3. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**

EEZ is a short abbreviation to the term Exclusive Economic Zone, which is according to the United Nations (UN) (UNCLOS, 1982) on the Law of Seas in the Article 55, “The exclusive economic zone is an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, subject to the specific legal regime established in this part, under which the rights and jurisdiction of the coastal State and the rights and freedoms of other States are governed by the relevant provisions of this Convention” (United Nations, 1982). The United Nations (UNCLOS, 1982) specified the legal length of an EEZ as not to extend beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured” (United Nations, 1982). Accordingly, “nations enjoy the freedoms of navigation, over flight, the establishment of submarine cables and pipelines, operation of ships and aircraft in their boundaries” (United Nations, 1982). In the Article 56, the United Nations declares the rights to exclusive economic zone a coastal state enjoys guaranteeing as such “sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds. Sovereign coastal states enjoys entitlements to the establishment and use of artificial islands, installations and structures, the conduct of marine scientific research, protection and preservation of the marine environment (United Nations, 1982).



## **B. Balance of Threat Theory**

The importance of this theory is that it enables researchers to investigate the forces that stimulate states to support one another's foreign policy in a proximate geographical arena, to formulate alliances in the first place, and sometimes to prioritize the process of territorial integrity and regionalization processes of some local units at the expense of some others. The theory also highlights the types of potential threats statesman according to which start seeking out external support or form alignments against a specific rising regional power (Walt, 1987).

Particularly, it is evident that the alliance of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt did not emerge arbitrary. Instead, there exist a number of factors that led to its emergence in the first place, the exclusion of Turkey was not unintentional, as the theory suggests. In this unit, the origins of alliance formation will be discussed briefly using conceptions from the theory to defend our main argument.

### **1. Alliance**

Walt (1987) in his book of "The Origins of Alliances" states that "states ally to balance against threats rather than just power alone" as such the theory is perceived as a refinement and an alternative to the traditional "Balance of Power" Theory, centered around the idea that states does not align merely to counter-balance a rising material power in the international system but a power that projects new threatening ideologies compelled with a rising material capacities in the region.

Walt (1987) in this sense defines an alliance as "a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states. When confronted by a significant external threat, states may either balance or bandwagon". Within the framework of the investigated alliance formation case between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, the alignment was formed by states that seem to be close enough in terms of geography with Turkey and with each other. Realizing that geography is a constant and an unchangeable tangible by human intervention, geopolitics on the other hand is what states can control. Geopolitics is usually influenced by the regions where resources are concentrated the most, since resources and wealth are distributed unevenly resulting in some regions to be extra more valuable than others fueling as such a state's industrial and military power along with trade routes vis a vis others, incentives to resource acquisition emerge

(Andrikopoulos, n.d). Human intervention in such circumstance is highly valuable thanks to the presence of facilitating infrastructure to transfer the wealth, treaties or at worst, the creation of wars or discord between states (Andrikopoulos, n.d). Moving to the main theoretical framework, Walt (1987) defines balancing as allying with other states against the common perceived threat, its main reason is to maximize state's commitments to their security *vis a vis* the common threat. Whereas bandwagoning is the alignment of some states with the main source of danger (Walt, 1987). Bandwagoning is a rare occasion occurred in the history of international relations once took place it means that states are suffering from a security scarce, because when aggressors attract additional allies it will boost their power and hamper the opposition's force, which will weaken the situation of vulnerable states (Walt, 1987). Whereas balancing is the most common tendency and it means that states are more secure to confront aggressors and form a balance in the region through the combined opposition (Walt, 1987). Therefore, balancing or bandwagoning realizations are predetermined depending on state's capabilities (Walt, 1987). Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt preferred, therefore, to establish an alliance realization as a reaction to the new resources found in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and establish new trade routes to exert their exploration plans which gave a new geopolitical meaning to the region. Alliances are the main means of states' foreign policies and their existence contribute to a great extent to the outbreak of peace or within a defined area (Andrikopoulos, n.d). The exclusion of Turkey from this realization is explained in terms the external rising material and political threat it poses in the region.

The balancing behavior according to Walt is defined as "states join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat" (Walt, 1987). In other words, the more advanced the state appears to be in terms of natural resources and military capabilities compared with its local units, the more fear it will project in the region, thus it would frequently encounter a committed opposition (Walt, 1987). Therefore, states choose to balance for two main reasons. The first reason is that states often balance in order to curb a potential hegemon from becoming too stronger and more powerful to dominate them, therefore avoiding being dominated by its potential is the preferred option (Walt, 1987). In this case, states will be in a constant state of risk until the source of threat is

balanced or destroyed through the alignment formation strategy. As such, they tend to join those who are at the same level of power or do not seek dominant intentions for the sake of avoiding being controlled by the states who are capable of doing so in future (Walt, 1987).

Overall, states in their foreign policies often tend to opt for balancing rather than bandwagoning as a preferred option since states cannot fully guarantee other state's intentions and future action plans (Walt, 1987). As such, bandwagoning comes across as a risky option since it boosts the dispensable resources of the threatening power with no trust in its continued loyalty (Walt, 1987). Walt states that "Because perceptions are unreliable and intentions can change, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to rely on the hope that a state will remain benevolently disposed" (Walt, 1987). Likewise, the weaker and less secure the state is, the more preferable for it to bandwagon than to balance. They must choose the winning side especially if they are more sensitive to a proximate power or in the case of the unavailability of alliances (Walt, 1987).

## **2. Sources of threats**

There exist different sources of threat in international relations. According to Walt, one of which is the aggregate power, which signifies that "the greater a state's total resources (for e.g. population, industrial and military capability, and technological prowess), the greater a potential threat it can pose to others" (Walt, 1987). In other terms, a state that appears greater in terms of natural and industrial resources and thus powerful enough to threaten the rest of units in a region will elicit an aligned opposition (Walt, 1987). As such, in the case of Turkey, Israel for example may feel threatened by Turkey due its hegemonic intention in the Eastern Mediterranean region along with its prevailing issues with Greece, Egypt and Cyprus concerning borders and politics which motivated a counter-reaction of balance by the rest of local units in the region.

- Aggregate power is the state's total resources with regards to population growth rate, industrial and military capabilities and technological development that project it as a potential threat to others (Walt, 1987). Recognizing this fact, states usually tend to alien against any state that is more powerful and dominant than them. Based on these terms, a state's

aggregate power frequently spur up balancing or bandwagoning reactions from the neighbor actors (Walt, 1987).

- Geographic proximity is also a matter and is considered as a type of threat, as “the ability to project power declines with distance, states which are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away” (Walt, 1987). Alternatively, to the aggregate power, which spurs up whether balancing or bandwagoning, the geographic proximity case when it comes to bandwagoning is far more dangerous as it will create a large sphere of influence in the region (Walt, 1987). Therefore, only small and too vulnerable states, which are approximate to a great power are more likely to choose bandwagoning rather than balancing (Walt, 1987).
- Offensive power signifies states with large offensive capabilities, which spur the emergence of an alliance because of geographical proximity and a military posture (Walt, 1987). The offensive capability states combined with geographic proximity will provoke threat to the sovereignty of local actors and as such will spur an opposition (Walt, 1987).
- Aggressive intentions is for states who are perceived by the other local units as aggressive, which provoke a balance against them. Perceptions of intent play a significant role in alliance choices and they are revealed through the official statements of states, crises or other confrontations that may engender a level of fear and concern (Walt, 1987).

Having set up, thus, the theoretical framework of the balance of threat theory in this book comes out as a refinement to the traditional balance of power theory. As stated, states tend to balance against the most powerful states in the system which cause a threat to them. As such Greece, Israel, Egypt and Cyprus has mainly planned for a balance of threat realization through the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum with the exclusion of Turkey. According to the argument, the most powerful states in the system are measured in terms of the capabilities of national power composed of different forces like the military and economic capabilities, natural resources and population. In this respect, Turkey emerges as a rising threatening power in the region due to its increasing economic and military capabilities over the years along with its dominant political intentions in the region. In this regard, the balance of power theory anticipates that that states solely react to

imbalances of power whereas the balance of threat theory asserts that the existence of an imbalance of threat such as a state or a coalition appears especially dangerous, states tend to whether boost their internal efforts or create alliances to reduce their vulnerability partly because of geographical proximity. Power here includes population, economic and military capabilities, technological skills, and political cohesion. The significant items to measure an effective power of a state or a coalition are population, gross domestic product (GDP), size of armed forces and the defense expenditures (Walt, 1987).

### **C. Regional Security Complex Theory**

The regional security complex theory is stemmed from the “Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security” of Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver, it has emerged in 2003 and it defends the argument that “most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones” (Buzan et al., 2003), which creates a regional complex security interdependence pattern between the local units because their main security environment is their local region. In this respect, Buzan states that “most states have been concerned primarily with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbors” (Buzan et al., 2003). However, the theory distinguishes between the system and local levels of regionalizing and globalizing trends in the security analysis. In this sense, Buzan asserts that superpowers and great powers whose intentions frequently transcend geographical limits usually compete at the system level for dominance (Buzan et al., 2003). The theory was developed based on the blend of two traditional schools of International Relations being Neo-realism and Constructivism in its definition of security. The invention of the regional security complex concept was purposeful in the sense that the theory mainly advocates the adequacy of the regional level in providing a practical security analysis for the international system (Buzan et al., 2003). The two extreme patterns that govern security analysis in the international relations are being the national and global levels (Buzan et al., 2003). The global level is attributed to the exceptional case of superpowers and great powers who are not tightly integrated in security terms due to the capabilities of their power and intentions in transcending geography, and the regional level, which is beneficial to our case where states are tightly influenced by the power and intentions of their neighbors and as Buzan states “where the extremes

of national and global security interplay, and where most of the action occurs” (Buzan et al., 2003). In other words, global powers intervention in the security of regional units can solely be explained through diagnosing the regional security dynamics of a specific area. The way to investigate regional security dynamics is by finding out the cultural heritage, economic and historical sources of the region (Buzan et al., 2003), in which it will dig deeper in the analysis of the Eastern Mediterranean countries rival over gas and the newly discovered resources in chapter four.

### **1. Brief modern history of regional security**

The theory suggests that the first security interdependence phenomena was perceived into three stages the first of which was in the modern era between the 1500–1945 when European states reached out the peak in several arenas including economic, military and political as such they successfully dominated social and international systems this created a regional security complex (RSC) or a security interdependence among regional powers and created a global rivalries among European powers at that time. Superpowers and great powers normally compete at the system level, whereas regional powers rival at the regional level. The European powers established several social and international systems in all of Africa, the middle East and Asia eventually resulted in predominant regional security dynamics in the region made also these fragile arenas a meat to global rivalries among global powers among European powers, Japan and the United States of America (USA) and created security interdependence between local clusters (Buzan et al., 2003). During the second stage, 1945 to 1989, it was marked by the end of the Cold War and decolonization added up new security complexes. On the one hand, decolonization limited imperial power but also created dozens of new independent states, with new operating regional security dynamics in most of Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia (Buzan et al., 2003). On the other hand, the existence of the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union with newly liberal regions altered security dynamics in all of Europe and Northeast Asia (Buzan et al., 2003). At this stage rival was mainly due to ideological reasons, as opposed to the USA and the European Union (EU) liberalist patterns of free trade and self-determination, The Soviet Union was seeking a socialist revolution (Buzan et al., 2003). Both superpowers at that time established the idea that the third world was a

pivotal arena for their military and ideological competition. By the late 1960s, the whole world was politically altered to the European manner (Buzan et al., 2003). The ending of the Cold War has marked the division of the international system into two worlds a world of peace and a world of conflict, and it had three major impacts on the story of regional security. It has brought up fifteen new independent states to the international system and thus a new RSC to the game (Buzan et al., 2003). Ideological confrontation was also ended up between the soviet power and the United States of America (USA) this new freedom in fact gave a pulse to the core at the expense of the periphery region in terms of ideological and economic autonomy third it has also shifted the nature of the security agenda where issues of military are no longer prominent (Buzan et al., 2003). Unipolarity in fact added a new range of security agendas with the US hegemony like environmental issues, globalization, cultural shifts and importance is given to sub state and super state powers instead of only the state. Points of security rivals also included issues on shared river systems, seas, air quality, which interplay between local regions and create a RSCs between local units (Buzan et al., 2003).

## **2. Variables of regional security complex**

Buzan et al. (2003) defined a security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another”. In other words, Buzan insisted in the interdependence of the national security concerns of local clusters in creating complexes within a shared geographical arena (Buzan et al., 2003, p. 44). Recently, the definition of regional security complex was refined by the same author to “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan et al., 1998). In this regard, concepts of securitization and desecuritization penetrated the foreign policy agenda of security concerns.

The regional security complex is being constructed upon a number of variables which determines state relations. The formation and operation of RSCs depend on patterns of durable amity and enmity among the states within a particular geographic arena, which makes the actions and interpretations of actors as key element in understanding regional systems not just reflecting on the mechanical pattern of the

distribution of power (Buzan et al., 2003). The character of a local complex is identified by the historical factors, the long-standing enmities or amity, the existence of a shared culture or an embrace of a common civilizational area (Buzan et al., 2003). The causes that creates complexes are exemplified in the anarchic structure of the international system, the constant rival of balance of power along with the pressures created by a geographical proximity. Complexes get tighter when penetration occurs, the meaning of that is when an outside foreign power align with states with a regional security complex for the sake of balance of power or to spur up local pressures (Buzan et al., 2003). Small states in this case become in a weak situation, their call for an outside help will make them linked and interdependent to foreign powers and rival will be altered from being solely between local patterns to the constant inclusion of global ones (Buzan et al., 2003).

The theory grants a paramount value to local factors in the execution of security analysis. In this respect, RSC is built upon patterns of rivalry, balance of power and alliance formation among regional powers within a specific arena (Buzan et al., 2003). The potential pattern is to determine who fears or likes whom not merely at the system level but also at the internal level as being extremely crucial to untangle the mixtures of historical and political factors along with material capabilities (Buzan et al., 2003). In such way, the theory asserts the relevance of regional level in providing a scrutinized security analysis.

### **3. Levels of threats**

There exist four levels of analysis to identify state threats, the first is based at the domestic level in the state of the region, where finding out the specific domestic vulnerabilities of a state facilitates determining the type of security scarce and fears it lacks, in the same line Wæver (1989) asserts “it is a way to make another state or a group of states a structural threat even if they have no hostile intentions”. The second level is to understand state-to-state relations which signifies the type of relationship a state has with its neighbors which is frequently influenced by historical events, existing treaties, rivals or peace talks (Wæver, 1989). The third level of analysis is to scrutiny the region’s interaction with its neighboring regions given the fact that complexes are frequently associated with the internal level, interactions are frequently considered positive when outcomes of economic integration and peaceful cultural collaboration projects are realized in a specific region (Wæver, 1989). The



fourth level is to study the role of global powers within the region and to identify the type of interplay between the two sides of the global and regional security structures (Wæver, 1989).

Eurasia under the current theme, is undergoing deep upheavals in terms of its unresolved historical, geographic, economic and socio-political conditions especially under the added pressures of the recently discovered resources and the newly transportation routes projects under construction (Katman, 2018). The initiatives are introduced by diverse powers including local, regional and international powers, which grant the investigated region a more critical position in the world politics. The point of the theory is to find out whether the interests of these diverse powers will lead to cooperation or clash during the process of realizing them (Katman, 2018).

$$\text{Threat Perception} = \text{Capability} \times \text{Intent}$$

Equation 1

As indicated above, the threat perception can be defined through measuring a state's means and power capability in engendering threat to the survival of its neighbors plus its intent in endangering the feeling of security (Katman, 2018). From another perspective, threat does not solely exist at a state's survival but also any act that oppresses peace, economic, political, social, and humanitarian conditions (Katman, 2018). Thus, once a threat is captured, it is securitized, meaning it is prevented and contained. Desecuritization, conversely, is the process of normalizing the perceived threat into a normal issue. For instance, in the post-Cold War period, previous threats treated by suspicion most revolved around the subject of other countries' weapons and war plans they possessed for the purpose of preserving their sovereignty and security. These issues are nowadays become normalized, in fact become more unidentified and borderless.

Back to the theoretical framework, the levels of threats can be also analyzed depending on states' adjacency of geography, Buzan et al. (2003) stressed on the importance of geographical proximity because "many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones". Chapter four provides a thorough explanation to how the proximity of Turkey to the above stated regions projects an existing threat to their sovereignty given the country's rising power capabilities and perceived intentions. In other words, the security interaction between regional clusters

influence numerous existing military, political, societal and environmental processes in the region (Buzan et al., 2003). As such all states in the system are immersed into a global security web of interdependence. That said, insecurity is often reflected in the geographical proximity, which creates a security interdependence at the regional trend (Buzan et al., 2003).

#### **4. The essential structure of RSC**

RSC embodies four variables. The first is being boundary, which makes RSC different from its neighbors, frontiers are fundamental to determine states' geography and sovereignty (Buzan et al., 2003). Second, the anarchic structure of the international system, which mainly signifies the RSC must be compelled of two or more superpower units in the system (Buzan et al., 2003). The third is being polarity which signifies the distribution of power among the units (Buzan et al., 2003). Fourth and the most important is the social construction of the region being the type of relationship patterns that govern among the regional powers inside the region usually varying between amity and enmity among the units and is always influenced by the type of historical ties, states' intentions, cultural similarities and harmonies plus the political legitimacy units enjoy (Buzan et al., 2003).

#### **5. Types of regional security complex**

RSCs can be defined based on the security actions and intentions of actors and it is structured upon dynamics of "securitization" and "desecuritization" (Buzan et al., 2003, p. 56). The securitization pattern typically signifies the influence projected by actors in securitizing each other within a particular region. Securitization is frequently-in a developed circumstances-being followed by a process of desecuritization, which often signifies a regional integration where what Wendt describes as "actors stop treating each other as security problems and start behaving as friends. They still compete and feel challenged now and then, but this is dealt with as are normal political, economic, environmental, and societal problems—not as matters of security, i.e., threats to survival that mobilize extreme countermeasures" (Buzan et al., 2003, p. 56).

A beneficial example to the desecuritization trend according to the book is being the European integration, where norms of desecuritization exist in terms of the elimination of territorial barriers to member states, plus economic trade and the

existing political collaboration of member states, though not fully desecuritized due to historical trajectory securitization processes still thus exist (Buzan et al., 2003). Moreover, according to the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum case, the inclusion of all of Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and Israel under one room is also considered as a type of desecuritization where mutual trade and gas exploration agreements are existing. Hence, it is perceived also as a type of securitization in the case of Turkey due to its exemption from the geopolitical and economic benefits of its membership. Frequently integration lead to a variety of impacts, as in the case of the EU for example, it has unprecedentedly changed a whole RSC into a great power which facilitated the structure of global polarity in the international system (Buzan et al., 2003). In the case of the formation of EMGF as well, the desecuritization trend has reduced rivals and conflicts between major member states, though security-related realizations between isolated states in the region still holding a tremendous political and economic concerns in the region. To sum up, unifications like what happened in Europe or the Eastern Mediterranean might change the local dynamics of power instead of the global. But the idea is that security dynamics will still always exist because of fragmented cultural units who hold great concerns about their societal security like the races that exist in today's United States or Europe (Buzan et al., 2003, p. 7) which is also the case in Cyprus and the prolonged Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



### **III. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK: REGIONAL RELATIONS (2002-2021)**

#### **A. Turkish-Greek relations**

It has been argued that as far as the Cypriots gained independence from the British governance in the 1960s, conflicts between the Turks and the Greek Cypriots about Cyprus has emerged, although the deep roots of the crisis in fact pre-date the event of independence (Peach, n.d.). The conflict in fact has two parts, one is unprecedentedly complex, which allowed the involvement of international parties like the UN and EU, and the other is a pro-longed one which involves ethnic conflicts not has been solved despite serious several attempts (Peach, n.d.).

The admission of Cyprus as a member in the EU since 2004, and Turkey's strain from joining the union fueled the prolonged conflict to be also internationalized. Apart from the involvement of the EU as a mediating party especially to Greece's interests by France in the region (Marcus, 2020), Russia is also another active party with strong military bases in Cyprus and unlimited interests in the recently discovered regional oil (Peach, n.d.). Complexities of Cyprus identity, the different perspectives Turkey and Greece held in disputes, Turkey's military invasion in 1974, along with failure of major approaches to resolution such as the Annan Plan further fueled sentiments of anger and discord between the two actors (Peach, n.d.)

## 1. Characteristics of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the Greek Republic of Southern Cyprus



Figure 1 Map of The United Cyprus Republic and Its Constituent States.

**Source:** Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021). Map of the United Cyprus Republic and its constituent states, Access Date: 05.11.2021, Web Address: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/KIBRIS/Cyprusmaxi.jpg>

Cyprus is a small island consisting of a population of 1,162,458 most of which are natively Greeks, according to the data collected in 2014, 77% of the population are Greeks and 18% are originally Turkish with some other ethnic minorities coexist such as Maronites and Armenians (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). The economy is dependent on a large part upon tourism and agriculture, whilst the Turkish Cypriot economy relies hugely on funding and aids from the Republic of Turkey (Peach, n.d.). Recently, the discovered amount of oil in the basin surrounding the Cypriot island has furthered interests in the region and brought incentives to foreign powers involvement for instance, the military presence of Russia in Northern Cyprus (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015).

Geographically, Turkey is more proximate to the Middle East than Europe, whereas modern Cyprus has been recently enjoying closer ties to Europe due to its full integration in the EU, it has a large history under the British administration and then its annexation after the Ottoman Empire's decision to join World War I (Peach, n.d.). During that time, Turkey became independent, whereas the island stayed under the British colonization until 1960 when eventually it gained independence. Shortly, since 1963 conflicts between the Greek and Turks has emerged (Central Intelligence

Agency, 2015). The conflict eventually finished by Turkey's military occupation in 1974 to the Northern part of Cyprus as a reaction to the Greeks overthrow of the newly elected president of Cyprus with a sponsorship of foreign powers (Peach, n.d.). Many Greek Cypriots as a result, were forced out of their homes in the north resulting in the creation of a status quo in its relation with the Greek Cypriots in the south (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Recent events led to the declaration of the newly independent state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), however the state is still until today solely recognized by the Republic of Turkey (Peach, n.d.). Due to the prolonged and constant disagreements about the stances of the original constitution between the two parties, TRNC furthered its own independent constitution (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). Accordingly, since 1974 the island has been constantly divided between the Turkish Cypriots in the north and the Greek Cypriots in the south, and has built since then stubborn checkpoints and other difficulties for people who aim to move from one side to another (Peach, n.d.). Consequently, the series of events resulted in the marginalization of both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in the island (Peach, n.d.). Eventually, sentiments of displacement, cultural disconnection as well as rigid nationalist sentiments fueled the policy atmosphere of the involved parties (Peach, n.d.). The existence of the dividing wall, difficulties in terms of freedom of movement and the presence of the Turkish military and UN peacekeeping forces, along with the failure of UN peacekeeping forces in boosting integration plans between the two ethnic groups further intensified tensions and discord in the region (Peach, n.d.).

The politicization and intensification of the conflict took place after the Island's independence, when Greek Cypriots felt obliged to leave their homes after Turkey's military intervention, which resulted in the deep physical division between the two ethnic groups (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Later on, lack of education and cultural integration programs furthered the existing moral gap between the two populations (Peach, n.d.).

Accordingly, the northern part is identified to be inhabited by the Turkish Cypriots where the main language spoken is being Turkish and are more identified with the Republic of Turkey than with the island of Cyprus itself (Peach, n.d.). In the southern part however, most inhabitants speak Greek as a native language and

sympathize more with Greece (Peach, 2015). A Greek Cypriot once stated for a study on Cypriot identity that “I am a Cypriot but I feel [like] a Greek too...Perhaps we ‘feel’ Greek because of the Turks” (Papadikis, 2006) or with regards to the international weight Greece gained recently (Ker-Lindsay, 2011). Moreover, the study gave information about how Greek Cypriots prioritize identity over integration. In other words, the conflict seems to be more a Greek versus Turkish identity conflict, and an ethnic Cypriot dispute over territory (Peach, n.d.).

Within the island, the Turks are the smallest ethnic group descending from the Ottoman Empire and Greeks were believed to be Islamic converters especially during the period of the Ottoman occupation of the island in 1571, created also divisions between Greeks as being either Turkish or Cypriots (Ker-Lindsay, 2011). After the settlement of the Turkish in the Northern part of Cyprus in 1974, the identity of the Turkish and Greek has become more and more complex (Ker-Lindsay, 2011).

The Greek Cypriots are the largest ethnic group on the island and are believed to be the oldest inhabitants of the island having come to the island since the Bronze age which means four thousand years ago. In modern Cyprus, the international influence of Greece has made it a lot more difficult to spot a distinction in the identity of the Greek and Greek Cypriot (Papadikis, 2006).

In this phase, ethnic identity is often a complicated issue especially when shaped by historical claims. As in the case of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, both own historical claims to the island as there exist a mixture of Ancient Byzantine, Greek and Ottoman sites in the region (Peach, n.d.). The two communities have deeply relied on their heritage to defend their legitimate claims to the island. The strong impact of national identity, education in portraying information as well as the role of media in fostering such influence has shaped their opinion toward the “other” differently (Papadikis, 2006).

Within the indications stated above, the conflict between the two ethnic groups in Cyprus seems to be largely exceptional. Ethno nationalist conflicts are the main reasons behind the existing territorial disputes between the Turkish Cypriots in the north and the Greek Cypriots in the south (Peach, n.d.). This reflects the fact that any attempt to set up a shared culture is not sufficient for social and political integration, instead, the population’s different identities and the sense of pride in inhabiting a specific territory surmount their desire to conjunctly coexist and compromise (Peach,



n.d.). Moreover, the features reflect the fact that the strong ties the two ethnic groups dearly behold to their own states. They believe that the establishment of the state and citizenship to be only based on the ethnicity they hold (Papadikis, 2006). Since then, the conflict emerged much as a war between cultures than a mere dispute over territory (Peach, n.d.).

## **B. Causes of Failure**

Causes of failure to full political, social and cultural integration is largely attributed to the failure of state formation due to the different desires the two communities prolongly fought for. The Greeks are in favor of a unified state approach, whereas the Turks support a partitioned state. Second, the existence of the imbalance of power between the Turks and Greeks in the Cypriot government led to a major complexes (Yakinthou, 2009). The Greeks enjoy more power in the government through a consociationalist, which created an imbalance of power between the parties to realize cooperation and harmony. Finally, international actors failed to offer incentives for both communities to boost cooperation projects in the region. Turkey and Greece are unable to solve the conflict between each other as they had politicized and polarized the two ethnic groups (Yakinthou, 2009). The above stated factors led to the failure of the conflict resolution plans suggested since the first year after Cyprus independence, its first written constitution in fact has contributed in a large part to the ethno-political divisions we have perceived in Cyprus until today.

Both parties have tremendously worked for the sake of coming up with a common solution but the constant outcome is a lack of compromise between no side to the benefit of the other, Greek Cypriots continue to preserve the feelings of Turkey's violation to their rights over territory through its control of the northern part of the Cyprus island (Hadjipavlou, 2007).

In the political constitutional stance, Greek demand a unitary state where the island is only to be governed by a single unit being a central government by the Greek nation whilst the Turks continue defending demands of a two-state solution, Greek Cyprus would be one state whereas Turkish Cypriots would either prefer to unite with the Republic of Turkey or form their own separate state (Kanli, 2015).

Both sides in this regard disagree with the other's solutions as none seems to hold positive incentives for Cyprus' future (Kanli, 2015).

The Annan Plan led by the namesake former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan seemed to be a pivotal option to the resolution of the conflict at some point. The plan evoked new Cyprus that resembled to a hybrid between a federation and confederation. A place where the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots could have shared sovereignty values along with a balanced representation in the government where ration would generally reach 50-50 in the Senate and a representation based on population in the Chamber of Deputies and other federal institutions (Sozen, 2006). A potential incentive to the implementation of the plan is the EU membership to be granted soon after the conflict would have had resolved (Sozen, 2006). Eventually, the plan failed immediately after "the Turkish Cypriot side protested the emerging EU decision to begin accession negotiations with the government in the south (Fihser, 2001). The violation of the Annan Plan terms which created distrust in the eyes of Turks toward the Greeks in prioritizing an EU membership above the prioritization of conflict resolution has stopped negotiations and resulted in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) entering into economic negotiations with Turkey (Peach, n.d.).

The Turkish Cypriots favored more power in the government and the Greek favored a more unified Cypriot state (Peach, 2015). The failure was also according to Yakinthou, due to the different objectives statesman of both sides suggests (Yakinthou, 2009). The Turkish Cypriot elite encouraged the public to support the Annan Plan, while the Greek Cypriot elite disfavored the plan owing to their believe that it was an "all-gain' for the Turkish Cypriots and an 'all-loss' for the Greek Cypriots" (Yakinthou. 2009). Greek Cypriots considered it to be a true loss as it will hamper their power. Apparently, the plan did not meet their desire to a unified Cypriot state (Peach, n.d.).

Greek Cypriots opted for the decision to join the EU based on incentives they believed best for their state's economy which led to the failure of the Annan plan though being the most viable conflict resolution plan so far to the case of Cyprus division (Peach, n.d.). Greek Cypriots decision to act according to their own interests bypassing as such the Turkish Cypriots interests, led to the intensification of mistrust and furthered backward steps during the conflict resolution process (Peach, n.d.).

According to the Turkish Cypriots, the Greek Cypriots attempted to use the EU membership to serve their own interests in terms of conflict resolution plans, they hoped for their government to further isolate the Turks once joining the EU in order to foster their interests in the region and so that the EU will come up with subjective solutions serving as such their favor (Peach, n.d.).

## 1. Territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean

The maritime dispute between Greece and Turkey is being divided under three main issues. First of all, it is the disagreement over the maritime boundaries of the Greek waters since it owns a number of islands in the Aegean Sea (Dalay, 2021). Second one is the rival between the two countries about the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the Eastern Mediterranean and third is the unresolved issue of Cyprus crisis ranging from unrecognized sovereignty issue of the TRNC and the Greece's breach of the demilitarization agreement of the Greek islands near the Turkish claims (Dalay, 2021).

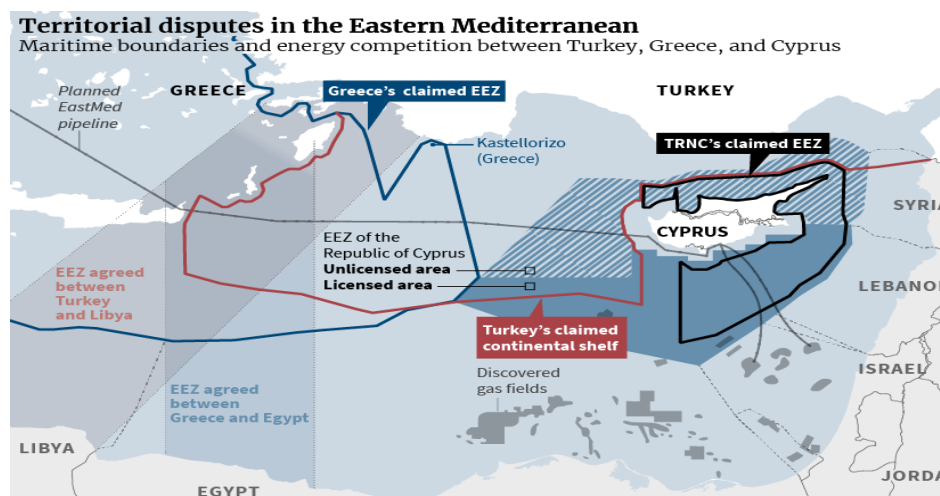


Figure 2 Territorial Disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean

**Sources:** Global Risk Insights (2020). Territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Maritime boundaries and energy competition between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, Access Date: 05.11.2021, Web Address: <https://globalriskinsights.com/2020/09/greece-and-turkey-energy-security-tensions-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>

In fact, these disputes are being directly related to the conflicts of national sovereignty where both unrecognized each other in the island of Cyprus (Dalay, 2021). TRNC is being solely recognized by the Republic of Turkey and thus lacks international recognition, whereas Ankara unrecognized the Republic of Cyprus in the south despite gaining international recognition and has recently joined the EU

with Greece's accession in 2004 (Dalay, 2021). With regards to the maritime dispute, Greece is in favor of the international adjudication, whereas Turkey prefers bilateral negotiations to bring about a broader range of topics on the table (Dalay, 2021).

The maritime issues encompass issues surrounding delimitation of fishing rights, seabed resource exploitation, migration management and much more (International Crisis Group, 2021). The escalation is all about maritime boundaries and resource rights in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. The discovery of gas made the dispute more long-standing and made the demarcation of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) more pressing with Greece and Turkey competing in supporting their claims. Greece has been demarcating its EEZs with a number of littoral countries such as Egypt, Italy, Israel and Lebanon (Aljazeera Center for Studies, 2020). In 2018, Greece agreed upon establishing a pipeline project to transfer natural gas from Israel to Greece and then to Europe bypassing as such Turkey (Aljazeera Center for Studies, 2020). In response, Turkey reacted to the imprisonment by demarcating its EEZs with the Libyan Government of National Accord where cooperation on gas exploration activities and share of discovered resources will emerge (Aljazeera Center for Studies, 2020). The agreement in fact, has sparked opposing angry sentiments from Athens and the other concerned states claiming it as illegal due to putting a large part of the area between Crete and Cyprus in Turkey's EEZ but also crosses Israel and Cyprus's EEZs (Aljazeera Center for Studies, 2020).

## **2. Status of the Aegean Islands and sea claims**

Many Greek islands in the Aegean Sea along with the Eastern Mediterranean are just within less than 2 kilometers of the Turkish mainland for instance the island of Kastellorizo, which heightened complexes surrounding issues of territorial waters in the arena (BBC, 2020). Greece aims at extending its territorial water in the Aegean Sea from six miles to 12 miles as it is internationally allowed, Turkey perceives such move as a threat to its rights in the sea considering it as its own shores, "No way Turkey will consent to any initiative trying to lock the country to its shores," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan assured (BBC, 2020). Turkey also relies on its "Blue Homeland Doctrine" (Mavi Vatan in Turkish) in order to secure its own maritime areas in the coast, the doctrine relies on modernizing the country's naval forces and advancing Turkey's military presence within the area to assure its claims

(BBC, 2020). Against this drop back, Turkey defends its stance through claiming that “islands that are far from the mainland and closer to Turkey cannot have a continental shelf” (BBC, 2020). Whereas Athens continues to defend its claims to the extension of its own sea claims in the region declaring that the islands that belong to Greece should be treated the same as their mainland (BBC, 2020).

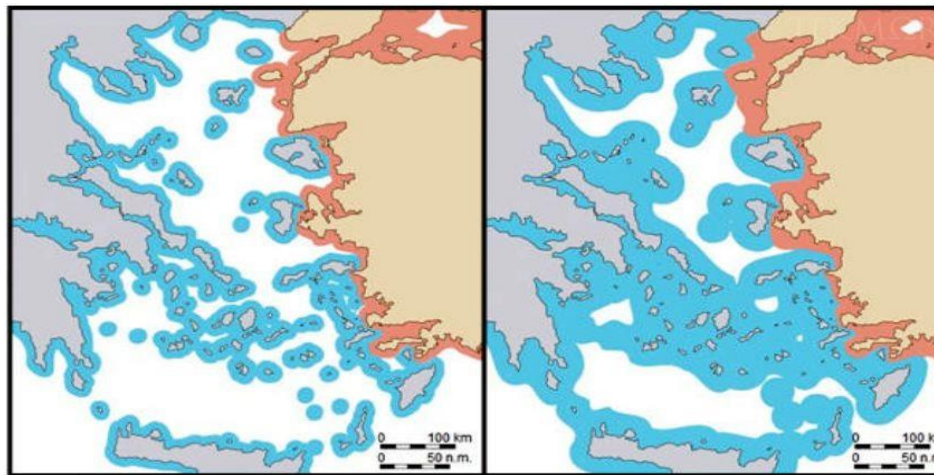


Figure 3 Aegean Sea Territorial Waters Claims Based on 6 Versus 12 Nautical Mile Limits

**Source:** Eurasia Daily Monitor

Greece also alerted its naval forces in the south of Kastellorizo Island, near Turkish coast, which is illegal by treaty (Treaty of Lausanne) and a number of agreements had soon sparked a military deployment of the Greek and Turkish fleets across both the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean (International Crisis Group, 2021). The status of the islands has in fact sparked other issues apart from the sea disputes to include a several disagreements surrounding, air and land disputes (International Crisis Group, 2021).

### **C. Turkish-Israeli Relations**

Soon after the end of the cold war, Turkey enhanced its foreign policy with key regional actors, the enhancements highly reflected itself in the existed bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel (Yilmaz, 2008). Within this framework, on March, 1949, the Turkish government was the first Muslim state to recognize the state of Israel simply after less than a year of its establishment in the Middle East.

Moreover, Turkey sponsored a series of migration programs to Israel encouraging its own citizens, significantly those descending from a Jewish origin to move to Israel (Yilmaz, 2008). Turkey's attitude throughout this period allowed the country to gain the sympathy of the United States, eventually became soon integrated to the West and joined the NATO in 1952 (Yilmaz, 2008). During the 1950s, its relations with Israel progressed successively becoming a prominent key partner to Turkey in terms of the economic, political and military arenas (Yilmaz, 2008). Soon after that, Turkey's attitudes to enhance its relations with key neighboring Arab countries resulted in the decline of the country's relations with its long strategic partner, Israel (Yilmaz, 2008).

## **1. Unresolved issues in Turkish-Israeli relations**

As discussed above, Turkey and Israel reflected bilateral cooperation and durable friendship in several areas during the post-Cold War period, developments included relations of "high politics" and "low politics", most importantly were the agreements of military cooperation nature as a sign for their eagerness to mutually develop and cooperate (Yilmaz, 2008). This come to an end when a series of disappointing events took place since 2010.

### **a. Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

The Turkish public generally advocate the Palestinian side in the Arab/Palestinian- Israeli conflict and this is usually due to religious similarities plus the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media against the Jews. As Gencer Ozcan (2005) observes, the image of Jews especially Israelis in the eyes of Turkish people is being highly distorted and intolerated to the point that undesirable events in the country or in the world are often attributed to "Jewish conspiracy" (Yilmaz, 2008). Consequently, despite nowadays' government plans to encourage foreign investments, Israeli investors in particular are viewed with great suspicions of either invasion or to realize their plan of "greater Israel" (Yilmaz, 2008). Consequently, Israelis reputation abroad led them to impede their investments especially in Turkey and kept it in small amounts (Ozcan, 2005). Beyond the stereotyping arguments that influence Turkish public attitudes toward Israel, the Israeli army had been in several occasion condemned of using excessive force against the Palestinians, causing death and injury to millions of innocent civilians especially under the Ariel Sharon's

administration. With Israel's bombardments and invasion of Gaza, the public has been reluctantly putting pressure on their government to cut its relations with Israel (Yilmaz, 2008). Though, for the Turkish government it wasn't easy to cut up all relations based on military, economic and diplomatic bases with Israel being formed nearly two decades ago (Yilmaz, 2008). Indeed, it was not easy also to give a cold arm to public pressures as well. In this case, recent developments has led to a transformation in Turkish foreign policy to favor the Palestinian rights in a long term procedure (Yilmaz, 2008). Consequently, in several other occasions, most notably during the 2021 Israel-Palestinian crisis, Turkey accused Israel for the violence and held it accountable for its crimes during the Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan speech at the Climate Summit conference and called out many countries to support sanctions against Israel for its massacre of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, despite being its sixth greatest exporters in terms of natural gas, chemicals and military equipment (Alarabiyanews, 2021).

#### **b. Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) incident**

In 31 May 2010, nine Turkish activists were killed and much more civilians were injured due to Israeli military troops interference soon after a cluster of six ships of different nations were carrying humanitarian aid to Palestinians part of the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" (Black, 2010). One of these ships was one flying a Turkish flag, The accident led to the deterioration of Turkish-Israel relations and the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan described the raid as a "state terrorism" (Telegraph, 2010). Soon, Turkey has downgraded its diplomatic ties with Israel and suspended military cooperation since mid-2010, strained as a result more than 16 defense contracts worth billions of dollars with Israel, demanding after that an apology and a compensation to the victims' families from the country (Arsu & Bilefsky, 2011). Three years later, on March 2013, the Israeli government apologized for the Mavi Marmara incident describing it as unintentional in an official statement and expressed regret about the deterioration of their bilateral relations declaring after that, a compensation to the Turkish victims' families, which Turkey appreciated it (Sherwood & MacAskill, 2013).

### **c. Demarcation of Maritime Borders conflict**

#### **i. Maritime Borders of Turkey with Libya**

Opposition to the maritime border agreement signed between Libya and Turkey in December 2019, which allows the deployment of the Turkish military troops in Libya and declared Turkey's new sea borders to be extended from Anatolia to the shores of Derna and Torbuk. Israel opposed the maritime border between Ankara and Tripoli describing the deal as illegal (Staff, 2019). Turkey's navy after this deal suspended an Israeli oceanographic research vessel operating in conjunction with the Cypriot government in Cypriot waters, which Israel considered as an act aimed at cutting off its access to international waters in the Mediterranean sea, the sole route that facilitates nearly 99% of its exports (Chorev et al., 2019).

#### **ii. Cyprus Demarcation Maritime Borders Disagreement**

Cyprus and Israel has agreed upon demarcating their maritime borders for the sake of facilitating the search for mineral and gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean (Dalay, 2021). Turkey expressed discontent over the agreement as it was filled with competing narratives of national sovereignty disputes over sea and land between Turkey and Cyprus. Due to Ankara's assertive stance in opposing the agreement, both Israel and Greece were strained from advancing their natural gas research in the area with overlapped claims around Cyprus (Dalay, 2021).

## **D. Turkish-Egyptian relations**

### **1. Geopolitical characteristics**

There exist a common background of geopolitical, security, economic and capacity-building incentives between Turkey and Egypt that spur up cooperation projects between the two parties, despite the current deteriorated relations since 2013.

#### **a. Geographic characteristics of Turkey**

In the world map, Turkey has power over a great geostrategic position of strong regional influence, historically helped in its expansion all across the area as the Ottoman Empire (Sheira, 2014). It is a Eurasian country located in the Middle East and Caspian Basin boarded by European, Asian, Middle Eastern along with



Black Sea countries (Sheira, 2014). The geostrategic position it occupies grant it an influential political, economic and cultural power capabilities, which facilitates the expansion of its democratic values, economic development and in serving as a regional peace promoter in the region (Sheira, 2014).

### **b. Geographic characteristics of Egypt**

Egypt on the other hand, is none of a less. The country's geographic position grant it a prominent role in global political issues (Sheira, 2014). Located in North Africa, sharing borders with African, Arab and Islamic circles along with being watered by the Nile River, the country enjoys great diplomatic relations with a number of international countries in terms of geopolitics, economy and culture, which facilitates the preserve of its political weight and economic value in the region (Sheira, 2014).

In short, the shared geostrategic locations being both located in zones of influence, Turkey and Egypt are prompted by geopolitical, security, economic and political incentives, which make cooperation plans the most suitable option for both local actors to foster regional stability, development and democracy in the region.

### **c. Geopolitical incentives**

From this perspective, there exist a number of elements that enable Turkey and Egypt to play strategic roles in the establishment of peace in the Middle East despite the fluctuations in their bilateral relations that occurred across history (Sheira, 2014):

- Geopolitics: Turkey and Egypt close proximity to crisis-stricken countries make both of them extremely vulnerable to the confrontations with extremist groups on their borders like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria "ISIS" and the "PKK" (Sheira, 2014).
- Military capabilities: Both countries enjoy a well-equipped counter-terrorism capabilities in terms of military, intelligence, law enforcement and diplomatic relations. Noting that Turkey has the second largest army among NATO countries and has been fighting against PKK in the eastern and southern parts of the country since early 1980s (Rodoplu et al., 2004). The last incentive is being the diplomatic impact it enjoys in the Middle East between several established and emerging state along with the non-state actors (Sheira, 2014). Following the uprisings, its relations with Arab

emerging-democracies states deteriorated due to which a turn to the strategic “zero problems” foreign policy is essential to ease tensions and revive its impactful status among Middle Eastern countries (Sheira, 2014).

- The economic incentive: Since the election of the AK Party, Turkey realized tremendous political and economic developments bringing about stability and credibility respectively to the country (Sheira, 2014). Transformations took place in a number of fields involving reforms to the economic, fiscal and monetary policies to boost national capital expenditures, foreign direct investment along with guaranteeing long-term commercial activities in a predictable environment to investors (Hakura, 2013). Egypt is also one of the most developed and diversified economies in the MENA region, despite its political instability following the uprising, the Egyptian economy preserved its operation in almost all sectors (Sheira, 2014). Egypt’s geography facilitates the transportation of tons of goods and petroleum products worldwide through its Suez Canal (Sheira, 2014). In this respect, its geopolitical security is highly regarded as any potential disruption in the operation of Egypt’s Suez Canal would lead to major consequences in the international trade terms with regard to production and prices in the world (Sheira, 2014).

## **2. Post-Arab Spring rivals**

The Arab Spring rivals of 2011 against corrupted ruling governments marked a turning point in Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East. In the first place, with the emergence of protests in Egypt, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was the first leader to support the resignation of the former President Hosni Mubarak (Edelman et al., 2013) Hence, the period following Morsi’s removal from power marked a great historic deterioration in both countries’ bilateral ties (Sheira, 2014).

Late economist and diplomat Mohammad Chatah observed that during this period, Turkey “[moved] from a zero-problem platform to a coordinated regional system” to strengthen its role *vis-à-vis* the region (Sheira, 2014) Upon the Muslim Brotherhood’s withholding power in Egypt, Erdogan and the then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited Egypt on several occasions to optimistically congratulate Egyptians for their country’s transition to democracy noting during his visit that a

secular reform would suit and advance the country's social and economic progress (BBC, 2011). During this phase, Turkey was perceived as the most fitting model of an Islamic Democratic country especially to Egypt's post-Arab Spring transition period (Sheira, 2014). Flourishment of relations were key to the emergence of several economic, social and military agreements between the two countries, for instance, the sign of the \$2 billion aid package, as testimony to the good will of Turkey along with its anticipation for a pro-longed strategic cooperation with Egypt in several other arenas (Yezdani, 2011). Yet, with the unanticipated overthrow of Morsi by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) on July 3, 2013, The Turkish administration considered the event as an interruption to the democratic transition and stated that the Turkish government "cannot accept a regime that has undertaken a military coup" (Gulhane, 2014). Within few months of Morsi's ouster, Turkish Egyptian relations deeply deteriorated. For the first time in history, Egypt and Turkey expelled their ambassadors and deteriorated their relations to a *charge d'affaires* (Fahim & Arsu, 2013). Following these developments, a public outburst manifested in both countries. In Turkey for instance, the event of Morsi's overthrow was a tragic reminder to Turkey's aggressive old *coups d'état* by military forces (Sheira, 2014). Whereas in Egypt, the public regarded the Turkish reaction as a testimony to its willingness to enforce an Islamic rule different from its own secular model (Meral, 2014).

Mainly, due to the constant pejorative dialogue the Turkish government adopted in targeting Sissi's new administration of Egypt, Turkey's popularization was in turn criticized by the Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Badr Abdelatty for intervening in the country's internal affairs by trying to alternate the public opinion against the Egyptian government and supporting particular organizations and TV-channels with intentions to destabilize the country (Staff, 2013).

### **3. Relations under Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi**

The importance of the rhetoric speech is critically regarded, the evidence comes up as on July 2014 after Prime Minister Erdogan speech identifying Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi as an "illegitimate tyrant", Egyptian administration warned Turkey to stop interfering in the country's domestic affairs and canceled the "Ro-Ro" agreement with Turkey (Alsahry, 2014). Accordingly, Turkey was banned to transport its containers to Gulf countries through using Egyptian ports (Alsahry,

2014). Soon after that, a campaign emerged against Turkey backed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia to boycott Turkish products and as a result also lost its membership to the United Nations Security Council (Alsahry, 2014).

In the meanwhile, from Egypt’s point of view, Mahrous declared that “[Turkey] was a moderate Muslim country that has become an Islamist dictatorship at the hands of [Turkish president] Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his affiliated Muslim Brotherhood political party" (The New Arab, 2016). The Egyptian administration also accused Erdogan for materially backing up Muslim Brotherhood TV channels in and outside of Egypt to target the country’s transitional administration (The Arab Weekly, 2019).

**4. Libya conflict**

Turkey and Egypt took opposite sides in the Libyan conflict which impacted their relations on several areas (Melcangie, 2021). Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi granted full military, logistical and intelligence support to the Libya National Army (LNA) based in the eastern part of the country supporting as such chief General Khalifa Haftar, presuming him as an ideal leader to foster stability plans in the post-civil war Libya, advocate Egypt’s interests in the region especially after the exploration of large amounts of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean and equally important is to protect Cairo’s national security and domestic stability as being highly intertwined with the resolution of the Libyan issue (Melcangie, 2021).

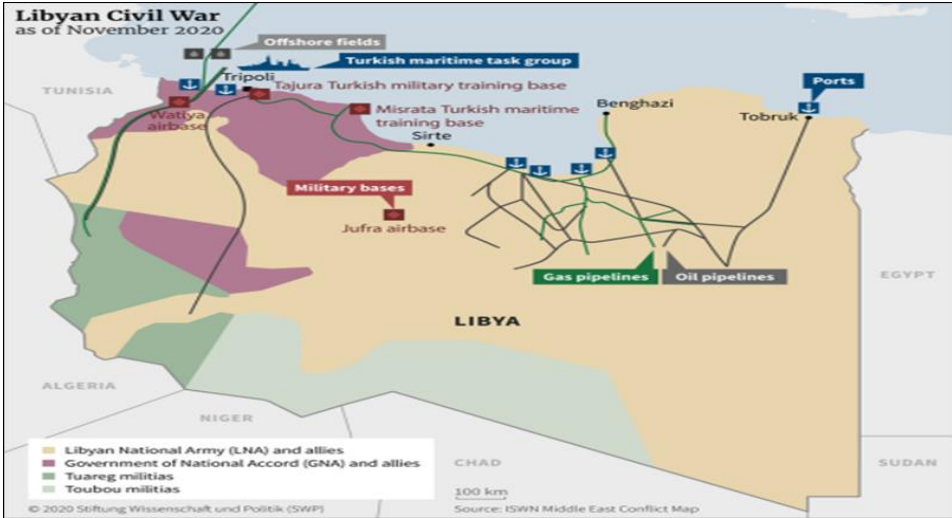


Figure 4 Civil war in Libya

Source: ISWN Middle East Conflict Map

Turkey on the other hand, was backing the opposing side to Egypt in the Libyan conflict, supporting parallelly the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) with a military intervention in 2019, eventually achieved gains in late 2020 (Telci, 2020). One of the major factors that makes the Libyan agenda internationally significant is being the Eastern Mediterranean issue. Given that Libya possesses a coastline of 1.770 km in the Mediterranean, its stability will influence the Eastern Mediterranean agenda as since 2000s littoral countries have established efforts to determine the borders of their continental shelves, demarcated executive economic zones and established partnerships between each other (Telci, 2020). Within the framework of the recent developments in the Libyan dossier, relations between Ankara and Cairo soon deteriorated during Turkey's military involvement against the opposing eastern part government that Egypt supports. Despite Egypt's disapproval of Ankara's illegitimate involvement, Turkey authorizes its military intervention in the region to increase support to the Libyan rights, bringing about military and technical assistance as well as a number of partnerships for security and economic developments to the country, most notably the "turning-point" partnership of the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean between both countries following article 102 of the UN Charter in 2019, which spurred up backlash from major littoral actors including Egypt, France, Greece and RoC to the deal. However, in late 2020 Turkey gained a legal victory from the UN General Secretary regarding the legitimacy of the agreement between Ankara and the GNA (Telci, 2020).

In fact there exist a number of threats Egypt feels with the persistent hard-power presence of Turkey in the region even after the GNA raise (Aksoy and Roll, 2021). One of the exemplified threats that will hinder the normalization process of relations between both countries, is being the threatening long-term Turkish military presence in the region, which was increased with the possibility of a military confrontation between Cairo and Ankara in the summer of 2020 at a time when new gas reserves were discovered in the region and the disputes over EEZs sparked out between major littoral countries (Aksoy and Roll, 2021). The second is Egypt's fear of creating a new room to maneuver with the winning side of Turkey in Libya, especially under Ankara's shifts in foreign policy under the reign of the AK Party, which deepened the edge between the different ideological foundations both regimes

currently adopt, fearing as a result Ankara's intentions to create a new room for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in the post-war Libya, the issue that has long been securitized by the new government of Egypt and exemplifies a direct threat to its political stability (Aksoy and Roll, 2021).

### **5. *Coup D'état* in Egypt and attempt *Coup D'état* in Turkey**

Justice and Development Party with modern Islamic stances captured almost 50% of votes in 2011 elections (Chislett, 2013). Whereas in post Arab-spring Egypt, Islamic tenets promoting parties never gained as much weight as it have had in Turkey (Chislett, 2013). Initially, Erdogan and the elected President Morsi, also leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, conjunctly shared the same conservative and religious policies, soon resulted in dividing public opinion between secularists and conservatives in the two countries (Chislett, 2013). Yet, Morsi so far became autocratic by granting his supporters key charges in the government. Within these indications, Egyptians opposed to Morsi's policies sparked protests and soon gained momentum through sparking the coup that led to Morsi's overthrow (Chislett, 2013). Instead, Sissi gained power in 2013 banning the Muslim Brotherhood activities and labeled it as a terrorist organization, securitizing as such the issue (Chislett, 2013).

Turkey's aims at restoring Morsi's administration in Egypt was continually bating Sissi even after he was formally elected in 2014, calling his success as the product of a "coup" not a popular "revolution" Ziad Akl proclaimed, a senior researcher at the Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies in Cairo "Egyptian-Turkish relations simply boil down to the Muslim Brotherhood," and confirmed that "Egypt will support any kind of action that will get rid of that mentality"(Chislett, 2013). The two countries are now considering each other as an imminent threat, backing opposite parties in all of Syria, Yemen and Libya.

## **IV. GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (2010-2021): ANALYSIS OF FACTORS TO TURKEY'S ISOLATION IN THE REGION**

### **A. Threat Factors**

According to the balance of threat theory, the nature of bilateral support that exists between all of Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt is primarily, a balance of threat alliance formation promoted for the sake of balancing the security threat perceived against Turkey. Turkey is frequently regarded as a high level threat in the region for a number of reasons. For instance, its dominating and rising military and industrial capabilities, its population growth, its geopolitical proximity to the above stated actors along with its perceived ideologies and intentions in the region.

#### **1. Turkey as an emerging threatening power in the Eastern Mediterranean**

Superior resources a country enjoys vis a vis the rest of its neighbors within a common region often exemplify a potential threat in their perspectives (Walt, 1987). Emerging threatening power states in this case, often encounter a conjoint opposition by weaker states as a form to protect themselves from being dominated by the higher power influence in future (Walt, 1987). Under such circumstances, states with the same level of power usually weak or average, tend to align to balance or destroy the emerging threatening power (Walt, 1987). Within the framework of the Eastern Mediterranean countries case, Turkey comes across as a rising emerging power in a number of fields that project a threat to the rest of the regional actors, with distinctive rate of military expenditures and industrial developments vis a vis all of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel added to that its geographical proximity to the area of tension and its perceived intentions in the region.

**a. Industrial and Military Capabilities**

In the balance of threat theory, Walt (1987) identifies the most significant items due to which a state’s power is considered as superior than those of its neighbors in a particular region, primarily where perceptions of alliance for a balance of threat and power opposition start revealing. Some of these items are being the size of armed forces and military expenditures, the gross domestic product (GDP) and the population size.

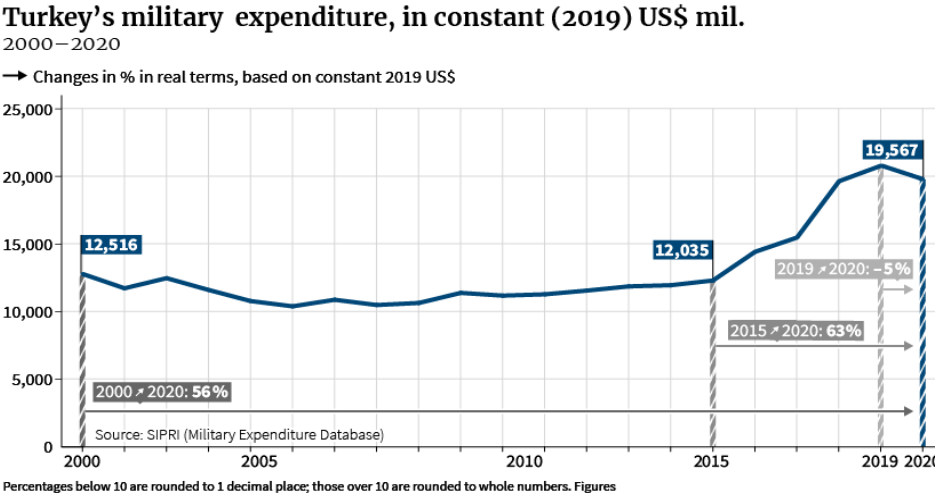


Figure 5 Military Expenditures of Turkey (2000-2020)

Source: SIPRI (Military Expenditure Database)

Turkey’s military budget is according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2020) recorded its peak levels between the years of 2019 and 2020. The line chart above demonstrates the distinctive development of Turkey’s military expenditure from the year of 2000 to 2020. From considerably guarding its military budget around the 12.5 million dollars all during the last 15 years, Turkey impulsively skyrocketed its annual military expenditures to 19.5 million dollars just following the years between 2019 and 2020.



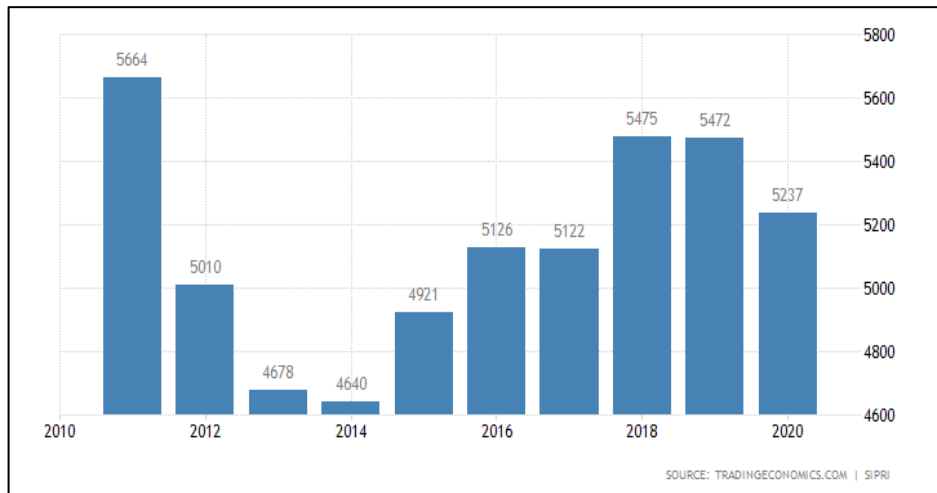


Figure 6 Military Expenditures of Greece (2011 to 2020)

Source: SIPRI (Military Expenditure Database)

According to the same source, Greece’s military expenditures however, were steadily maintaining the 5 million dollars position in the described years, despite a slight fragmentation, Greece’s military expenditure jumped to 5.7 then substantially dropped to 5.2 million dollars in 2020.

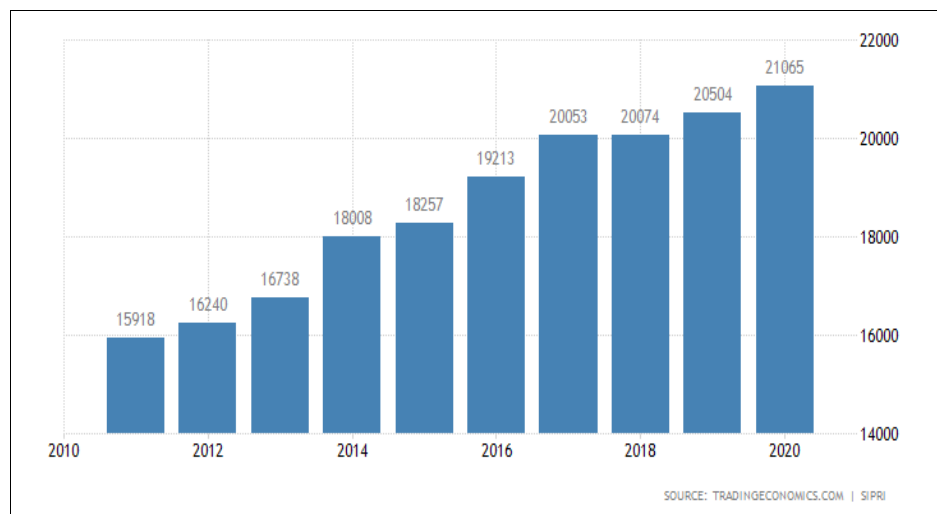


Figure 7 Military Expenditures of Israel (2011 to 2020)

Source: SIPRI (Military Expenditure Database)

On the other hand, Israel comes across as the most valuable country in terms of military expenditures, the expenditures were considerably growing up especially since the discovery of Tamar and Leviathan gas deposits in early 2010. Israel’s military expenditures were significantly climbing from 16.2 million dollars in 2012 to reach 21 million dollars in the last year.

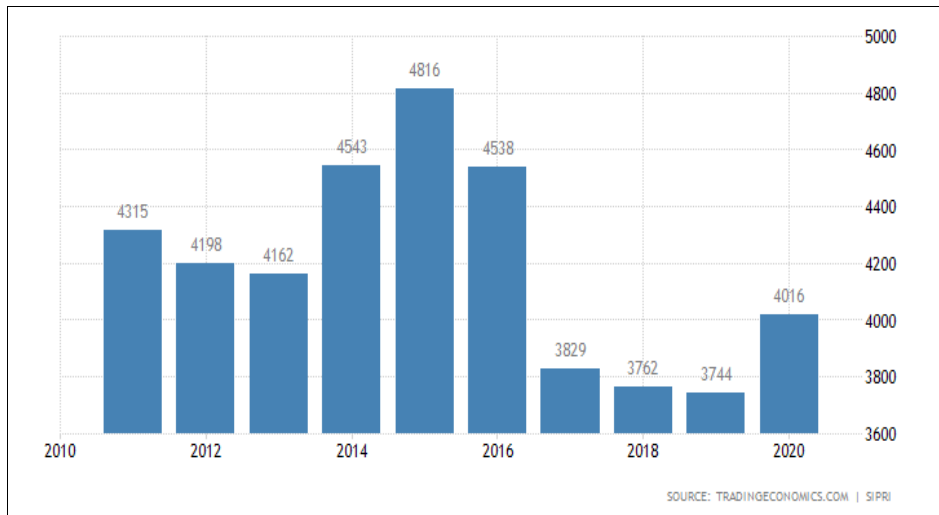


Figure 8 Military Expenditures of Egypt (2011 to 2020)

**Source:** SIPRI (Military Expenditure Database)

Military expenditures of Egypt recorded a slow graduation, remaining constant all along the chart from 2012 to 2020, despite recording a stagnation during 2017 and 2019, expenditures finally stood firm again at around 4 million dollars in 2020.

### **b. Population growth**

Population is a highly important organ to measure a country's economic development and military weight within a particular region. The subject often engenders fear and threat perceptions between state actors due to the population growth direct influence on determining a country's hard power capabilities and defense potentiality in a region. In the book of the "Origins of Alliances", Aggregate Power is a term used to identify the incentives based on which states emerge in forming alliances against a significant potential threat, one of the stated threats is being a country's population growth rate, industrial and military capabilities along with some other factors analyzed in the following section (Walt, 1987). According to the international law, a state without a permanent population, a centralized government and a defined geographic boundaries cannot be labeled as "sovereign" (Shaw, 2003). In this context, a large population is a crucial wealth to countries relying much on their hard-power capabilities in obtaining their objectives within a particular geographical arena. Among the concerned littoral states of the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt comes across with the highest population growth record in the region, registering 102,33 million with a yearly growth rate of 2.5% (Worldometers, 2020). After that, comes Turkey with a population record of 84,3 million in 2020 and

a growth rate of 0.55% per annum (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020). Followed by Greece registered 10,7 million in 2020 (Worldometers, 2020), after that comes Israel ending at 9,2 million in 2020 according to the same source (Worldometers, 2020). Population growth is a crucial element to a country's strength due to its direct influence on the manpower available for military in each state. Against this background, Egypt's manpower available for military registers the highest record, reaching 41,157,220 (Armedforces.eu, 2019). Followed by Turkey registering 21,079,077 (Armedforces.eu, 2019). After that, emerges manpower capability of Greece, which slightly records 2,535,174 and then ending up at Israel touching 1.797,960 manpower available for military (Armedforces.eu, 2019).

### **c. Geopolitical proximity**

Geopolitical proximity is another source of threat, as “the ability to project power declines with distance, states which are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away” (Walt, 1987). A state's geographical adjacency whose power is considerably rising often spurs up a collective opposition from its weak neighbors frequently formed through the act of a collective alignment to counter-balance the threatening power state. Against this background, Turkey emerges as the nearest country to Greece with regards to its islands being fully militarized in the Eastern Aegean sea despite violating several international law agreements on the demilitarization of the 18 Aegean islands in the area aforementioned in Lausanne Treaty (1923) (Aslan, 2020), the following picture grants a wider view to the threat perceptions with which Greece treats Turkey, in terms of Athena's adoption of a bilaterally agreed delimitation of exclusive economic zones strategy with key states in the region, being Lebanon and Israel in the given picture, whilst damaging Ankara's EEZ rights in reaching gas fields and intensifies its encirclement in the region. On the other hand, the heavy militarization of Turkey to the TRNC is also another subject that demonstrates the perceptions of securitization Ankara parallelly adopts in its relations with the RoC as a way to protect its claims in the island. Against this backdrop,



Figure 9 Exclusive Economic Zones in the Eastern Mediterranean.

**Source:** The Economist (2020). A row between Turkey and Greece over gas is raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey's geographical adjacency to the Eastern Mediterranean aligned states seems to be intimidating and is one of the core existing motives that further intensifies the pro-active assertive atmosphere engendered out of the lack of trust and de-security perceptions in the region. Within this framework, the aligned states seem to be aware of Turkey's threatening power as well as the main point of weaknesses it has, being mainly its sensible geography in the region surrounded by hostile powers, which they strategically used in order to undermine it. Therefore, both Turkey's geographical proximity and military capabilities fuel the rest of actors' decision in excluding Turkey from their regionalization projects and continue to perceive it within a narrow context of threat perception and doubt until they manage to counter-balance its rising hegemonic intentions in the region (Walt, 1987).

#### **d. Aggressive intentions**

Aggressive intentions are frequently standardized by others and exemplified through the type of official statements a country uses, which frequently engenders a source of fear and threat to the sovereignty of the targeted actors, especially in the case of regional states (Walt, 1987). Within this context, Turkey's newly reframed foreign policy under the JDP reign was often exhibited as active and bold especially with regards to issues related to conserving its own national rights and interests, more specifically, in a time when Ankara has never been as much directly and influentially involved in the Middle Eastern affairs since before the 2000s (Bilgin &

Bilgic, 2013). Turkey's adoption of bold official statements in defending its stances and assertive foreign policy was often criticized by its Western neighbors. To Greece's perspective, Ankara exemplifies a threat to Athens's security and maritime sovereignty primarily after Ankara's adoption of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine or the "Mavi Vatan" in Turkish and the bold tone up shift of its official statements as a way to issue a threat to the states who want to isolate Turkey and curb its rights and entitlements in accessing the natural resources found in the region. For instance, due to escalations in the Eastern Mediterranean, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remained steadfast in spite of increased sanctions on the country claiming that "We are proud to wave our glorious Turkish banner in all our seas. I submit that we are ready to protect every swath of our 462 thousand square meter blue homeland with great determination and undertake every possible duty that may come" (Gingeras, 2020) or "We do not have our eye on someone else's territory, sovereignty or interests" Turkish President Erdogan declared, "but we will make no concessions on that which is ours. We are determined to do whatever necessary" (Norris & Norris, 2020). The rhetoric seems to be bold, straightforward and committed, transmitting an alarm to regional actors of Turkey's unwillingness of escalations at a time when an equitable compromise would serve the region's stability and prosperity better (Outzen, 2021). Coordinately, Greece perceives Turkey as a threatening hegemonic maritime power, who is doubling its military equipment since 2015 in the region with an activist foreign policy and a straightforward objective revolved around restoring the geopolitical influence it had enjoyed in the past over territories that were under the Othman's rule in all of the Middle East and the surrounding areas of Greece, which in turn create a sense of insecurity and fear in Greece's standards and reactions toward Turkey (Talbot, 2020).

Turkey was also perceived to undertake opposing stands to Israel's policies with regards to the Palestinian case. Ankara's official statements were actively advocating the rights of Arab Muslims whilst at the same time accusing Israel to be "oppressive" vis a vis the Palestinians calling it a "terrorist state" that commits "genocide" followed by an expulsion of the Israeli ambassador Eitan Na'eh and its consul in Istanbul (Staff, 2021). The following events damaged Israel's reputation worldwide and downgraded its popularization among countries eventually, resulted in its isolation in the Middle East (Talbot, 2020). In Israel's perspective, Turkey is

undertaking a biased position whilst harshly criticizing and hosteling Israel's stances in the region since 2010, which made Ankara to be collectively regarded as a common threat in the region under today's circumstances (Talbot, 2020).

For Egypt, it perceives Turkey as a threat to its domestic political stability due to Ankara's support to the former elected government of Morsi and criticism of the new Egyptian government of Sissi considering it as "a permanent product of the military coup" and "brutal murders" as the Turkish PM Erdogan declared in 2013 (Anadolu Ajansi, 2013). Hosting as well several Egyptian opposition channels and journalists in exile to tone up their rhetoric against events that should be heard about in Egypt, which make Cairo look at Ankara as a permanent threat to its stability and constantly doubt its intentions and motives in the region (Sofuoglu, 2018).

## **B. Securitization/ Desecuritization Dynamics**

Eurasia comes across as an area with distinct characteristics of security complex dynamics due to its several unresolved historical, geographical, economic and political upheavals add to that, the new conflict surrounding energy exploration rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, which led to the intensification of routes of tension in the region (Katman, 2018). The regional security complex theory argues the presence of two regional security dynamics whilst analyzing a regional situation, being mainly securitization, where actors securitize each other for survival and treat each other as security threats (Katman, 2018). On the other hand, desecuritization is subject to the promotion of integration and stabilization plans within the analyzed region (Katman, 2018). Based on the present indications, the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020 is projected as a prominent remedy for regional actors such as Greece, Cypriot, Egypt and Israel to desecuritize each other in terms of the promotion of the exploration activities of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean through the creation of several bilateral and tri-lateral treaties along with the demarcation of their EEZs (Katman, 2018). Have these countries consolidated good relations with each other, the developments that took place had in fact immense impact on Turkey's isolation and exemption in the region. Turkey comes across as being the sole Eastern Mediterranean country that was intensively securitized by its neighbors, facing as such, rejection from the operating regional natural gas cooperation plans. In fact, there exist numerous co-operation agreements

between the stated quasi-alliance of cooperation surrounding the political, economic, energy and military levels when some of which has been operating starting since 2009 (Tziarras, 2016). For instance, Greece and Israel signed military along with several other agreements that ended up with the sign of a joint committee for strategic security cooperation against terrorism in 2011 (Midkiff, 2012, p. 49) followed by another treaties of military nature in 2015 (Middle East Monitor, 2020) GCASC and Israel as well has signed multiple agreements to promote military and defense cooperation in 2012 (Agdemir, 2016) and in the summer of 2015 they created a Cooperation Committee to strengthen their bilateral agreements in the defense and security arenas (Tziarras, 2016). Soon after that, areas of cooperation between Israel and Cyprus multiplied to cover the energy sector aimed at defending Cyprus stance in the subject of its extraction and exploitation areas of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean primarily against Turkey's claims, which intensified Turkey's insecurities in the region (Tziarras, 2016). Against this background, agreements mainly covered the subject of co-exploitation of the natural gas reserves between the two countries particularly, The Cypriot reserves of Aphrodite, and Israeli's reserves in "Leviathan" and "Tamar" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2011; Athanasopoulos, 2012). The following few examples of the cooperation projects and the progressively on-going negotiations undertaken between all of Israel, Cyprus and Greece are absolutely a testimony of their firmly-built relations, which in fact bypasses the act of balancing threats toward a collective motivation into realizing the full pro-longed integration and reaching complete desecuritization dynamics in the region, the "comfortable-quasi-alliance" as Tziarras describes, was merely a fruitful result to a number of historical, energy, economic and security motivations the concerned states had in common (Tziarras, 2016). In fact, they collectively consider Turkey as a threat, the negative stance they hold around Turkey and Turkey's bad relations with the above stated countries played a decisive role in the determination of their securitization plans against it, which resulted in Ankara's ultimate isolation (Tziarras, 2016).

From Greece's perspective, there exist a number of pre-existing issues that made a security threat (Tziarras, 2016). The main problem to Cyprus securitization of Turkey goes back to 1974, when Turkey's military occupied the Island's north, the event has since then changed the game rules and as such switched the country's

patterns both domestically and diplomatically (Tziarras, 2016). Turkey is perceived to be both an external and internal threat, impacting the island's peace since it maintains military forces in the northern side of the island being under its influence and control (Mazis, 2012). The geographical proximity of the island along with Turkey's developed offensive military capabilities spur up threatening intentions in the GCASC, which perceives it as a high level of threat (Tziarras, 2016). Disputes surrounding the Aegean maritime zones, airspace and the issues around the unfair treatments of the Greek and Turkish minorities in each country (Aydin & Yfantis, 2004). According to Greece, Turkey's perceived intentions and offensive capabilities affect the way it perceives it. Turkey is illegally claiming rights to the Aegean Sea through projecting hard power capabilities to defend its stance in the region but in fact it is violating Greek maritime and airspace claims, the reason why it is regarded the country as a prominent threat to Greece (Tziarras, 2016).

Whereas for Israel, relations does not have the same historical background of enmity with Turkey as relations were at its best during the 2002 and 2010 period, due to which signing several strategic agreements since late 1990s (Tziarras, 2016). However, things changed after Ankara's shift in foreign policy toward supporting the Palestinian case and constantly criticizing Israel's policies in a number of occasions (Tziarras, 2016). Turkey's offensive capabilities and perceived intentions in the region made Israel perceive it as a prominent threat, too (Tziarras, 2016). Turkish-Israeli relations were at their lowest in May 2010, whilst Turkish ship Gezi Flotilla ("*Mavi Marmara*") was carrying humanitarian aids to Gaza, Israeli soldiers raided the Turkish ship and killed nine activists, eight of them were Turkish and one was Turkish-American (Tziarras, 2016). Consequently, all kinds of defense ties were suspended. In 2011, Turkey coordinately announced sanctions against Israel threatening as such its naval military operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although, Turkey was eventually compensated by Israel in 2014, Israel continues to perceive Turkey as a threat. The reason to that, according to Israel, goes back to AK Party's emergence as an ultimate supporter to the Palestinian case, advocating their voice at the expense of Israel's image in the region, joining as such the Anti-Israeli Arab camp (Tziarras, 2016). To Israel, Ankara maintained a high stance of hostility in a number of issues veering always to one side against the other, which apparently doesn't serve its coercive interests in the region, consequently weakens the



diplomatic process between them. In conjunction with the present events, Israel favored turning towards Cyprus, Greece and Egypt at the expense of Turkey, furthering as such its isolation in the region to co-balance its rising threat (Tziarras, 2016).

To sum up this part, there exist several variables that led to Turkey's isolation in the region, most of which according to the Regional Security Complex theory are the patterns of durable amity and enmity among states in the region, which was the pro-longed conflict case between Turkey and Greece since 1874. Add to that, the different political and social culture Northern Turks and Southern Greeks adopt, which strained the process of their integration in the region. The present was also the case with Israel, in fact, Turkish- Israeli relations deteriorated particularly in 2010, after Turkey's bold foreign policy claims in veering toward the Arab side against Israel's coercive perceptions in the region, impeding as such the progress of the long-established diplomatic ties with the country, which in turn threatened and warned Israel. Adjacency of geography is another thing to add to the list of security threats under the present theory, where pressures of geographical proximity between all of Turkey and Greece is a crucial force to their unresolved land, air and sea sovereignty claims. Being the main reasons as well behind Israel's fear of a military confrontation against Turkey, as proximate states are frequently influenced by the power and intentions of their neighbors, which led major regional actors to consolidate their state to state relations, except with Turkey.

### **C. Balance of Threat Reaction of the Eastern Mediterranean States**

Against this background, and due to the threat stances analyzed earlier by collective powers of all of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt and also due to their interrelated motivations and goals in the region, the present emerges as an alliance formed intentionally to counter-balance Turkey's perceptions in the region and weaken its power influence (Tziarras, 2016). In fact, the factors that led to their alignment through the creation of several energy and security-oriented inter-state partnerships, are mainly triggered by the collective deterioration of their relations against the common actor being in this case, Turkey (Tziarras, 2016). Have these countries had good relations with Turkey, Ankara would have not been isolated, instead involved in the promotion of the energy-related cooperation plans in the

region, thanks to its numerous advantages being for instance, its smart geostrategic position and its developed infrastructure which would better facilitate the transition of the natural gas pipelines between all of Israel, Greece and Europe (Tziarras, 2016).

In the final analysis, there exist both power-profit and threat-related incentives that led to the establishment of the East Med Gas Forum in 2020 without the inclusion of Turkey, despite being a key player to the stability of the region. A cluster of historical, energy, economic and security forces gave rise to the alignment of Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt against the common perceived threat in the region being Turkey (Tziarras, 2016). Most importantly, Turkey's deteriorated relations with all four countries exemplified a catalyst role to their alliance to balance against its power and threat (Tziarras, 2016).

### **1. Establishment of the East Med Gas Forum**

The decentralization and regionalization plans of the international system often establish new regional approaches to facilitate demystifying the new geopolitical order, stability and peace procedures along with security dynamics in a region (Tziarras, 2018). Regionalization in fact, creates a new vein for smaller states to enhance and gain more weight in a globalized world, by fostering their interests within a decentralized international order (Tziarras, 2018). Within this framework, regionalization highlights the importance of organization and non-state actors in promoting multipolarity of the international order, which consists of coming up with new ideas and actors to facilitate cooperation between them. The process is significantly useful in terms of building regional resources and enhancing security affairs between states through peaceful negotiations and dialogue (Tziarras, 2018). Aristotle, in his definition of a "strong region" identifies the existence of a number of security dimensions stemmed from the Regional Security Complex Theory. Elements of security dimensions consist of the degree of cohesion, internal and external recognition, the common historical background, economic interdependence and the existence of some unique characteristics, based on which a region can be classified to be as whether a "strong" or "weak" region (Tziarras, 2018). The East Med is absolutely, none of an exception. In fact, the discovery of the seabed hydrocarbon wealth of the Eastern Mediterranean advanced agency and fostered relations between regional states as never to be unprecedentedly seen. Eastern Mediterranean states

leaned toward regionalization and institutionalization to promote their cooperation and interdependence (Tziarras, 2018). Member states in this case, enjoy an advantageous position learning from the European Union (EU) and The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a model to realize regional development and integration (Tziarras, 2018). That said, although the establishment of the East Med would bring about fruitful outcomes, the exemption of Turkey is an issue to be addressed before implementing a full inter-state network in the region (Tziarras, 2018). Given Turkey's troubled relations vis a vis its neighbors, the cooperation occurred based on institutionalization is as a counter-balance to Turkey, which the act itself will impede the further stability and progress of the region (Tziarras, 2018). A number of reasons contributed to its exclusion, some of which are related to the pro-longed issue of the Cyprus problem, the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy with regards to supporting Arab Palestinians at the expense of Israel's incentives in the region, its support for the rise of Muslim Brotherhood party in Egypt along with its perceived intentions in the region noting the intimidating hard power capabilities it enjoys vis a vis its neighbors in the same region (Tziarras, 2018). In fact, until nowadays its exclusion is still temporary, as a slight change in its foreign policy and a compromise between its own maritime claims and those of Cyprus, would facilitate its socialization and reshuffle cooperation patterns in the region based on a solid, fair and equitable background (Tziarras, 2018).

The Eastern Mediterranean Forum was formed on January 2020, it includes major Mediterranean countries from Egypt to Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Jordan, Palestine and Italy (Staff, 2020). Being officially converted to a regional organization, the forum aims at empowering cooperation projects in the region to include all forms of available energy in the area. It is the first international organization that connects gas producers, consumers and transit-countries under one entity (Staff, 2020). Sharing the same visions, its members aim at conjointly involve in all parts of the production and trade of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region through financially supporting new infrastructure routes to transport natural gas such as pipelines and underwater electricity-related cables to facilitate the exportation of electricity and gas along with reducing the costs of production and transportation to member states (Qandil, 2020). Based on these indications, it would be a great disadvantage for the countries that have not yet joined the entity especially

to Turkey, Spain, Algeria and Portugal as it is estimated to gain further international interest especially in the near future being under the permanent observation of the USA and France's request to join the forum (Qandil, 2020).

## **2. Trilateral energy partnership agreements since 2003**

The orientation toward excluding Turkey through undermining its exclusive economic arenas in the region has started years ago, some of the bilateral and tri-lateral agreements were signed starting from the year of 2003 and so on (Tziarras, 2016). Within this context, one of the prominent treaties were signed on the month of February in 2003 between Egypt and Cyprus for the sake of strengthening their diplomatic links based on cooperation in the maritime field and delimitation of EEZs between both countries, which will facilitate the share of their maritime resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, the treaty worked in conjunction with the UN convention of the Law of the Sea (United Nations, 2004). Moreover, both countries signed other bilateral agreements in the year of 2012 for the sake of promoting cooperation on gas exploration in the area (Tziarras, 2016). The second agreement emerged between Egypt and Israel in 2005 with an aim to transmit Egyptian natural gas to Israel in a 15-year deal via an undersea pipeline from the north Egyptian of el-Arish to the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, highlighting as such the solid established trust and peace between both actors (The New York Times, 2005). Another treaty signed between Cyprus and Lebanon in 2007, the partnership also targeted cooperative gas exploration plans between both actors. In addition, a growing alignment between the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean countries occurred in another treaty recognized between all of Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine under the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in 2020 with concerns to promote activities of gas exploration and production in the region along with other bi-lateral treaties formed exclusively between Egypt and Greece on 6 August 2020 (Tziarras, 2016).

### **a. The *De Facto* Standards between GCASC and TRNC**

To start with, the agreement signed between the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) and Israel resulted in the creation of a new brand of crisis called “energy chess” with harsh intentions from neighboring players to share the energy reserves discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean (Katman, 2014).

Sharing energy reserves is a concept centered around the idea of the delimitation of exclusive economic zones between the littoral countries in the region, the event that fueled additional tensions between the historical northern and southern Cyprus issue, where even claims toward each other's sovereignty and recognition has not been yet existing (Katman, 2014). In this context, Greek Cypriot divided the Eastern Mediterranean into 12 segmented areas, each of which to be occupied by a foreign power. Greece gave 12th parcel to American Nobel Energy; 2nd, 3rd, and 9th parcels to ENI, 10th parcel to Total, 2nd region to Italy and France with tenders, whilst at the same time signing other oil and gas drilling agreements in 2003 with Egypt followed by Lebanon and Syria in 2007 (Katman, 2014).

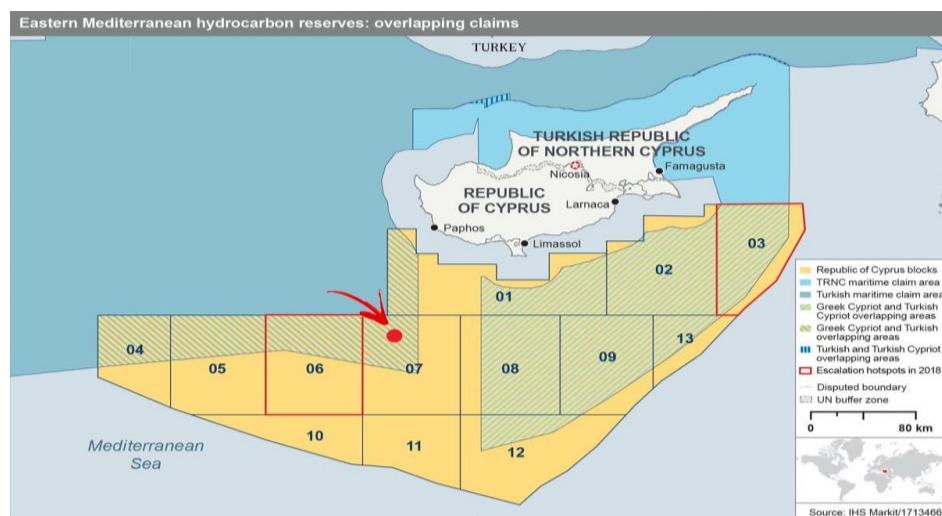


Figure 10 Eastern Mediterranean Hydrocarbon Reserves: Overlapping Claims (2018)

**Source:** HIS Markit (2018). Turkey-Cyprus-Greece marine risks, <https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/Turkey-Cyprus-Greece-marine-risks.html>

The crisis broke out in the region when a Norwegian search ship was granted drillship authority in the overlapped Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot EEZs, which evoked Turkish battleship intervention in 2009 (Katman, 2014). Under these developments, the Greek Cypriots aim was to accelerate the process of the delimitation of the borders of exclusive economic zone between Cyprus and Israel in 17 December 2010 at a time when Turkey and Israel were undergoing a deep crisis after the aftermath of Mavi Marmara incident (Katman, 2014). Turkey's naval intervention, on the other hand, was justified to protect equal rights of the Turkish Cypriots in terms of the sharing of natural resources around the de island (Katman, 2014). Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) was granted license by TRNC to start its geophysical search in a licensed area called "Region G", eventually signing up an

agreement with Shell, world's leading oil company in late 2011, for the search and production of gas resources in the Mediterranean and South-eastern Anatolia (Katman, 2014). Under the development of these events, a de facto situation was created, the Greek Cypriot's drilling claims were perceived as illegal in the region followed an evoked process of tension despite efforts from the European Union (EU) to calm down tensions and suspend natural gas exploration activities in the area of dispute as Maja Kocijancics, Spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for the European Union proclaimed "all parties should exercise restraint and do their utmost to facilitate successful completion of this process" (Katman, 2014). The impact of recent developments forwarded the emergence of several segmented perspectives in the region, most notably the shift of the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean and its impact on the emergence of a more assertive Turkish foreign policy in preserving national rights, challenging by which, the adopted zero problem with neighbors foreign policy (Katman, 2014). Mustafa Kutlay, Political Economy Expert at EU Studies Center of USAK observes that escalations between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots would emerge due to the drilling crisis which will lead to a return to the reel political stances in the region (Katman, 2014). He mentions three reel political lessons to be learnt by Turkey, affirming that "balance in the Eastern Mediterranean changed against Turkey once again", based on a historical analysis conducted by him he concluded stating that "the balance in the Eastern Mediterranean is challenged after Greece becoming member to the EU in 1981, then in 2004", Southern Cyprus becoming member of the EU as "Cyprus Republic" (Katman, 2014). Based on the latest developments conducted by Greece with regards to drillship rights, once left unanswered by Turkish forces, "the balance will be distorted against Turkey more". Secondly, Kutlay insisted on the essential role of Turkey's realist power response played against the events initiated through drilling activities by Southern Cyprus, insisting that it is a similar strategy to reply against the inefficiency of solving the issues based on a mutual dialogue (Katman, 2014). Kultay sums up as following "Since GCASC is recognized as 'Cyprus Republic' by the UN as a sovereign state, Greek Cypriots argue that they use their rights originated from being 'state'. Leading countries such as UN, Russia, UK also mention that Cyprus Republic has right for exploration in the Mediterranean. But, Turkey fails to cooperate on the issue since it does not recognize Greek Cypriot side as a state

(Katman, 2014). In short, unless Cyprus issue is resolved, Turkey may face with such issues." He also insists on Turkey to continue advocating its rights for drillship activities in the Eastern Mediterranean based on the agreement signed with TRNC, and further signs other agreements of EEZ demarcations with Egypt and Lebanon. On the other hand, the drilling activities of RoC are all backed up by a number of international actors for instance, France, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Austria, Belgium and Holland, the reasons are multiple but mainly goes around Europe's aspiration to end up its dependency on the imported natural gas reserves from Russia and to keep the Chinese influence away from the Eastern Mediterranean (Katman, 2014).

#### **b. Multilateral Partnerships beyond the Energy Cooperation Plans**

The cooperation agreements soon consisted of treaties covering new range of fields regarding politics, economic, energy and military (Tziarras, 2016). Especially those between Greece and Israel, which have started since 2009 with an aim to foster military cooperation against terrorism and security-related issues, followed by a joint committee for strategic security cooperation in 2011 (Tziarras, 2016). In 2015, another agreement on security and military affairs was signed (Middle East Monitor, 2020). Regarding RoC and Israel, the agreement signed revolves around the defense and military cooperation in 2012. Parallely in 2015, they engaged in the foundation of a Cooperation Committee with an aim to strengthen their bilateral agreements in the fields of hard power security (Tziarras, 2016). After that, both actors have upgraded the fields of their cooperation to include cooperation in the field of energy exploration and drillings along with the security agreements. Primarily, The latest agreements araised as a response to defend and strengthen Cyprus claims and rights toward the areas of extraction and exploitation of hydrocarbons against those claims of Turkey, alleviating as such its exemption and insecurities (Tziarras, 2016). Other treaties additionally included co-exploitation agreements on the hydrocarbon reserves in all of "Laviathan" and "Tamar" areas (Tziarras, 2016).

Agreements between the RoC and Egypt also has started since February 2003, aiming at further strengthening ties of good-neighborliness based on cooperation in the maritime field, recognizing as such the importance of the delimitation of EEZs to further cooperation and development in both countries, the treaty worked in conjunction with the UN convention of the Law of the Sea where the two parties

shall build diplomatic channels to cooperate the share of the natural resources found in the agreed areas (United Nations, 2004).

Moreover, in 2020 both Greece and Egypt signed an agreement of maritime cooperation objective in the Eastern Mediterranean where both actors agreed upon delimiting their maritime boundaries and as such extend the areas within which to tackle their exploitation and extraction activities of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean (Lika, 2020).

The indicated agreements soon led to Turkey's aggressive reactions in the Eastern Mediterranean after being completely left out and exempted. Being conscious that the events will undermine its position toward profiting from the discovered energy resources, especially during a time where it feels desperate to confront its economic stagnation and reduce the energy importing rate of foreign countries being at its highest level 95%, Ankara therefore veered toward signing two Memoranda of Understanding with the Government of national Accord (GNA) recognized by the UN in Tripoli in 2019 (Tanchum, 2020). One of these agreements connotes a military cooperation agreement, whereas the other is about demarcating the EEZs between Turkey and Libya, the treaty has efficiently changed the game rules in the region to the benefit of Ankara as it countered the conjoint claims of the already established EEZs between all of Greece, Egypt and Cyprus, which led to further intensifications in the region (Tanchum, 2020). In addition, Turkey signed a military cooperation treaty that guarantees Turkey's hard power support to the GNA against the efforts of General Khalifa Haftar, who is supported by France, Egypt, UAE and Russia, which stimulated tensions during the Libyan civil war upheavals (Tanchum, 2020). Having eventually succeeded in the war, Turkey now enjoys a great military presence in Libya that challenges Greece, Cyprus and Egypt over their maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean and pressed Greece's claims by operating exploration attempts through sending the Oruç Reis, an energy exploration ship supported by five naval vessels in waters near the Greek island of Kastellorizo to affirm its position in the region, which augmented the escalation cycle in the Eastern Mediterranean (Tanchum, 2020) but also made actors aware of Turkey's determination and valuable diplomatic strategy in protecting its rights on the assumption of the inefficiency of solving emerging issues based on mutual dialogue and compromise.



#### **D. Role of the European Union in the Intensification of Turkey's Isolation in the Region**

The Eastern Mediterranean crisis resulted in the change of two major geopolitical dimensions. The first dimension was reflected on Turkey's growing assertive foreign policy and military posture in the Eastern Mediterranean, which heightened geopolitical competition between Ankara and its regional adversaries apart from Egypt, Israel and Cyprus tremendously shaped the EU Member States forms of engagement with the country due to recent escalations in the region (Adar and Toygur, 2020). The EU's response notably signified by Turkey's strain from accession negotiations, threat with tougher additional economic sanctions and discussions mostly focused on areas of conflict rather than cooperation, which tightened discord in the EU- Turkish relations (Adar and Toygur, 2020). In the meanwhile, the EU's intensified militarization posture to its southern neighborhood has become a crucial manifestation to the EU's securitized position vis a vis Ankara's gas exploration and drilling prospects in the arena (Adar and Toygur, 2020). Turkey's maritime boundary conflict with Greece and Cyprus has in fact strengthened its international exemption and resulted in its power rivalry against several regional key powers being Egypt and the UAE and consequently affected its relations with the EU and showcased their incapability in adopting a unified cooperative approach towards each other (Adar and Toygur, 2020). Within this backdrop, Turkey's architecture of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine focused on the strong naval military equipment it possesses against Greece and Cyprus, the AKP's support to Arab revolts during and after the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa against the European powers influence, such as Turkey's military intervention in Libya against France, its support to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood party in Egypt and Tunisia, which deeply contradicts the historical interests of European powers notably France and some other Middle Eastern monarchies in the region such as the UAE and KSA (Adar and Toygur, 2020). That said, although during its conflict with Cyprus and Greece, the Union's intervention in the conflict reflected the differences of engagement between member states with Turkey (Adar and Toygur, 2020). To France's perspective, in line with the power change in Libya after the GNA's success following Turkey's intervention in late 2019 and Turkey's signature of two memoranda of understanding with Libya's UN-

recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) surrounding delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean Sea and security and military cooperation agreement that serves its influential presence in the region, France took the side of supporting Greece and Cyprus and advocated an opposing approach to Turkey's EEZs agreements in the Eastern Mediterranean claiming the act to be illegal and unlawful in the region (Dalay, 2021). Therefore, France's act to undermine Turkey's aims in the region was displayed in its increased military support and growing defense spendings to Greece along with encouraging Greece's purchase of French weaponry on September, 2020 and the execution of joint military exercises with all of Greece, Italy and Cyprus against Turkey (Adar and Toygur, 2020). Besides, The French President Emmanuel Macron endorses the idea of the creation of the "Pax Mediterranean" project which implies a peaceful Mediterranean based on the grounds of political cooperation between littoral states in the region with the exemption of Turkey's "imperial fantasies" as he declared "I do not believe that in recent years Turkey's strategy has been that of a NATO ally when you have a country attacking the Exclusive Economic Zones or the national sovereignty of two European Union member states," he said. "What would be our credibility in handling the issue of Belarus if we did not respond to attacks on the national sovereignty of our member states?" (Greek City Times, 2020). France in this sense perceives Turkey as a threatening regional power with imperialist visions in the region, which contradicts not only France's historical regional influence and interests but also clashes with its military posture in a number of occasions explained by Ankara's occupation of parts of Cyprus, Syria, Libya and Iraq (Greek City Times, 2020). On the other hand, in pursuit of energy diversification and the protection of their economic and security interests with Libya, Southern European states notably Italy, Spain and Malta have maintained neutral positions in the issue rather than veering toward the Pax Mediterranean or Turkey (Adar and Toygur, 2020). Moreover, Germany the nation that bears the largest Turkish diaspora in Europe and enjoys strong economic relations with Turkey appears to be the most consolatory actor in the region, stepping up several mediation efforts between Turkey and Greece in favor of a dialogue-based approach with Turkey, as Ankara plays a valuable role in curbing the flow of migration trends to Berlin (Adar and Toygur, 2020). In the light of this, France appears the most reluctant country to Turkey's regional integration, the sentiment grows flagrant after Turkey's President Erdogan call for an

international boycott against French products after a disagreement over religious topics occurred, the subject of Cyprus invasion and Turkey's recent expression of two-state solution in Cyprus, which contradicts Greece and the EU resource-driven interests largely intensified Ankara's isolation (Adar and Toygur, 2020).

All in all, the European Union has fostered Turkey's isolation in the region during multiple attempts most of which resulted in the decline and breakdown of Ankara's EU accession talks and prospects for the EU membership, featuring expressions of distrust, miscommunication and the different prospects of geopolitical visions between both actors (Paikin and Rose, 2021). The trend left Turkey with no choice only to pursue a more active independent foreign policy focused upon advocating and protecting its national interests and rights against Greece through projecting its military naval posture and soft power tools to preserve its share in the gas drilling and exploratory efforts in the region (Paikin and Rose, 2021). Although facing multiple sanctions, Turkey seems to be determined to protect its rights even at the expense of limiting its relations with Brussels to migration issues, trade and investment (Paikin and Rose, 2021). The war of words and clashing positions with France over the subject of Cyprus invasion, the PKK, Libya and other religious topics added to Turkey's tensions with NATO members over its purchase of the Russian S-400 defence system in 2020 resulted in a cognitive intensification of sentiments of distrust towards Ankara (Paikin and Rose, 2021). The EU is in fact growing securitized towards Turkey due to several other political issues in short, being Turkey's pursuit of a religious conservative nationalist ideology that opposes the western allies liberal and democratic elements, the EU accusation of Ankara to violate human rights and freedoms of expression inside the country, along with Ankara's fight against the rise of the Kurdish People's Democratic Party within its land, in Syria and Iraq, which paradoxically France dearly supports (Ongun, 2020). It is noteworthy to claim that Turkey's new assertive and conservative ideological and political stances are directly influencing the newly-emerging democracies in all of the Middle East and North Africa, which reflects another threatening topic to the EU member states to fear Turkey's accession (Ongun, 2020). Ankara's stances led the EU to anticipate the probable negative consequences of the process of Turkey's integration into the EU, anchoring instead a political and ideological reconfiguration that would best serve the region's interest within a unified institution, although the

establishment of the EMGF without the inclusion of Turkey seems to be another prominent manifestation to the EU's desire to impede Turkey's growing power and influence in the region until a reconcile could be achieved on the current controversial topics between both actors (Ongun, 2020) .

### **E. Reaction of Turkey to Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean**

Turkey's foreign policy under the present circumstances has undergone an unprecedented test and pressure from its neighbors. Against which, Ankara has undertaken several adjustments in terms of its foreign policy since 2002 revolved around preserving its own rights and claims in the region under any circumstances, veering as a result from the portrayed unbiased position toward an assertive active foreign policy (Outzen, 2021). Turkey's reactive strategy connotes several strategic elements including adopting a doctrine that articulates and connects Turkey to its maritime claims and resource rights based on projecting and developing power capabilities, the doctrine is known as the "*Mavi Vatan*" or "*Blue Native Land*" (Outzen, 2021). Developers of the doctrine, naval officers Cihat Yayci and Cem Gurdeniz, assert that the doctrine is protective in nature and aimed at fostering compromise and fairness rather than dominance in the region (Outzen, 2021). At the time when developers insist the strategy's purpose would boost Turkey's rights within the framework of the international law in the region, several other lectures and political analysts doubted the objective, arguing the strategy to be "*Expansionist*", "*Neo-ottomanist*" and thus ineffective in stimulating actors to work conjointly and cooperatively with Turkey (Outzen, 2021). The second element of Turkey's reactive strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean was to multiple its naval power projection tools relying mostly on its domestic production of ships and submarines, missiles and naval drones (Outzen, 2021). The third strategy revolves around bestowing executive trainings and recent modern equipment to the Turkish Navy for the sake of extending their reach along with signing access agreements with foreign navies such as with those of Qatar, Libya and Albania and signing demarcation of EEZ agreement in late 2019 with Libya to further its interests in the Mediterranean (Outzen, 2021). Finally, Turkey has been also working tremendously within the framework of international law to reiterate its legal stance and concerns within the region and calming recent troubled waters by restoring negotiation plans with several key actors in the region

after a considerable strain of relations during the end of this year (2021), the act included for instance, reviving diplomatic ties with Greece to negotiate maritime rights of both countries (Hurriyet Dailynews, 2020), with Egypt to process normalizing ambassadorial links and economic relations after a strain of more than ten years (El-Khazen, 2021) along with seeking a fresh start with Israel (Goren, 2021).

Against this background, Turkey believes there would be much more to be gained in the region with its inclusion. Once the deals in the region will enable all the concerned littoral actors to benefit from the energy finds in the Mediterranean without exception, the region is estimated to become eventually stable and prosperous (Outzen, 2021). Whereas Turkey's intimidation plans by neighbors with the help of foreign powers in the region will only undermine its rights and claims in the region, which will eventually lead to an escalation and intensification to the existing disputes as Turkey will not compromise with the hostile intentions that aim to violate its rights (Outzen, 2021). In fact, Turkey's foreign policy despite portrayed as hard and assertive, played a catalyst role in convincing actors that Ankara cannot be easily intimidated in the region and that peaceful negotiations and a compromise seems to be a more promising path to all the actors in the region (Outzen, 2021). In the bargain, following the withdrawal of the United States from supporting the East Med gas pipeline project in January 2022, the project in this sense was meant to link Israel's Leviathan and Cyprus's Aphrodite gas fields to supply Italy with natural gas despite the strong opposition of Turkey to the project due to intensifying its isolation and its overlap with the EEZ claims it established with Libya (Elass, 2020). The decision of the United States Department to move to sustainable, renewable and decarbonized energy sources implemented in the example of introducing new electricity interconnectors instead of relying on a commercially viable pipeline that was soon proved to be "*a complex project*", non-eco-friendly and a main source to continuous tension in the region as it excludes Turkey from the regionalization plans and prevents the normalization of relations between Greece, Israel and Turkey (Cyprus Mail, 2022). The move soon exterminated a heavy weight of pressure borne by regional actors surrounding the possibility of an established peace plans in the region within the light of their heavy contradicted interests, soon the plan proved to defend the interests and benefit of Turkey's stances in the region and thus

rehabilitates further hopeful peaceful steps to be adopted in future (Cyprus Mail, 2022).

## **F. Future Geopolitics in the Region**

The increasing importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region is demonstrated in the doubling of regional and global powers' inclusion to the field of power challenge (Ataman, 2021)

There exist three reasons behind the conflicts taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean, most of which are related to Turkey's deteriorated historical relations notably, the prolonged conflict with Cyprus along with its new assertive foreign policy in the region (Shea, 2021) which exemplify a threat to the opposing states of its power rise. Within this context, the most prominent issue is surrounding the historical disputes between Greece and Turkey over the sovereignty issue of the island of Cyprus along with their territorial waters conflict in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean seas. The issue has been groveling since decades now with many attempts for mediation and negotiations but most of which were in vain. Both countries have applied to a request on the interpretation of international law about the status of EEZs between both countries (Shea, 2021). The stance of Greece consists of treating its Aegean islands which some of them are just a few kilometers off the coast of Turkey, as the same as the mainland reserved under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which permits it to extend its territorial waters around these islands to 12 nautical miles (Shea, 2021). The request aims at reducing Turkey's territorial waters to a narrow coastal strip and straining its movement and access to the Aegean waters. Consequently, Turkish politicians and military leaders emerged re-introducing the "*Blue Homeland*" doctrine or (Mavi Vatan in Turkish) as an attempt to showcase Turkey's hard power and assertive capabilities in the region, which was a way to intimidate its neighbors exaggerated claims whilst preserving its own rights (Shea, 2021). The persistence of the territorial disputes led Greece and Turkey to take an escalated assertive stances in the region using their hard power projections sending their warships and fighter jets to the disputed zones, which according to analysts, a military proximity between the two rivaling powers is never something that attests good events in future (Shea, 2021). Greece has soon become conscious about Turkey's moves toward modernizing its

military capability in a rapid way, so it has also raised its military budgets to counter-balance, in some way, Turkey's maritime rising power (Shea, 2021). Athens perceives Ankara as a threat since its developed high-tech defense capabilities has made it a winner in games related to Libya, Iraq and Syria (Shea, 2021). Moreover, its victory after Azerbaijan countering Armenia last year was all due to its massive warfare capabilities (Shea, 2021). Greece as such has turned toward its allies in the region seeking support and reassurance, relying as such on the US for warships purchase and training exercises as well as Israel, additionally it walked closer to France as Paris is undertaking counter positions to Turkey's influence with regards to the emerging issues in all of Libya and the Northern African countries in general (Shea, 2021).

The Eastern Mediterranean is increasingly gaining weight both at the economic and geostrategic levels for a number of reasons, particularly after Israel's newly discovered gas reserves, namely the Tamar and Leviathan fields, and Egypt's reserves around its coasts (Shea, 2021). The discovered oil around Cyprus are estimated at 25tn cubic feet of gas, when US company, Noble Energy, was permitted to evaluate explorations in the region (Shea, 2021). In order to precede the exploitation of these resources, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt along with other littoral states have established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, without the inclusion of Turkey (Shea, 2021).

Based on these indications, Ankara reacted to the new geopolitics by demanding its own share in the region, requesting as such a definition to its own executive economic zone to explore and drill on the behalf of the Northern Cyprus, though being internationally unrecognized only by the Republic of Turkey (Shea, 2021). Under these pressures, Ankara sent its own drilling ships protected by intimidating Turkish warships to the water zones claimed by Cyprus, which led to a confrontation. In the meanwhile, Greece and Egypt have agreed upon establishing a pipeline to transfer gas and electricity promoted by solar power connecting the north and south of the Eastern Mediterranean (Shea, 2021). Turkey, on the other hand, has replied by forming an agreement with Libya primarily to counter-balance the alliance of Egypt, Greece and Israel, whilst at the same time confusing the claims of Cyprus and Egypt in the region (Shea, 2021).

Under the persistence of these events, geopolitics in the region are perceiving a high level of risk. In fact, there should be a way for both Athens and Ankara to solve their territorial issues within the framework of the international law (Shea, 2021). Precedents in such an issue exist, let's consider for instance, the delimitation of continental shelf in the High North after persisting issues between the Norway and Russia (Shea, 2021) or also the example of equitable distance compromises that global courtroom of Justice's ruling undertook in the persisting cases occurred between Tunisia and Italy or Malta and Italy (Outzen, 2021).

Moreover, the EU acquires a paramount role in easing negotiations between Turkey and Greece and to prevent further militarization of the region (Shea, 2021). Given the fact that it was the Greek Cypriots who hindered the Annan Plan to reunite the island through a referendum 20 years ago, the government now should work conjointly with the Turkish Cypriots in the northern part to reduce its economic dependency on the Republic of Turkey and end up its transport isolation in the region. Actors therefore, should capture the low threat steps to normalize the circulation of dialogue in the region (Shea, 2021).

Ankara and Athens also have to reach a point of accepting a confidence-building processes by pushing their military forces away in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, limiting as such the threat perception they hold toward each other with regards to the size and number of military exercises (Shea, 2021). In this case, if Turkey accepts the idea of pushing away or reducing its troops from the Northern Cyprus, Greece would offer to limit the presence of its military troops of some of its islands with high proximity to Turkey or even demilitarize them (Shea, 2021).

The EU has also to conjointly work with the NATO to establish a recognized air picture specifically to the Aegean Sea case for the sake of preventing frequent air incidents between both actors in future. Thus, ensuring the establishment of a sense of trust and desecuritization in the perceptions of both states (Shea, 2021).

The period after the Arab Spring has had also several effects on Turkey's foreign policy portray in the region, which had respectively impacted the existing geopolitical shift that narrowed its chances to resources access in the region (Shea, 2021). Ankara for instance, was often portrayed by the neighbors as a country with an anti-status quo in the region, supporting the rise of Islamist parties in all of Egypt and Libya (Shea, 2021), which goes against the interests of the currently elected



government of Sissi in Egypt and damages its future anticipated interests in Libya. Ankara has been also tremendously working within international spheres at advocating the Palestinian rights criticizing as such Israel's moves and stances against Palestine, which Israel perceives as an attack to its popularization in the region. Against this background, it is still useful to perceive the upcoming actions that will be undertaken by the Turkish government in order to reform its perceptions in the region and focus much more on the cooperation and integration plans that will be suggested to it in future and work on re-gaining and restoring the trust and confidence it had enjoyed formerly from its neighbors and allies (Shea, 2021).

Another point to add, is that regional states have to start their cooperation plan by focusing on low politics for the sake of guaranteeing environmental, social-political and cultural integration as they are considered as non-threatening with slight impact on national security of states (Tziarras, 2018). The project of working upon the low politics level constitute expanding the regional non-state and state actors for the sake of preserving common interests in the region through building a sustainable political culture with introduction of applicable cooperation plans (Tziarras, 2018). The failure of state integration plans will result in a major defeat in the region, where a stable, secure and integrated prosperous region cannot be established without the adoption of sustainable cooperative and adjustment norms (Tziarras, 2018).

With regards to the Palestinian issue, a further normalization in Arab-Israeli relations cannot take place without adopting new positive perspectives to the issue (Tziarras, 2018). Likewise, the lack of progress in the issue will only lead to further hindering Israel's relations to its major regional neighbors in the Middle East and beyond namely Turkey (Tziarras, 2018). In this regard, the concerned countries will need to remain preserving continuous positive dialogue that aims at designing their future steps in a collective way. Energy, on another hand, can play a catalyst role in the issue, ensuring a future regionalist project in the Eastern Mediterranean with the inclusion of all of its entitled actors (Tziarras, 2018).

Nevertheless, the most potential issue that should be addressed to foster peaceful inter-state network and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean is to prevent Turkey's further exclusion plans. Given Turkey's multiple troubled relations with the concerned states, its inclusion in this case depends on the extent to which Ankara is ready to refine its foreign policy with the key players in the region, which

a slight reform will easily reshuffle patterns of cooperation and normalization by jointly working with the key players in the region (Tziarras, 2018). It has to indulge in a further positive dialogue with Cyprus surrounding the securitization of their relations upon different issues with regards to the delimitation of territorial waters, airspace and continental shelf along with militarization of the islands in the Aegean sea and start as mentioned before from the low-politics issues surrounding fostering cultural social programs between the two communities and promoting tourism and trade projects to the region (Tziarras, 2018).

Equivalently, Littoral actors have to come to a conclusion that cooperation plans without Turkey's integration in the region cannot bring about tremendous results to the stability and prosperity of the region at a long term. Ankara as seen, cannot be easily bypassed or intimidated in the region primarily, thanks to its great diplomatic strategies weight regionally and internationally, along with its rising economic and military capabilities. Eastern Mediterranean littoral states have to submit that the country's inclusion will absolutely boost the strong valuable alliance formed and that established agreements with Ankara will further facilitate gas-transmission partnerships between actors notably, from Israel to Cyprus and then to Europe thanks to its geostrategic position in the map, its developed infrastructure along with its remarkable expertise in the field gas transmission.

Coming to the end, the challenges awaiting the Mediterranean are serious and undetermined in this perspective. Plans in order to diminish the political uncertainty and lack of trust among littoral states is pivotal in order to guarantee an equal division of the region's natural riches between actors and at the same time to foster positive and sustainable relations between the concerned states (Demiryol, 2020). Under this background, it is also still useful for actors to resolve or at least, lower their initial political obstacles through undertaking positive initiatives and goodwill gestures in order to demystify whether the discovered resources will soon lead to peace and stability in the region or enhance its protracted rivals and incoherency (Demiryol, 2020).

The good news is that later this year, Turkish leaders built the first moves toward Ankara's socialization in the region, stressing on the fact that Ankara is in favor of solving the most prominent problems with Greece through dialogue surrounding maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean, air space rights,

energy drilling entitlements and the status of the islands in the Aegean sea and Greece's militarization of the Aegean islands, which should be normally demilitarized by treaty that has been violated (Dailysabah, 2021). Opting to resolve their problems through dialogue, both Ankara and Greece showcased mutual aspirations to discuss the subjects within a positive constructive way (Dailysabah, 2021).

Moreover, starting from September 2021, Turkey and Egypt started a new round of diplomatic talks after a split in relations since the wake of 2011 (Wilks, 2021). Turkey was described by Eyup Ersoy, an international relations faculty member at Ahi Evran University, as it had "relinquished its unwavering support for the Muslim Brotherhood and had become less vocal about the issue" (Wilks, 2021). The meeting was expected to broke the tension Ankara had with several Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE and to accentuate talks surrounding issues related to the regional economic files with an aim to boost up levels of investments between both countries especially from the Gulf countries, also to establish a way for Ankara to restore and revive its status in the region along with confronting the economic stagnation it has been recently undergoing (Wilks, 2021). Equivalently, the Egyptian opposition's media present within Turkey's territory softened its criticism toward the country and on this, Samir Salha, professor of international relations, asserted that "the obstacle to the success of the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement is the issue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, those who were received by Turkey and opened for them the field of political and media movement on its territory" (Al-Estiklal Newspaper, 2022). Likewise the recent decision of the United states to suspend its support to the establishment of the East Med pipeline that came in January 2022 which was intended to link Israel, Cyprus Greece and Europe with natural gas resources, the move raised upon reasons related to the project's commercial viability, non-environmental eco-friendly and its cause of continuous tensions between Turkey Greece and Israel as it overlaps with Turkey's interests and EEZs in the region (Cyprus Mail, 2022). The decision was claimed to be in favor of Turkey's long nationally defend stances and interests in the region especially after its encirclement in the region and as such it could be claimed that there exist a greater probability for future increased peaceful and cooperative eco-friendly plans to be established between littoral countries in future that takes every party's stances into consideration (Cyprus Mail, 2022).



## V. CONCLUSION

The argument the present research defends is that the alliance between all of Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt cannot be considered as a mere coincidence or established cooperation aimed at merely targeting their economic interests and resource-needs in the future. In fact, the argument behind this paper goes beyond that thinking into exploring the core motivations behind the states' alignment in the Eastern Mediterranean against a defined actor, being Turkey. As discussed above in the theoretical section, states often undertake efforts in forming an alliance exclusively in the case of the existence of a common perceived threatening power, so the act is called a "*balance of threat*". Within the light of the Eastern Mediterranean case, Turkey comes across as an emerging rising power in the area, with strong economic power, military capabilities, and different ideologies aiming to impose in the region, creating as a result, a security dilemma to all of these countries. Israel is constantly menaced by its deteriorated relations with its major neighbors in the Middle East because of its severe politics adopted in tackling the Palestinian case, which on the other hand Turkey dearly and boldly supports. Within the framework of its relations with Greece, Ankara poses a threat to Athens in terms of its assertive claims in the region surrounding unresolved maritime boundaries rights, unrecognized sovereignty claims over land, sky, and sea along with the prolonged social, cultural, and political issues between both parties. In Egypt, Cairo feels menaced by Turkey's hostile discourse in undermining the legitimacy of Sissi's administration of Egypt, which emerged after the outbreak of a coup in 2013 and its undemocratic politics. Turkey also depressed Egypt's interests and objectives in Libya after its opposed intervention in 2019 supporting the UN-recognized government of national accord in Libya, which created a sense of threat against Turkey in the region.

Within this framework, the present volume determines that the nature of Israel, Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt's alliance is an act formed intentionally and with a justifiable purpose to counter-balance the threat opposed by Turkey in the region.

Most of these countries shared different perspectives of threat with Turkey and at different levels, which gave their alliance a new edge of importance, being once to share of the estimated economic interests found in the region but most importantly to meet the security and balance of threat motives they commonly had with Turkey. In terms of the balance of threat theory, the approach was a useful pattern to allow unfolding Turkey's supreme potential in the Eastern Mediterranean and the sources of threat the other neighboring countries perceive in Turkey, which brought forth the process of its isolation. Turkey's threatening status in the region was then concluded by actors given to its rising *aggregate power* in terms of population, military, and resources capacities. The outcome of power rise in intimidating the most approximate neighbors in the region and thus subsequently face an aligned opposition were all demystified through *the geographical proximity* of Turkey to all of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt. *The offensive intentions* of Ankara were also measured based on the conjunction of two basic initiatives, *the geographical proximity* it has and its rising military power primarily during the recent years especially of 2019-2020. Lastly, the actors' estimated *aggressive intentions* they perceive in Ankara led to its ultimate isolation, the idea was further explained in terms of Turkey's new assertive and power-driven foreign policy in the region mainly being the adoption of the "*Blue Homeland*" doctrine, and the bold assertive statements Turkey uses in defending its rights and ideological perceptions in the region. Later on, the regional security complex pattern granted a helpful assumption in strengthening the role of patterns of *durable amity and enmity* among states in the region based on historical factors, long-standing enmities or amities along with the shared culture in demystifying the idea that regional power states project more threats than dominant powers as long as they are neighbors. Another conclusion can be drawn from the discussions presented in this volume, the theory's relevance in pre-determining the outcome of the acts of cooperation, like what occurred with the institutionalized case of Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt or the act of exemption and exclusion, which was the case of Turkey. Based on this evidence, within this theory the reasons behind Turkey's isolation almost by-pass the material factors yet concentrate more on the conjunction of perceptions of power and intent based on the study of state-to-state relations situated upon the type of relationships among regional powers or long-standing historical rivalries or amities between states and the shared political and social culture states commonly enjoy. The theory also classified

the actions based on which states securitize or desecuritize each other, based on the identified patterns of “*enmity*” or “*amity*”. The desecuritization approach was evident in the analysis of the foundation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020 that connotes major Eastern Mediterranean littoral states with a concern to conjointly benefit from the gas resources found in the seabed of the region. More essentially, states’ insecurity in the region led most of them to initiate bi-lateral and tri-lateral agreements in terms of gas exploration and drillship activities along with the demarcation of their EEZs with each other without the consult of Turkey despite having common security and economic incentives in the region, which is a clear sign to their intentions in encircling and undermining Turkey’s rights in the region. In the light of the recent developments, Turkey emerged as a more strategic and assertive active power in the region, adopting a more realist approach to its foreign policy based on the multiplication of its naval power projections in the region and military presence in key places to showcase actors that Ankara is capable of a military confrontation during a time where solving the issues through mutual dialogue and compromise seem to be inefficient.

To sum up, Turkey’s exemption from the ongoing regionalization plans in the region cannot be permanent, despite its troubled relations with the concerned actors. The reason is that its continued exclusion will not bring the long-term stability and prosperity other actors aspired for through its encirclement. Turkey, in fact, is a remarkable geostrategic country with strong diplomatic weight at both the regional and international levels and is witnessing an economic and military progress as a rising middle power in the region???. Therefore, actors have to start working again conjointly with Turkey in addressing their issues starting from the low level of politics and concentrating more on the advantages their efforts will bring once the resource-based cooperation will take place with the equitable inclusion of the entitled actors to the region’s wealth. The act seems to be the only promising way for all actors to enjoy a sustainable prosperous and stable region.





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## **RESUME**

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### **EDUCATION**

- ❖ **Bachelor:** 2018, University of Carthage, Faculty of Literature, Department of Applied English for Communications.
- ❖ **Masters:** 2021, Istanbul Aydin University, Social Sciences Institute, Department of Political Science and International Relations.

### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

- ✓ English Teacher at Berlitz International Institution- Tunis, Tunisia
- ✓ English Teacher at English Time Language Center- Istanbul, Turkey
- ✓ Radio/ TV Programs Presenting Trainee at ORIENT TV- Istanbul, Turkey
- ✓ Owner of Easy Talk Language Training Center - Tunis, Tunisia.
- ✓ Public Relations Assistant Manager at PR Factory - Tunis, Tunisia.