

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EEZ CONFLICTS IN EAST MED AND A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Oğuzhan AKYENER¹

Abstract

Alternative natural gas sources have become much more important for the EU (which is a major natural gas consumer), which is now trying to purify its markets from Russian gas. In this context, the East Med has started to attract more attention with its proved and possible natural gas resource potential.

In addition to its importance in the context of energy, it is also important to guarantee that the tensing balances in the north does not shift to the south. Which means, global dynamics is not in such a situation to manage another war or a hot conflict in the East Med.

From a geopolitical point of view, China's increasing activity in the region, new investment initiatives, and political and military objectives, although disguised as a commercial cover, push the Eastern Mediterranean to a position that needs more attention.

Moreover, through a more political approach, China - Iran - Saudi Arabia normalization negotiations, Iran's military initiatives including nuclear weapons, the further strengthening of terrorist organizations such as the PYD in Syria, and radical groups in Lebanon and Syria whose operational capabilities has increased with new weapons threaten the security of the region.

As a result, existing resource potentials and the possible security risk and threats further reinforce the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean. Where it is obvious that this region still has a very strategic position for the flow of many commercial cycles and value chain supplies for a globe.

Keywords: East Med, EEZ Conflicts, Energy

Introduction

Eastern Mediterranean (East Med) is a region of increasing importance with its geostrategic location, natural gas resource potential and natural beauties. However, in addition to all its beauty and advantages, there are too many encrusted conflicts in the region that are not easy to solve. Conflicts within the scope of the (exclusive economic zone) EEZ borders are among the most striking problems in this context.

¹ TESPAM President

Undoubtedly, maritime boundary, like territorial or land boundary, is a politically sensitive subject, because it directly affects the coastal State's jurisdiction regarding the fishery, petroleum and other resources of the sea as well as concerning the other uses of the sea'. In addition to this, currently, of the World's 512 potential maritime boundaries, less than half have been settled, creating ambiguity and room for disputes for the remainder [3]. Which means, resolution is not easy. Many crises caused by the inability to find a solution continue to be experienced continuously. In addition to the crises, conflicts prevent the efficient use of the economic potential in the region and the emergence of peace and stability.

In this context, when we look at the EEZ conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, first, the problems between Türkiye and Greece draw attention. Since the problems that started with the Aegean Sea could not be resolved, they spread to the island of Cyprus. The fact that the TRNC, which is actually present on the island of Cyprus, is ignored by the international community, causes the process to move to an inextricable dimension.

On the other hand, (although it has been resolved through the third parties) problems between Lebanon and Israel, uncertainty in Syria, acceptability of the agreement signed by Egypt and Greece, agreement between Libya and Türkiye, Greece's unfair attempts to usurp the EEZ areas of Libya and the unclear situation of Palestine actually reveal that we are too far to find an easy solution in the region.

Perhaps at the center of solution possibilities of this whole spiral of conflicts, the knot of the problem between Türkiye and Greece lies first. Hence, with a just solution that can be realized between Türkiye and Greece, all the problems in the region seems to be resolved quickly, one after the other.

From this point of view, in this study, firstly, the increasing strategic importance of the EastMed will be mentioned. Then the current EEZ conflicts will be analyzed. Through these analyses, after focusing on the conflicts between Türkiye and Greece, possible resolution strategies for the Cyprus and EastMed will tried to be explained.

EAST MED: A More Strategic Region

“Energy is now undoubtedly more important for the world than ever before. While the global energy demand is increasing rapidly, many targets are set for energy transition in order to reduce carbon emissions. Energy supply and prices directly affect the growth targets of countries. While the global economy and technological superiority are slowly shifting from the West to the East, the global tension evolving in the axis of the United States–China conflict reveals a globalization model in which energy is put at the center. Balances shaken by extraordinary situations such as the pandemic turn into the launchpad of a global economic model focused on green transition” [2]. While the growing importance of energy turns into a determining role in the balance of global dominance, on the other hand, the climate crisis that we are facing as a whole world carries the process to a much more challenging level. When the steps taken to reduce carbon emissions due to climate concerns began to reverse with the energy crisis, after the pandemic, and the burden and chaotic environment brought by the Russia-Ukraine war were multiplied the negative impacts, the severity of the situation reached much greater dimensions.

EEZ Conflicts In East Med

Although East Med is important in terms of global value chains and sustainability goals, the conflicts between the regional states prevent the implementation of an effective model for cooperation, investment and co-development.

Almost all of the states in the region have differentiating problems between each other. Syria and Lebanon have been at war with Israel for many years. Egypt also played a leading role in these wars in certain periods.

In addition to these Cyprus may be accepted at the center of the conflicts in the region. Unfortunately, Cyprus was exposed to genocide against the Turks (in the island) by the Greeks and the blood on the island could only be stopped after the intervention of the Turkish Armed Forces. Although the blood on the island has stopped, the TRNC, which is an organized and active state ruled by the Cyprus Turks, has not yet been recognized by the international public. Naturally, this fact resulted in an intense deadlock at the center of the Eastern Mediterranean, which also continues to fuel the conflicts in the Aegean.

On the other hand, the conflicts between Israel and Palestine have never ended either. Especially the paramilitary support to some groups in Palestine fueled the deadlock in the process.

With military coups, fall of governments, economic crisis, terrorist activities and finally the Arab Spring, the stability of the countries in the region from time to time has been highly damaged and it has become impossible for an effective and sustainable solution model to be implemented.

With the 2000s, the natural gas discoveries under the leadership of Israel made all countries realize the importance of EEZ's in the region [4] and the new resource potential meant more conflict, while it should have increased stability.

Currently, in terms of EEZ's, there are big disputes between Southern Cyprus and TRNC, between Turkiye and Greece, between Turkiye and Southern Cyprus, between Palestine and Israel, between Libya and Greece. At the same time, the definitions of EEZ between Turkiye and Egypt, TRNC and Israel, TRNC and Lebanon, Lebanon and Southern Cyprus (although with not major conflicts) have not become clear.

Only recently (despite the fact that the two countries are officially at war) between Israel and Lebanon, the solution model implemented with a pragmatist approach through the 3rd parties has attracted attention as a promising step. Nevertheless, much more dialogue, stability and initiative is needed for a similar model to be applicable for the other cases in the region.

Within this context, energy can be used as a solution-oriented leverage.

On the other hand, unfair approaches towards Turkiye, which has the longest coastline in the region, will never be able to be applied and will not benefit anyone.

In order to resolve all these conflicted balances, it is necessary to abandon the approaches aimed at usurping the fundamental rights of Turkiye and the TRNC.

At The Center Of The Conflicts: Turkiye, Greece And Cyprus Island

Undoubtedly, the most difficult dispute to solve in the Eastern Mediterranean is between Turkiye and Greece. Solving the problem between Turkiye and Greece will directly result in a possible resolution of the conflicts on the island of Cyprus. However, unfortunately, due to Greece's unfair and unreasonable approaches, its refusal to negotiate bilaterally, its constant demand for mediation by the third parties, and the biased approach of many states and structures (such as the EU and the USA) on this picture, no results are achieved.

The map below has been produced by reversing the selfish, maximalist, unfair fiction accepted by the EU, which reflects Turkiye's desire to be imprisoned in the Eastern Mediterranean. As can be understood from the map, locations of Turkiye and Greece was changed. And the

important question for EU asked. Which is: "If EU would accept the same EEZ offer, where Türkiye and Greece locations were changed!"

It can be easily estimated that the answer of the question is: "No!"



Map 1: Unfair Approaches of EU on the EEZ Boundaries in East Med [1]

Unfortunately, the EU (which defines Türkiye as an ally but is not sincere in this definition) is directing an unfair model in favor of Greece and Southern Cyprus, trying to imprison Türkiye in its own land areas, since they are members of its own. As can be seen from the due map, this model is not reasonable, acceptable or logical. Such a model has no place in international law.

By claiming the location of Meis Island, which is only 2 km away from Türkiye cost and surrounded by two Turkish islands, and 580 km away from Greece, EU tries to approach an injustice scenario against the Türkiye. Such a claim means for a Turkish Citizen that:

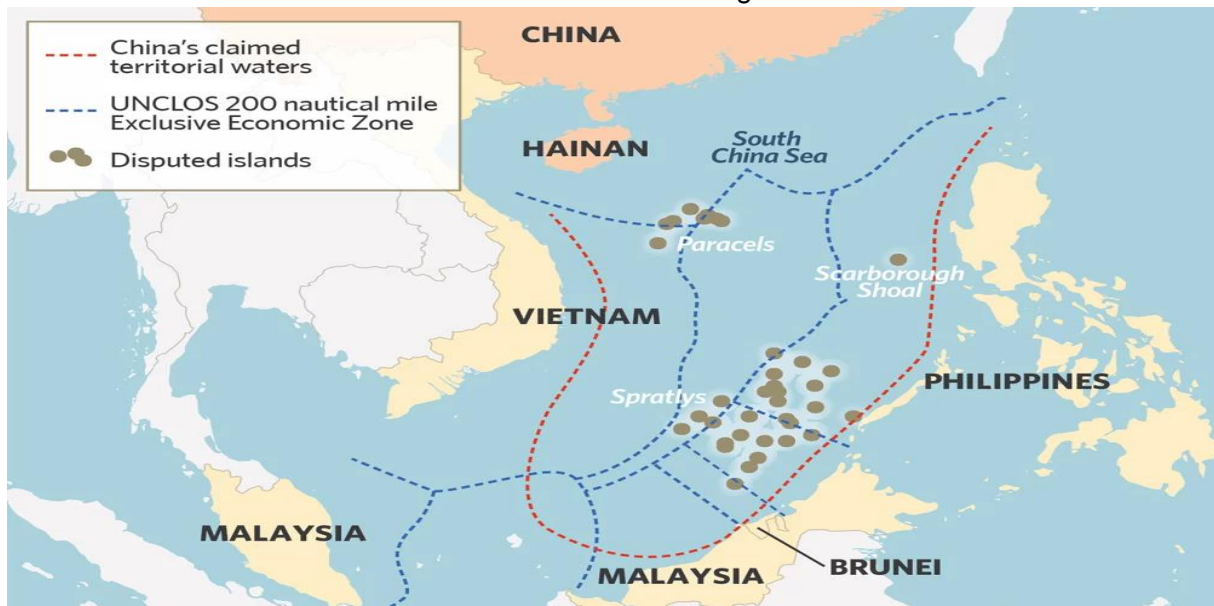
- In addition to being a basic completely biased and exclusionary approach,
- TR is a dangerous enemy for EU!
- TR has to be taken under control and imprisoned within its lands!
- TR must be stalled and deceived with the lie of alliance!
- Nevertheless, not to be lost! Hence, EU needs TR against Russia, China and immigrants risks!
- TR is also important with its sociocultural impacts on its civilization geography!
- TR officially is accused of not supporting an absurd claim by its EU allies!
- EU will never be a real ally!

It is not possible for Türkiye to accept such an approach. On the other hand, it does not make sense to accept countries and parties that support such an absurd, hypocritical and unfair insistence in discourses such as friends or allies.

In addition to these, as can be seen in the next map, the same EU countries (and US) condemn and threaten China (which has a similar stance to the claims of Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean) for its attempts in the South China Sea.

On the one hand, they support the unfair claims of Greece (for their own interests) and on the other hand, they accuse similar attempts of China as being unfair. In this context, it is important

that the western states, which Greece invited as a mediator, put an end to their hypocritical and inconsistent attitudes for a realistic solution in the region.



Map 2: South China Sea EEZ Disputes [6]

Otherwise, the model they claim will never be realized, and at a possible breaking point, Turkiye will be able to resolve all the conflicts on all the islands in the region with very different methods with more practical moves!

As mentioned above, first step has to be a realistic solution between Turkiye and Greece on the Aegean claims. Two neighbors have to solve their disputes within each other through logic approaches.

It is obvious that, Aegean is a very difficult sea to study and negotiate. Because:

- For some rocky structures it is not easy to say they are island or else!
- Existing continental shelf or EEZ rules can not be applied in such a complicated geography
- Territorial water limits for 12 miles is not also an applicable method!
- There are some Greece islands existing in geographically Turkiye's inland waters. This means it is also difficult to clarify the inland water lines to determine the median lines in Aegean.

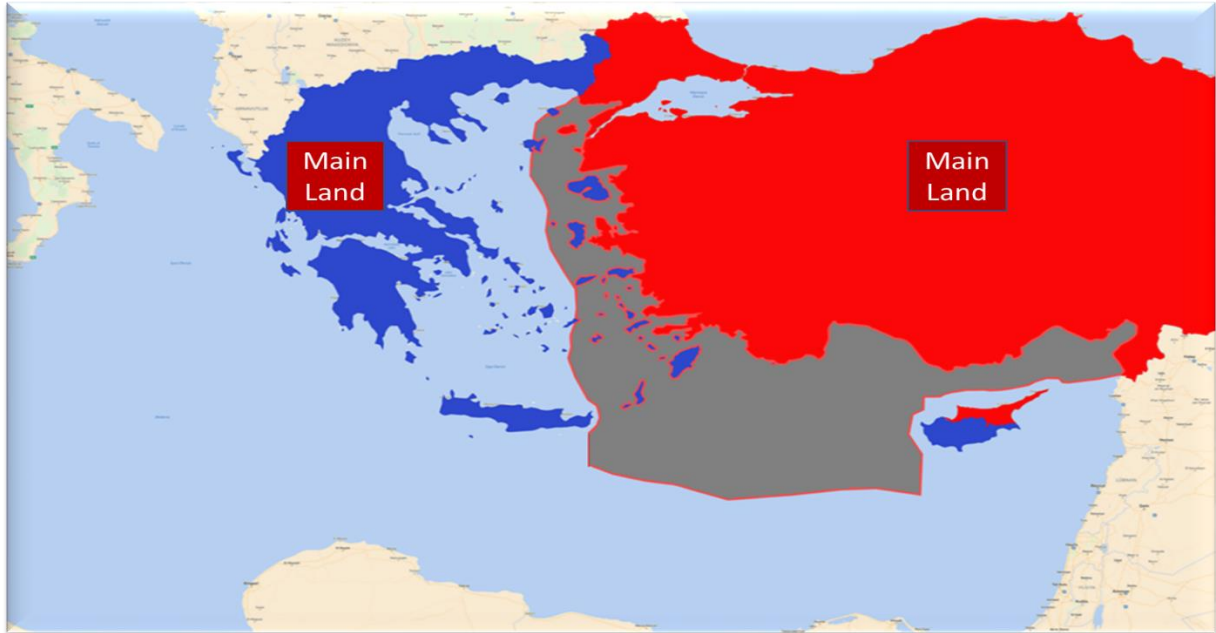
However, despite everything, Turkiye and Greece are two neighboring countries with deep-rooted histories and they should try to solve their problems in a way of dialogue.

By shortly looking the thesis of the both sides on the Aegean EEZ's,

- Greece claims that; all islands have full CS/EEZ rights without any condition (ref: UNCLOS art.121) and CS/EEZ boundaries will be determined according to mid-distance principle calculations.
- On the other hand Turkiye claims that:
 - o Entitlement and limitation are not the same things!
 - o CS/EEZ limitation can be made according to the principle of equity of both sides (ref: UNCLOS 74-83)
 - o We do not say we reject the CS/EEZ rights of islands/island countries!
 - o However, for the islands located between 2 mainland countries:
 - If located in the opposite side of the midline, or has a short frontal length, or cuts the CS of the mainland THEN zero impact (territorial waters only) can be given

- There are numerous Court Orders and Government Practices that support this. As; ICJ Decision - 1977-78 England-France, ICJ Decision 1985 Libya-Malta, ICJ Decision 2012 Nicaragua-Colombia, 1971 Tunisia-Italy Agreement 12.12.2019, 1978 Papua New Guinea - Australia Agreement.

As a result, the map below can be accepted as one of the most applicable EEZ boundaries for Greece and Turkiye.

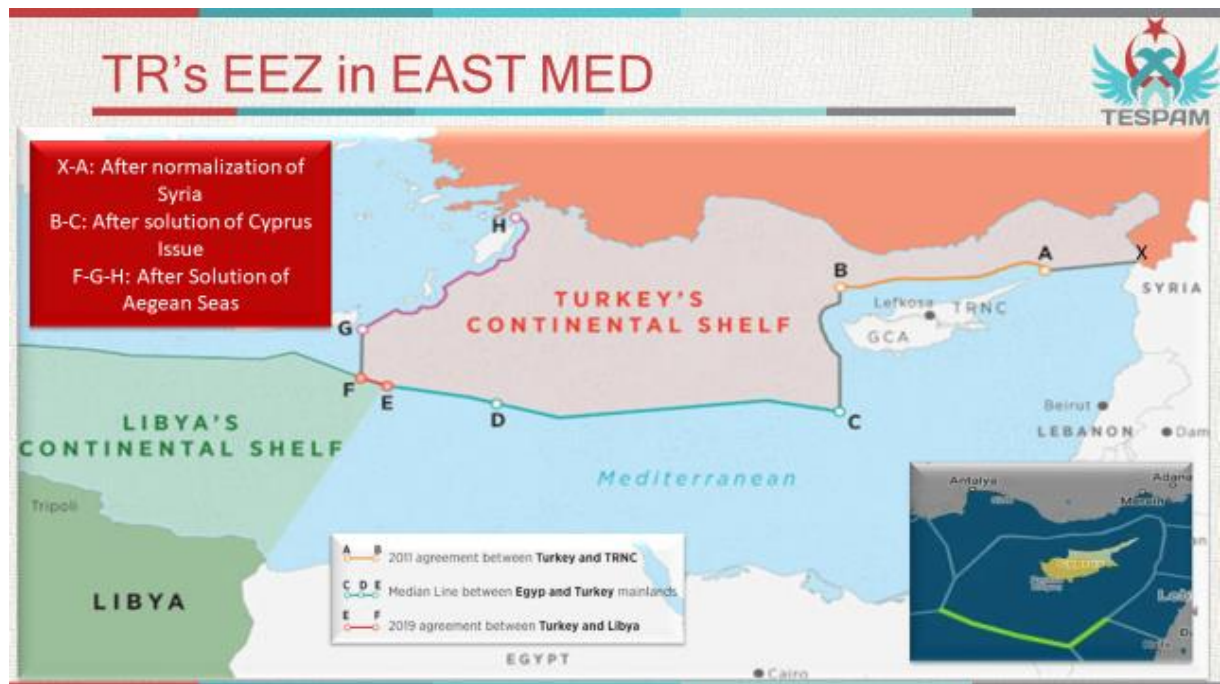


Map 3: Turkiye's Most Probable EEZ Boundaries in Aegean and East Med (Oguzhan Akyener, 2022)

As can be observed from the map and definitions above,

- It is very difficult to point by point determine the EEZ boundaries in Aegean Sea.
- East Med & Aegean Region is very complicated and there is not a completely similar region (within the same conditions) in the World (but there are some similarities in South China Sea).
- Existing international laws and systems cannot be easily applied into this scenario.
- Moreover, arbitration and mediator-ship processes usually work for the interests of the western countries, which are not objective, fair and rational!
- Turkiye and Greece are two neighbor mainland countries and initially have to solve the Aegean problems through bilateral negotiations!
- Median line approach seems the best and unique solution for Aegean Sea.
- After a solution in Aegean Sea, then a coherent resolution in Cyprus and the East Med can be applicable.

From this point of view, although the conflicts in the Aegean Sea have not been resolved, if we focus on the Eastern Mediterranean, the EEZ border agreements that Turkiye has made are shown in the map below.



Map 4: Turkiye's Declared EEZ Boundaries in East Med [5]

As can be understood from the map above,

- Line between X and A will be clarified after the normalization of Syria (which also means that, Turkiye do not want to be unfairly benefitted from the weakness of its neighbor, as Greece does against Libya!).
- Line between B and C will be clarified after the resolution of Cyprus disputes.
- Line between F – G – H will be clarified after resolution of Aegean disputes.
- Line between A and B clarified with Turkiye and TRNC agreement in 2011.
- Line between C – D – E is the median line between Egypt and Turkiye (where in this scenario, Egypt gets more area by comparing with the Greece's claims).
- Line between E and F clarified with Turkiye and Libya agreement in 2019.

On the other hand, some portions of these lines contradict with some of the agreements between Southern Cyprus – Egypt and Southern Cyprus – Israel. However, all these previous agreements, cannot be accepted according to UNCLOS, hence as written: "Marine border agreements must not violate the rights and interests of the other parties. And in bilateral agreements, boundary lines must be stopped at a non-conflicting point with the potential claim of 3rd parties." Where all these agreements violates the rights of Turkiye or TRNC.

There is also an EEZ agreement between Lebanon and Southern Cyprus (signed in 2007). However, this agreement did not enter into force, as it was not ratified by the Lebanese parliament. For this reason, it is null and void.

For the solution of these disputes, Turkiye and the TRNC made different proposals to the UN in 2011, 2012, 2019 and 2022 and invited the due authorities and states for both sides to stop all hydrocarbon exploration and production activities until an agreement reached. However, could not get an acceptable feedback.

Cyprus Issues: Too Difficult To Solve

When evaluated from a realistic point of view, it can be realized that a solution in Cyprus is very difficult. As experienced in the Annan Plan Referendum process in 2004, although TRNC citizens approved an agreement that was unacceptable for Turkish Cypriots and Turkiye,

Greek Cypriots (due to their maximalist goals) rejected an agreement that was in their favor. This is a situation that clearly reveals how difficult to negotiate and get a result in Cyprus. In addition to these, there are also other factors effecting the solution possibilities positively or negatively. Such as:

- Historical and existing conflicts between Turkiye and Greece.
- Historical Traumas in Cyprus (such as cruelty and massacre against the Turks in the Island).
- Greece and Southern Cyprus to be EU members and EU's unfair position within this regard.
- Regional targets of the third party powers such as EU, US, China, Russia etc.
- Global energy and economic crisis and worsening financial capabilities.
- Russia – Ukraine War.
- US – China conflicts.
- Turkiye's normalization policies in the region.
- Immigration problems.
- EU's gas demand and resource diversification attempts.
- Increasing importance of the Turkic World.
- Climate and environmental risks.
- Turkiye's investments for the Cyprus.
- Earthquake risks and collaboration exigencies.
- Pragmatic and efficient International Oil Companies acting in the region.
- Israel – Lebanon EEZ boundary solution, as an example.
- New potential for new gas discoveries.

All these different items have to be considered carefully to find a possible solution model in the region. While putting all the due factors into the same seesaw, as can be seen in the graph below, the factors that will negatively affect the solution outweigh.



Graph 1: Balancing a Solution Change for Cyprus Disputes [1]

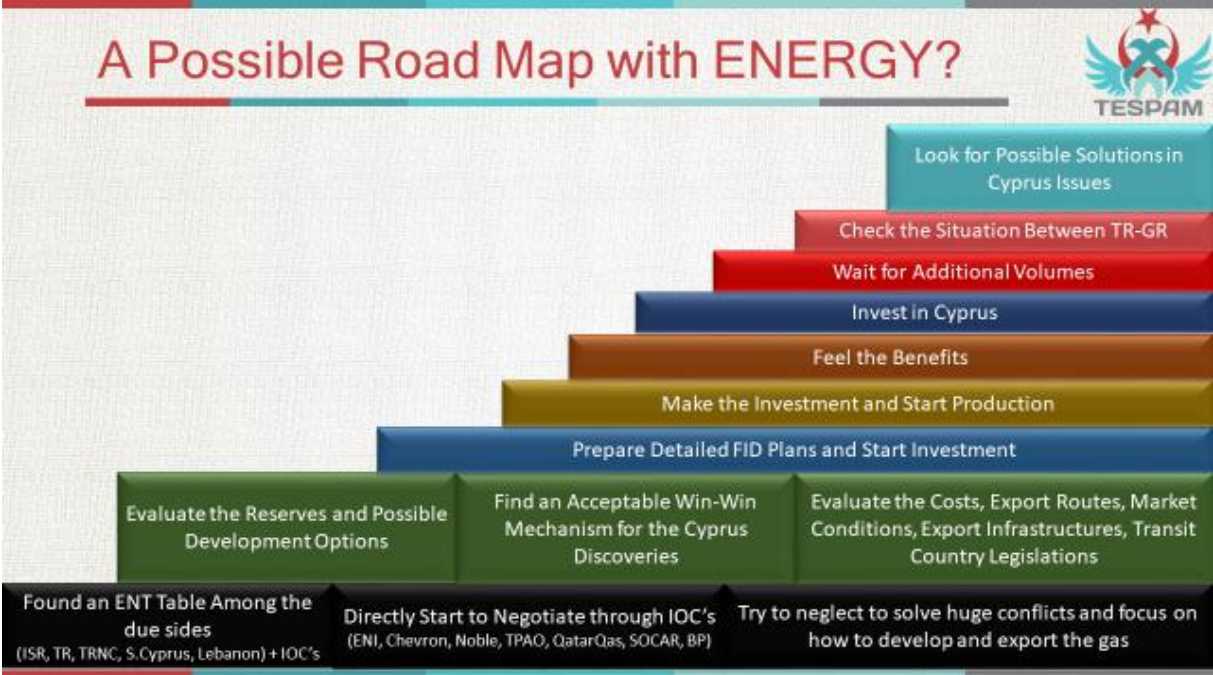
In this case, although the probability of obtaining a solution in Cyprus is very low, even if the factors that hinder the solution in the current situation are stronger, it would still be beneficial to evaluate the back door possibilities.

In this context, perhaps the most reasonable route would be a strategy in which the energy in the region is used as a lever, based on the partial solution model obtained through the third parties by the two states Israel and Lebanon (which are still at war with each other). Perhaps in such a scenario, problems will be thrown into the background and mutual win-win models will be implemented. International risks and diplomatic tendencies will be used as opportunities, and the practical negotiation capabilities of effective international foreign companies will be utilized. The positive effects of the rapprochement between Turkiye and Israel will also revive regional diplomacy. Therefore, even if nothing is resolved, mutual dialogue and cooperation can be developed and thanks to the profitable side of energy, the perceptual size of the conflicts will be reduced. Moreover, in this way, a much more convenient solution environment will be established over time.

A Possible Road Map With Energy

As mentioned above, it is very difficult to have a real solution for the disputes in Cyprus. Moreover, without having a solution in Cyprus, generally East Med will not reach a collaborative environment also for the other states. However, although a solution is too far away from the current point of view, some back doors can be utilized to improve the collaborated attempts. Within this regard, energy can be used as a leverage (the carrot to follow) for the due players in the region.

In this concept, as can be seen in the graph below, some steps may be followed to reach a better solution environment.



Graph 2: Steps of a Conflict Resolution Model in East Med [1]

This model also may help the states to use the other possible factors that may help to develop the solution stages, which were previously mentioned. Before going round of the solution attempts, for only commercial purposes, an export negotiation team (ENT) may be founded among the representatives of the due sides (which are Israel, Turkiye, TRNC, S. Cyprus, Lebanon, (international oil companies) IOC's acting in the region, some EU partners to represent the Baumgarten and Italy markets).

Since the Lebanese authorities will avoid meeting with Israel, Southern Cyprus with the TRNC, Israel with the TRNC, and Turkiye with Southern Cyprus, it would be more appropriate to meet in a third-party location. In this context, Baku, which is close to the region, can be considered as a meeting point. In addition, authorities from Greece, Romania, Italy, Hungary, Austria and Bulgaria (and may be additional Balkan countries) (within the marketing dimension of the process) should be included in the relevant ENT mechanism.

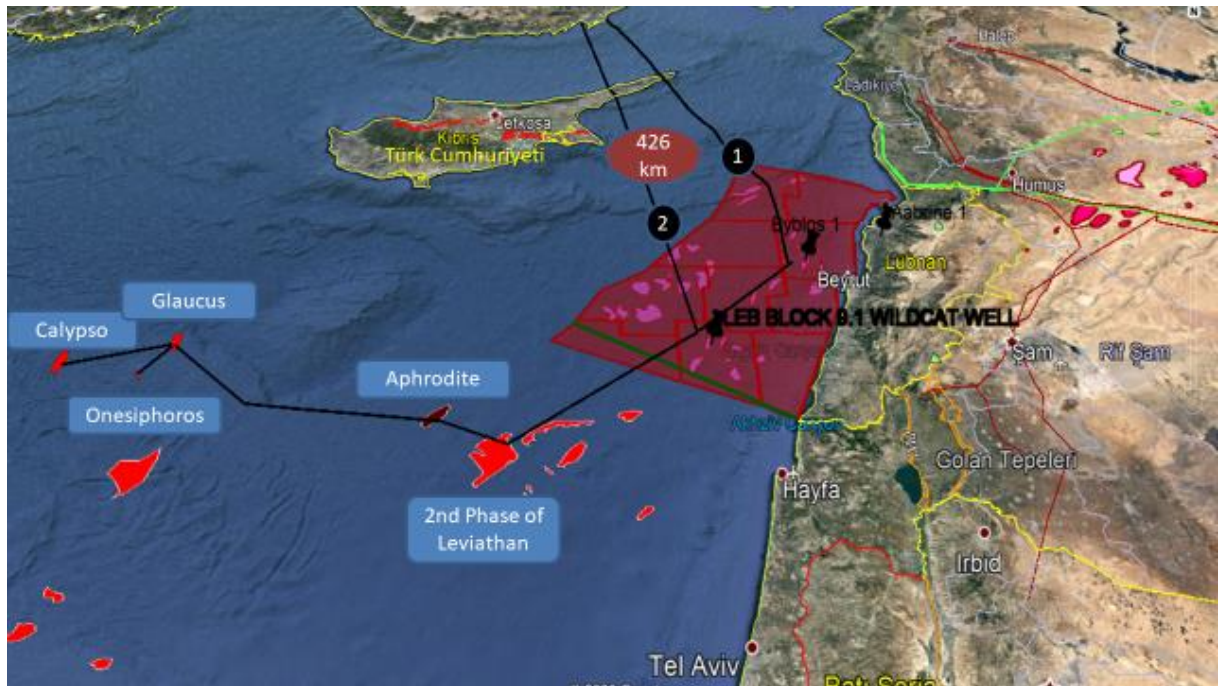
This ENT group has to work as an international advisory board and start to technically and commercially analyze the possible E&P, development, and investment, export opportunities for all of the discovered and potential fields in the region.

Each IOC's will evaluate the possible investment environment for farm-in opportunities for due E&P (exploration and production), development or pipeline (and related facilities) construction projects.

Interested IOC's will start to negotiate with the related governments for different export options and they will try to commercially complete the projects. Initial negotiations will start directly inside the ENT. Through this process, each side will see the possible benefits of the projects. Within this regard, naturally the initial focus will be on the existing discoveries in the Southern Side of Cyprus Island (such as Aphrodite, Glaucois, and Calypso) and the discovered fields in Israel EEZ areas (such as the second phase of Leviathan). All the possible costs to develop, export routes, market conditions, export infrastructures and transit country legislations will transparently be reported. Then, further investment plan, shareholders system, profit mechanism and other related financial structure will be negotiated under ENT.

After a possible FID (final investment decision) plan could be agreed, then investment will start and first production will be able to be handled.

If with the existing discovered fields, a possible export pipeline (As can be seen in the map below, option 1 or option 2 after the Lebanon can be selected according to commercial and diplomatic conditions.) from Southern Side of Cyprus to Leviathan then from there to Lebanon and then from Lebanon to TRNC and then to Turkiye could be achieved, then all the regional states may find investors for their pending exploration blocks, which have probable structures bearing additional gas reserves. (In this regard, TESPAM's G&G (geophysical and geological) studies show that there is additional gas potential in both Israel and Lebanon offshore. However, to explore and develop these areas, new investors are needed. Which also means that, if there is an export route, then the investors may interest in those projects.)



Map 5: Most Applicable Export Routes for East Med Gas [1]

After the initial focus on the existing discoveries, the next step will be the probable structures (defined with G&G works and) waiting to be discovered.

Through these steps and discussion-investment environment all sides will start to learn none of them is not completely EVIL! Moreover, they will start to feel the benefits of the new dialogue – investment environment.

In such an environment, if each sides start to openly communicate with each other and be benefitted through the investments, then a better solution environment will be handled. (On the other hand, solution will not be the vital issue to deal with.)

Conclusion

The East Med is an important region for global value chains and sustainability goals. This importance is increasing with the gas discoveries (and new possible potentials). However, the current conflicts in the region prevent many opportunities from being used.

Cyprus disputes undoubtedly stands at the center of these conflicts. However, a possible solution within this regard does not seem applicable under the current conditions.

On the other hand, chance fully, Israel and Lebanon (which are still officially at war) could manage to solve their EEZ border disputes through the third parties coordination. This is a very important step, which can be an example for the whole region. Undoubtedly, the importance of practical diplomacy, the establishment of a mutual win-win environment and the active support of the IOC's were very important for such a coherent achievement.

With a similar strategy, even if it is not a solution, it may be possible for the Cyprus disputes to reach a more solvable atmosphere or at least to evolve into a climate where a mutual win-win system can be obtained. Which means, the aim in this context is to use energy as a lever (carrot) that will provide dialogue at the table and provide mutual benefits for all the states in the region. Moreover, this model is technically possible.

With the implementation of such a model, all parties will be able to gain something.

In the sections above, why and under what conditions the model can be built, was explained. The table below summarizes the main gains for the due parties after such a model can be obtained.



Graph 3: Results of the Conflict Resolution Model in East Med[1]

By assuming that all parties partly put aside their insistence on their EEZ claims, and allow the due discovered gas fields to be taken into production and to be transported to Turkiye and (after analyzing the economic-technical conditions from a supplier perspective) to the EU via a pipeline to be constructed:

- Turkiye basically gains:
 - o more natural gas,
 - o additional potential for gas exports,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o less budget share for TRNC.
- Greece basically gains:
 - o more natural gas,
 - o additional potential for gas exports or transmission,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o less budget share for Southern Cyprus.
- Israel basically gains:
 - o more investors for the pending exploration blocks,
 - o a coherent export route for new fields to be developed (ex: leviathan phase 2),
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o a more sustainable dialogue back door with Lebanon
- Southern Cyprus basically gains:
 - o huge amount of money and profits due to gas sales,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o huge investments,
 - o a more sustainable dialogue back door with Turkiye and TRNC,
 - o less fear of Turkiye, which is the most active military power in the region.

- TRNC basically gains:
 - o more money flow and investments,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o a more sustainable dialogue back door with Southern Cyprus and Greece,
 - o a more conducive environment for official recognition at the UN.
- EU basically gains:
 - o more (non-Russian) natural gas supply,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o less demand for Russian gas,
 - o fewer complaints from Greece and Southern Cyprus,
 - o More coherent and secure policies in the South.
- Lebanon basically gains:
 - o more investors for the pending exploration blocks,
 - o more money and investment in the country,
 - o a coherent export route for possible new fields,
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,
 - o a more sustainable dialogue back door with Israel.
- Egypt basically gains:
 - o less headache in the regional diplomacy,

As a result, the implementation of such a model will create a much more effective dialogue environment for all parties and contribute to the resolution of regional conflicts in a much shorter time.

References

1. Akyener, Oguzhan. (2022). *Eastmed Conflicts And Solutions*. 28
2. Akyener, Oğuzhan, & Altun, A. (2022). Türkiye – Israel Collaboration And Energy Diplomacy. In *The Maritime Strategic Evaluation For Israel* (Vol. 72, Issue 72). <https://Hms.Haifa.Ac.II/Index.Php/En/Maritime-Evaluation>, 08.10.2022
3. Chorev, P. S. (2022). *The Delimitation Of The International Maritime Borders: Disputes, Challenges And Solution In A Comparative Perspective: Concept Note*.
4. Kıral, L. (2021). *The Delimitation Dispute Of The Maritime Jurisdiction Areas In The Eastern Mediterranean : Turkish Perspective Based On The Equitable Principles*. 52, 85–112.
5. Mesut Hakki Casin. (2019). *Analysis - Strategic, Legal Aspects Of Turkiye-Libya Deal*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/analysis-strategic-legal-aspects-of-turkiye-libya-deal/1673079>
6. R. Ridderhof. (2016). *South China Sea Islands*. Carnegie Foundation <https://peacepalacelibrary.ni/south-china-sea-islands>, 06.05.2022

Ethics Committee Permission

Ethics committee permission is not required for this study. No research has been conducted on any living creature (human and animal). The article belongs to the field of literature.

Deconfliction Statement

The author of the article declares that there is no conflict of financial interest between him and any institution, organization, person related to this study.

Support and Thanks

Support was not received from any institution or organization in the study.